

JOHANNESBURG 2018

« Car le vrai rôle d'un festival est d'aider les artistes à oser, à entreprendre des projets... »  
Bernard Faivre d'Arcier

## Atelier for Young Festival Managers 23 - 29 March 2018

Testimony by

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Participant of the Atelier Johannesburg 2018, Zimbabwe

### Atelier for Young Festival Managers Johannesburg

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It was a real honour and privilege to be granted the opportunity to attend the first Atelier on the African continent. I attended the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers which was held in Joburg in March this year, and likewise, before the program started, I had my own expectations. Half way through the program, I then realised that my expectations were exceeded. The program presented me with countless opportunities to be exposed to information, ideas and experiences, as well as potential collaborations, and access to wisdom that I can use in my industry. I've been working in the Literature industry for about 3 years now – primarily dealing with poetry (Workshops, anthologies and spoken word performances) – so I'm glad that I could be exposed to such a program at an early stage of my career.

Before I dive into my experience and what I learned from the program, I believe it's imperative to applaud the consistent communication that I received before the program even began. Not only did they keep me well informed, they also offered assistance in areas in which they could help if I needed any. All this began since last year, and really helped me in acquiring the necessary funds to attend the atelier. There are very few organisation that are willing to take the step in assisting their participants prior to them attending their programs, so this was a very positive thing for me to see, especially since the cost of attending the atelier was quite a lot. The constant communication managed to keep me in suspense of what I was going to receive from the program, and also kept me informed of other participants that will be attending the program. This is great because when the program began, I already had a good background on most of the participants who would be attending the same atelier. I must admit that, the festival academy also played a unique role in urging us to go through other papers that were submitted by other participants (although they were quite a lot).

Well, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2018, I landed in Joburg for the atelier and I was ready to not only have fun, but to also learn, network and share my experiences. The welcoming at the Wits School of Arts was great, and ironically they had an open mic after the opening ceremony, so for those that know me very well, they already know by now that I performed a poem during the open mic. It was awesome to see the other participants perform as well, and the band played beautiful music. As expected, the next day we went straight into the gist of things in the morning. Each day presented itself with a diverse number of topics and panellists, with curated discussions and presentations by participants, mentors and other guest speakers. One of the key attributes of the atelier program -which I highly appreciated and

applaud the Festival Academy for - was the manner in which the dissemination of information took place. The Facilitator (Mike Van Graan) managed to create a conducive learning environment where participants would not only learn from the content he shared, but also the information from other participants. I learnt a lot about Cultural Diplomacy, how to plan sustainable festivals and how festivals contribute to socio-economic change. Some of the key points that I really found important for my field of work is how culture plays a significant role in sustainable development, protocols for fair international cultural collaborations as well as characteristics of good festivals and good managers. I am not a festival manager, but the program definitely prepared me well should I one day start my own festival. The atelier is only one week, so of course there's only so much that can be covered in that 1 week, but I personally believe that it's enough to point an aspiring festival manager in the right direction and with the right resources, or to help a current festival manager further develop their skills and networks in order to improve their festival.



The program did get to a point where the information we were receiving was quite overwhelming, however this was compensated with extra activities such as visiting the Cradle of Humankind, the Apartheid Museum, the centre for the Less Good Idea, and also getting the opportunity to watch a couple of productions/performances, or to just spend free time relaxing. I must say that, the atelier has the capacity to present unplanned opportunities that one may have never thought of. For example, we were privileged to receive a few words from John Kani who paid a visit to the Market Theatre during one of our presentations. Another opportunity that I did not see coming was the opportunity to work on potential sustainable toolkit with other influential participants from different backgrounds.

I was honestly concerned whether I would be able to keep my head focused on the program in Joburg, because it took place during a week where I still had a lot of outstanding work in Bloemfontein, and I was also going to miss lectures for a full week. None the less, I managed to fully participate and enjoy the opportunity to its fullest. Well, I obviously had a lot of catching up and an overwhelming amount of work to do after the atelier when I got back in Bloemfontein. In conclusion, the atelier was worth the time and money. I would advise potential participants to note that, the benefits of such an opportunity as this one are mostly dependent upon you. The atelier provides a platform that generates countless of opportunities (not only for collaboration or funding), but it's possible for you to limit the benefits you could receive from the program should you not take advantage of each opportunity.

In conclusion, make sure you apply for the next atelier. You won't regret it. One of the participants even crowd funded in order to attend the atelier in Joburg, so there's not much that should stop you from applying. I'm really grateful for the friends I made, all the people I met, and the information I received and got to share. With that being said, all the best, and stay blessed.

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