

## Reflections and reviews

 By [Debbie Hathway](#) 23 Jul 2013

"Be strong." Those were the words that echoed around the media office at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Even to the uninitiated it was clear that great physical and mental reserves would be required to do justice to the plethora of artistic endeavours on the programme but many succumbed to the bitter cold and accompanying seasonal flu virus.



Performers suffered dangerously high fevers, dripping noses and lost voices, but somehow ensured that the show would go on. It's par for the course. However, by the end of the week, having made it to 22 shows and many more informal presentations in-between, one thing was certain: I was now proudly South African. It was a privilege to see such enormous talent among our dancers, musicians, singers, actors, comedians, writers and directors - and how expertly the technical crews handled the stagings. I was blown away.

### Culture defines us as human



A recent interview published on [independent.co.uk](http://independent.co.uk) quotes Tamara Rojo, the 39-year-old artistic director of the English National Ballet, who said: "Access to culture should be a human right. Culture defines us as human. It allows us to express ourselves, it's the way we learn about history, it's the way we understand the culture that we live in and it creates a connection between us all." She echoes the sentiments of Business and Arts South Africa's CEO, Michelle Constant. That's truly what this festival is about.

Now I have the wonderful opportunity to catch up on shows being staged in Cape Town that I missed during the Grahamstown run. Silver Ovation award winner Joanna Evans is staging *The Year of the Bicycle* at the Theatre Arts Admin Collective in Observatory - the play was supported on the Fringe as part of her prize for Best Up and Coming Director of last year's Student Festival.

Aphiwe Livi and Amy Louise Wilson are enthralling as two estranged childhood friends, tracing their connections in their youth and finding one another again via a literal meeting of minds through tragic circumstances.

Sound design by John Withers subtly enhances the emotional drama of the piece that keeps the audience

hanging on every word; they're no doubt reliving some of their own childhood memories as Evans brilliantly contrasts the lightness of play with the darkness of loneliness - and betrayal.



Meanwhile, Johannesburg dance fans should look out for Oakfields College's Journey, which won a special merit award at the festival as the SA Post Office choice for showcasing creativity and innovation.

The programme features new works by Mark Hawkins, Timothy le Roux, Ignatius van Heerden and Wayne Bester. There was nothing to fault in this admirably mature performance by young students at the Faculty of Dance and Musical Theatre. The boys proved particularly accomplished.

### **A technically high standard**

The cast embraced the choreographies and delivered a technically high standard, backed by beautiful music, costume and lighting choices. Hawkins said that he was very impressed at their dedication and commitment to late-night rehearsals that ultimately delivered an award-winning result. They rose to the occasion after a 23-hour physical journey beset with delays and a power failure that impacted on their set-time. "That's what it's about. As a performer you've got to get up and do it; it doesn't matter how bad you feel," he said.

*Journey forms part of the Krêkvars Student Arts Festival taking place at the University of Pretoria, Masipala Theatre this week. Remaining shows are on Thursday at 7.15pm and Friday at 8.15pm.*

*The Year of the Bicycle makes for compelling viewing. It's on at the Theatre Arts Admin Collective until 27 July at 8pm. Tickets are R40 at the door, or online at: <http://theatreartsadmincollective.weebly.com>. For more information contact Theatre Arts Admin Collective on +27 (0)21 447 3683 or Joanna Evans on +27 (0)72 233 4430.*

Tickets for Journey at the University of Pretoria can be purchased for R15 via [www.itickets.co.za](http://www.itickets.co.za) or R20 at the door.

### **ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY**

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts. [View my profile and articles...](#)

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