

CURTAIN CALL FOR DISTRICT SIX

Coming home to their own theatre

IN ADDITION to marking 20 years since Nelson Mandela's release, today marks 44 years since District Six was declared a White Group Area. To commemorate the occasion the Fugard Theatre, in the District Six Museum's Sacks Futeran Complex, will treat ex-residents to a performance of *The Magic Flute*.

As the General Manager of Isango Portobello and the Fugard Theatre, Georgina Rae has overseen the development of Cape Town's newest theatre. The company was this week awarded the Globes de Cristal Award for Opera for *The Magic Flute (Impempe Yomlingo)*. The international award, presented in Paris, recognises the company's sell-out season at the Théâtre de Châtelet where they received standing ovations every night from the 2 000-strong audience.

You moved from the UK to work with Isango Portobello. What was it that most appealed to you about the position?

It was more about the people

who are part of the team within the company and the work that they do. Working in London you don't get the opportunity to work quite so directly with the company, being part of their development and particularly with the new theatre opening it was really exciting.

As general manager, what does your position entail?

It's twofold really because there is the management of the company - everything from contracts, budgets, travel and touring, and there is also an element of managing the theatre although there is a bigger team of us doing that. Within the theatre we've also got other productions. We're also putting on Atholl Fugard's *The Train Driver* so I'm managing that production as well.

What does Isango Portobello mean?

It means "gate" in Xhosa and Portobello means "beautiful gate". Portobello comes from our London-based South African producer whose offices are in Portobello.

Is the touring of productions a



major part of the company's focus?

It has been previously. We've had some great international recognition but our focus is to create our own home and audience base here which is why we've developed and opened The Fugard. We can create our own work here.

So most of your focus will be on developing local theatre?

Yes. All of our work will premiere in Cape Town as it always has for Isango Portobello productions - previously at the Baxter. But now

that we have our own space we're not fitting our work to anybody else's stages any more.

What is The Fugard's connection to the District Six Museum?

The building is leased from The District Six Museum so we've had a great relationship with them through the development project, and their Homecoming Centre is right next door to us.

Today marks the 44th anniversary of District Six being declared a White Group Area. How will you mark the occasion?

We have gifted today's performance to the District Six Museum. The ex-residents have a programme in the morning so we've moved the performance to 3pm. Tomorrow is our gala opening so our patron, Trevor Manuel, is hosting the event with our producer Eric Abraham who will be joining us. We've got numerous dignitaries and ambassadors and local theatre people joining us - and family members of the company - so it's our big gala event which is very exciting.

How long have you been working on this?

I came to South Africa at the beginning of 2009 and we knew what building we were going to be looking at but we were still working on the lease. The building work started in August, so it's been a six-month project. The really special moment was bringing the company into the space for the first time. They got straight on the stage and were singing and dancing and suddenly it felt like our home.

What's next after *The Magic Flute*?

The opening season is *The Magic Flute* and *The Mysteries* running in repertoire so we're running both productions. Then the company is also developing two new projects so they will go straight back into rehearsals after the close of the two performances. We've got various workshops happening on the new projects so it really will be about developing new work and we've got the most wonderful rehearsal space which everybody is very excited



AT THE HELM: General manager of the Fugard Theatre, Georgina Rae.

about using.

What do you most enjoy about theatre production?

Seeing the finished project. Being a part of the whole development and knowing the amount of work that goes into getting to an opening night and finally being able to stand at the

back, hiding in the shadows. I can't stand not to watch the performance. But stand at the back and watch the audience watching the show, really that's what it's all about. It's about getting to that moment and seeing the work happen on the stage.

● Interview by Lesley Byram

