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# AFRICA BEYOND

## Celebrating African Arts in the UK



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## African Theatre in 2007

Sylvia Arthur takes a look at the UK's increasingly vibrant African theatre scene and previews some of this year's offerings.



March 27th is World Theatre Day and there's never been a better time to get in on the act and experience the thrill of the African stage. African theatre in the UK is thriving. Previously confined to small community venues and niche audiences, 2007 represents a landmark year for this vibrant but underexposed form.

A number of major productions are planned for the year including a range of new writing and revivals of old classics. Pioneering African theatre company Tiata Fahodzi celebrates its tenth anniversary with a week-long season at the Soho Theatre in April while Ghanaian playwright Ama Ata Aidoo's timeless drama 'The Dilemma of a Ghost' is set to return to the stage in the autumn.

Already this year, theatregoers have been treated to a number of high-profile African plays. 'Sizwe Banzi is Dead' starring legendary South African actors and co-authors John Kani and Winston Ntshona continues to play to packed houses while Kani's 'Nothing But The Truth' has recently completed a successful London run. All this is testament to the fact that African theatrical creativity is at an all time high.

There's an increasing awareness in the UK that African theatre should not be pigeon-holed just as something 'exotic', but as a sophisticated and wide-ranging contemporary performing arts culture. We're particularly interested in the best of contemporary African work which counters the popularly held misconceptions about Africa.

Michelle Knight, Africa Consortium UK

Theatre has long been engaged in a debate with itself about its purpose - should it be purely entertainment or does it have an intrinsic educational value? - and this argument has even more resonance with African theatre. Earlier this month UK Arts International, an award-winning theatre production and management company launched the Africa Consortium UK to promote cutting edge work from Africa and the Diaspora.

The Africa Consortium UK is committed to engaging with the performing arts from Africa and the African Diaspora. The aim is to increase intercultural knowledge and understanding, and develop collaborations which are

meaningful, sustainable and contribute to an ongoing intercultural dialogue.

Michelle Knight, Africa Consortium UK

An excellent example of the power of theatre to break down barriers can be found in 'Stages Calling', photographer Ruphin Coudyzer's exhibition at the National Theatre chronicling the role theatre played in the anti-apartheid struggle in 1980's South Africa. Coudyzer captured images of local protest theatre and Shakespearean classics at Johannesburg's Market Theatre, revealing a pictorial story of part of South Africa's journey to democracy.



Whether you just want to be entertained, enlightened or both, check out our guide to the best in African theatre in 2007:

#### Nothing But the Truth (South Africa)

On tour nationally from 25th April to 16th June

Following on from its successful run at Hampstead Theatre in February, this gripping investigation into the complex dynamic between those blacks who remained in South Africa and risked their lives to lead the struggle against apartheid and those who returned victoriously after living in exile embarks on a national tour. A must see.

#### Sizwe Banzi Is Dead (South Africa)

The National Theatre, London until 4th April and at The Barbican from 9th-26th May  
Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona's groundbreaking 1972 play that served as an act of defiance and racial unity in the struggle against apartheid.

#### Stages Calling (South Africa)

The National Theatre, London until 5th April

A powerful exhibition of photographs taken during the apartheid era at The Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

#### Tiata Delights (Various)

The Soho Theatre, London from 23rd - 28th April

Now in its third year and coinciding with the tenth anniversary of Tiata Fahodzi, Tiata Delights promises to showcase the best new writing from the Diaspora. Featuring Pulitzer prize-winning author Suzann-Lori Park's 365 Days, 365 Plays.

#### Barbican Moving Africa season

The Barbican, London from 4th – 16th June

A contemporary African dance series in The Pit, including a post show talk.

#### Joe Guy, Roy Williams play by Tiata Fahodzi (UK)

New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich and Soho Theatre, London, 18th October-25th November

New commission by the award-winning British playwright performed by Tiata Fahodzi.

#### The Dilemma Of A Ghost (Ghana)

Autumn 2007

Border Crossings in association with the National Theatre of Ghana bring Ama Ata

Aidoo's compelling drama to new audiences.

Sylvia Arthur is editor of What's On Ghana magazine.

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