

International Programs Travel Grant to South Africa Summer 1999

Final Report

A research field trip to South Africa during the first three weeks of July 1999 was an extension of my long-term scholarly activity in the field of African indigenous theatre, and afforded me the opportunity to generate educational connections with the University of Natal, Durban and with the University of Zululand.

Educational Projects to be Explored (as outlined in my proposal):

1. SDSU student theatre group participation in the Grahamstown Festival.
2. SDSU student theatre group performances at universities; attending classes.
3. Faculty to hold workshops/classes in Theatre Departments at universities.
4. Attend a performance of Ellis Pearson and Bheki Mkhwane's new theatre piece for children with a view to inviting them to perform it at the Theatre For Young Audiences Festival at SDSU in February 2000, and to hold workshops with our students.

My exploration of the projects listed above was successful.

First, Pearson and Mkhwane will be performing at the SDSU Theatre Department's Theatre For Young Audiences Festival in February 2000.

Second, I was well received by all the South African faculty I met and have devised a preliminary plan for a visit to SA in June /July 2000 by cast and director of Beyond Borders - a Theatre For Young Audiences theatre piece currently in production in the Theatre Department at SDSU. Beyond Borders is part of our annual season of plays presented for the public. It will perform to schools all over San Diego county during January 2000. It will be a featured performance at our Theatre For Young Audiences Festival in February 2000. I have attached a copy of the original proposal for the Beyond Borders project.

The multicultural student group would consist of six actors and one stage manager. They would be accompanied by Margaret Larlham (faculty director) and myself. I would accompany the group to liaise with all institutions. My preliminary timeline for the project is as follows:

June 18 - Arrive in Durban , South Africa

June 19 - 27 - Perform for a student and school audience in the Department of Performance Studies and Drama at the University of Natal, Durban. The group would also rehearse with Bheki Mkhwane and Ellis Pearson as part of a new piece for the Grahamstown Festival.

June 28 - Travel by air to Grahamstown

June 29 - July 9 - Perform Beyond Borders and the new piece with Mkhwane and Pearson at the Grahamstown Festival.

July 10-12 - Perform Beyond Borders at the Annual Schools Theatre Festival in Grahamstown.

July 13 -20 - Fly to Durban, drive to Zululand to perform Beyond Borders for the Department of Drama at the University of Zululand.

July 20 - Return to the US

I have been given assurances by all institutions that we would be welcome. I would have to apply to perform at the Grahamstown Fringe Festival; this is simply a matter of applying and paying a fee. I imagine all our performances during our stay would be free, that we would apply for subsistence etc. from this end. Theatre Departments at South African Universities are under considerable financial pressure at present, and their futures are uncertain. An association with us, however brief, would be a welcome gesture.

My initial estimate for airfares, accommodation, vehicle hire and per diem for the the period June 18 to July 20 for 9 persons would be \$ 40,000. For internal travel we would need to hire a van which would accommodate 9 persons.

Theatre students from SDSU would benefit immensely from this experience. They would: visit and perform at two South African universities; perform at the largest art festival in Africa; meet students from all over South Africa; perform at a schools festival; attend a variety of performances from all over the world during the 10 days of the Grahamstown Festival; and work and perform with two internationally recognized South African Theatre Professionals.

I welcome ideas on how I might raise money for this project! I would also welcome an opportunity to discuss my thoughts with someone in International Programs.

Recap:

The Grahamstown Festival is an arts festival held annually in South Africa early in July. It is the largest theatre festival on the continent, with theatre companies from all over Africa participating. The Grahamstown Festival is absolutely non-racial and enjoys the support of most political parties in the country, including the African National Congress. In the lead it has taken to promote inter-cultural relations between artists, and between artists and their public, this festival has become a measure of the democratization of the arts in South Africa.

Proposal to the season committee - TFYA TOUR -Middle and High schools

BEYOND BORDERS/MAS ALLA DE LAS FRONTERAS

Beyond Borders/Mas alle de las Fronteras is the guiding concept for a new theatre work that I would like to shape for young audiences. Focusing especially on teenagers - and aimed at middle and high school audiences - the production will explore stories of journeys and the crossing of boundaries - both physical and symbolic - with special reference to the border between America and Mexico. This new work would begin with research, improvisation and exploration - identifying relevant issues and investigating the rich cultural heritage of this country. Beginning sources may be drawn from literature- excerpts from the writings of Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel, both South American novelists, the plays of Luis Valdez and other Latino playwrights, poets and authors. Particular attention will be given to literature prescribed for junior high and high schools in the San Diego district and county schools.

It is important to recognize, acknowledge and create opportunities for the large diverse community at San Diego State University. This project would accommodate the needs of the students as well as attract new audiences (and new students) to the department.