

Raising awareness with a 'light touch'

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IT'S NO secret that the vast majority of South Africa's children don't have the luxury of an idyllic childhood.

It is not uncommon for our children to walk 11km to school, crossing rivers at freezing temperatures in winter and navigating thick bush which could hide away all sorts of predators – animal and human alike.

The "family unit" is often child- or granny-headed. And it is no secret that even though they were born here, many children incur the wrath of communities who chase them away, refusing to accept them as South African, simply because their parents are from another country.

And so the upcoming Kids Inherit! Festival – a children's theatre festival – is a welcome



ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE: *Green Hat* stars Buhle Mazibuko, Moses Sipho Lisoma and Ashleigh Joseph among the cast.

offering on the local theatrical table.

The festival is the brainchild of the Durban University of Technology's Professor Debbie Lutge, sparked by an encounter with

educational theatre veteran Gisele Turner.

Turner says that this festival of original plays is being held at the weekend partly to celebrate Heritage

Month – as many of the works deal with issues like child-run homes, HIV/Aids, xenophobia, child abuse and more.

Turner explains how the festival came about, following her success in an international competition where her play *Lucky Strike* was runner-up in the prestigious Trinity College of London International Play Writing Competition 2010. "There was some publicity around this and Debbie saw it and said it was so exciting and that it would be wonderful to put the play on."

Having worked for years with Wendy Nell in the well-loved Madcaps Creative Education Company, Lutge has a repertoire of children's plays under her belt.

She suggested that a range of plays be chosen for DUT's first-year students to work on. This would culminate on Heritage Day in the Kids Inherit! Festival.

"All the plays are rooted in something. For example, *Green Hat* is about raising environmental awareness, *Silver Stream* is about water awareness and conservation, *Rain* is based on an ancient San story and is an African myth dealing with the relationship between the celestial and terrestrial..." she says.

Turner's award winner, *Lucky Strike*, will see its first staging this weekend.

"I am very excited about taking *Lucky Strike* off the page and on to the stage. This is a township story that touches on some intense and painful issues, in a light way. It is about a boy

who lives in a child-headed home. The story looks at a different kind of family unit and its value. It also tackles issues of HIV/Aids and xenophobia."

Turner says that as qualified teachers (and later theatre practitioners), she and Nell share a passion for using theatre as an education tool and as an opportunity to tackle social and cultural issues.

The festival has also been a bonus for DUT students who have had the opportunity to be taught more about theatre in education, and puppet manipulation.

However, raising awareness of society's harsh realities through theatre is a complex exercise – especially where children are concerned. Turner says the balance lies in a light touch.

"A light touch is needed and there is a terrific need for humour... Innocent children, children can see the truth... You want to teach children to be aware of these things and how to handle them."

The Kids Inherit! Festival runs from September 23 - 29.

It will run over a weekend to allow family audiences to enjoy the selection of plays and then has a run for schools. It is geared to pupils from junior and senior primary schools.

● To see the full schedule for the five plays that are being staged at DUT's Courtyard Theatre see www.pubmat.co.za Tickets are R10 for everybody. Booking is through Lebogang Sibisi 031 373 2194.



MYTHS AND LEGENDS: Nelisa Nkala and Sweetness Mbalenhle Ngobese are cast members of *Rain*.