

Writers festival hosts 21 prominent writers

The 14th Time of the Writer international writers festival will be held from 14-19 March 2011, hosting 21 prominent writers from a dozen different countries in Durban, South Africa for a week of literary dialogue and exchange of ideas.

Hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, and with principal funding from the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund, the festival will present both day and evening activities. 'Freedom of Expression' will feature as an underlying thread within the festival and audiences can expect to hear the opinions of leading writers on creative processes which inform their writing as well as on the enabling or constraining forces of political, social and environmental contexts within which they write.

Justice Albie Sachs delivers keynote address

The festival's opening night keynote address will be delivered by the recently retired South African Constitutional court judge, writer and cultural activist, Justice Albie Sachs. The award-winning author of a number of books, including *Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* and *Justice in South Africa*, Sachs was instrumental in the process of writing the Constitution of South Africa.

Following the opening night at which all writers present brief introductions, double-bill readings and panel discussions will take place nightly at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, preceded by book launches and live music.

Tuesday, 15 March will feature British-born American Raj Patel food activist and author of *Stuffed and Starved: The hidden battle for the world food system*, and his most recent offering, *The Value of Nothing*. Patel has been active in South African affairs and was a visiting scholar at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in 2009. Joining him in a discussion entitled 'Ugly/ Beautiful, Stuffed and Starved', will be South African leading cultural commentator and author of the award-winning *Ugly/Beautiful: African and diaspora aesthetics*, Sarah Nuttall, with her reflections on contemporary society.

Also on the same night is author and journalist Lauren Beukes, whose novel *Zoo City*, has been described as "intelligent and witty urban writing for the 21st century." Popular Durban-based author of *The Lotus People* (which won the 2001 Sanlam Literary Award for an unpublished novel), Aziz Hassim, joins Beukes in a discussion entitled 'Life in the inner city'.

Literature as SA's conscience

Intellectual and award-winning writer Njabulo Ndebele, author of *Fools and other Stories*, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and others, will, together with provocative post-colonial thinker and academic Achille Mbembe, tackle the heady topic of 'A promise delivered or a nation betrayed: literature as South Africa's conscience'. Cameroon-born Mbembe is a profound

voice in contesting clichéd Western perspectives of Africa.

Ndebele and Mbembe appear on Wednesday, 16 March, the same evening that a foregrounding of African culture will take place in the presentations by Petina Gappah (Zimbabwe) and Ellen Banda-Aaku (Zambia). Gappah's debut collection of heartfelt short stories, *An Elegy for Easterly* describe the strained everyday living of Zimbabwe's people, and this award-winning book has already been translated into six languages. Primarily a children's writer, Ellen Banda-Aaku's first novel, *Patchwork* - an emotive tale of a young girl's journey towards coming to terms with her identity - won the 2010 Penguin Prize for African writing.

French writer Marie Darrieussecq's best-selling debut novel *Truismes* (Pig Tales) - a postmodern tale about the gradual transformation of a woman into a sow - explores the human state in the most bizarre and fantastical of ways. Matching her for a session titled 'Painting the psyche' on Thursday, 17 March is award-winning artist Ondjaki from Angola, whose evocative work as a poet, documentarian, prose-writer and actor posits him a versatile talent.

Writing in Egypt

Writing from the currently tumultuous context of Egypt, Sahar El Mougy, in a feminist perspective, articulates the conflict between the values of the west and traditional gender roles in the Middle East. In a hot topic session (Thursday), El Mougy will pair up with Durban-born Azad Essa in a discussion entitled 'Writing revolution' to unpack the role of writers in the scenarios unfolding across the region. Currently working for Al-Jazeera in Qatar, Essa's provocative 2010 book 'Zuma's Bastard', offers a fresh perspective around South African race politics and religion.

Two highly accomplished immigrants who have made their mark on the UK literary scene and worldwide, will take to the stage on Friday, 18 March. Originally from the Caribbean island of St.Kitts and author of numerous award-winning books, Caryl Phillips, whose extensive writing oeuvre ranges from non-fiction and fiction to theatre, radio and television documentaries teams up with prolific Nigerian novelist and playwright, Biyi Bandele, in unpacking 'Roots and routes'.

Also on 18 March the genre of the 'crime thrillers' brings together Sifiso Mzobe and Diale Tlholwe, in a panel titled 'Muti Noir'. Exploring the life of a young car hijacker in KwaMashu, Mzobe's *Young Blood* offers a glimpse into the emotional landscape of someone deemed by society, a 'criminal'. Recipient of the 2010 South African Literary Award and described by South African established thriller-writer, Deon Meyer as "superb", Tlholwe's *Ancient Rites*, within the frame of a detective story, navigates the contrasting worlds of the real and the spirit; the urban and the rural.

The pen as a weapon

Prolific Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop and German writer and filmmaker Torsten Schulz will discuss 'The pen as a weapon against war' on the closing night of the Time of the Writer. Diop's work of fiction, *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, deals powerfully with the issue of memory around the Rwandan genocide, while Schulz's novel *Boxhagener Square*, which won numerous awards and was made into a film, is set in the context of post-war Germany.

Chris van Wyk and Etienne van Heerden will culminate this year's festival with a discussion on 'Re-inventing memory through literature'. Van Wyk has an extraordinary knack for telling heartwarming stories of often comical personal experiences against the backdrop of critical periods in South African history. Van Heerden, with his work published in over sixty anthologies in South Africa and overseas, together with an acclaimed string of novels, poetry and essays, is one of the huge icons within Afrikaans literature.

For more information, go to www.cca.ukzn.ac.za or call the Centre for Creative Arts on tel: +27 (0)31 260 2506/1816.