

Author Jonny Steinberg talks about writing his book *A Man of Good Hope* on which Isango Ensemble's production is based, and its hero, Asad Abdullahi

I had little idea that I would write a book about Asad Abdullahi when I met him. I had in mind a very different project, one that would take in many times, people, and places. I imagined that Asad would occupy ten, perhaps twenty pages of the work.

It was at our second meeting, I think, that the book I actually wrote was conceived. Asad and I were walking through the Company's Garden, one of Cape Town's oldest and loveliest public spaces, when Asad picked up a twig, snapped it open and smelt it. I will never forget the expression that came over him—the surprise, the wistfulness, the knowledge that what he was experiencing would soon disappear. The fragrance had transported him more than two decades back in time. He was six or seven years old in a madrassa in Mogadishu, Somalia copying out the Koran line by line. The smell of the twig had reminded him of the narcotic sap of the agreee tree he had used to bind ink; he was reliving a forgotten high.

I felt a whim rising. A man who can break a twig and take me with him to another world, I thought, is a man about whom I ought to write a book.

When I met him, Asad was hustling for a living. He'd leave his shack on the outskirts of Cape Town in the early mornings, hang out in the Somali section of Mitchell's Plain township and ask the traders and businessmen he met there if they needed a delivery to be made. A man living that sort of life hardly had the time a writer demanded. And so I bought his time. I capitalized the business he wanted to start: selling cigarettes, mobile phone airtime, and frozen chickens from his shack. It cost me less than £400. In exchange, I acquired a subject sufficiently sedentary to interview for weeks and months at a time.

I was a white man in a good car and Asad was convinced that my presence in his shantytown home would attract men with guns. He refused to meet in his shack where he would have no forewarning of an attack. Instead he insisted that we talk in my car; there he had a 360-degree view and could see trouble coming. And so that is where we sat day in and day out for nearly a year.

When the first draft of the manuscript was written I asked him to read it. He refused. The story of his past was simply too sad, he said. I redoubled my efforts to get him to look at it, but he only dug in his heels. He simply would not. I was disconcerted. By the time I was done writing I had retraced most of his steps through the Horn of Africa, had found long-lost relatives of his in various parts of the world, and had discovered something of the lost genealogy of his family. Between my forensic interest in his history and his refusal to read about it was a chasm that made me immensely uneasy.

It took a long while for me to settle upon an explanation. Taking in his past as a narrative unspooling through time was simply unhelpful to him, I believe. More than that, it was destructive. To have this perennially rejected boy, forever kicked around like a stone, installed in his imagination, was to rob himself of the wherewithal to live in the present. Better to see his past in flashes, to keep in his mind particular moments: moments of mystical feeling, of love, of the desire for revenge, moments when he was the one who decided what would happen next. Deep in our culture is the belief that unearthing memory is therapeutic. I think that Asad has taught me otherwise. He gave me the material to assemble a story about his personal history. But the story is not for him; it is for others.

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL **AF**
1-17 March 2019

FOR THE ISANGO ENSEMBLE

Director Mark Dornford-May
Choreographer Lungelo Ngamlana
Music Directors Mandisi Dyantyi and Pauline Malefane
Lighting Designer Manuel Manim
Lighting re-design Sue Grey-Gardner
Speech and Dialogue Coach Lesley Nott Manim
Producer Claire Bejanin
Production Manager John Page
Company Manager Maris Sharp
Stage Managers Sandile Mgugunyeka and Valencia Mgugunyeka

A Man of Good Hope is performed in English and Xhosa, a Nguni Bantu language with 'click' consonants. The Xhosa are the second largest cultural group in South Africa. The most well-known Xhosa hymn is now the South African national anthem, *Nkosi Sikele' iAfrika* (*God Bless Africa*).

Presented by arrangement with Arts Projects Australia. Co-produced by The Royal Opera, Repons, BAM and Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg.



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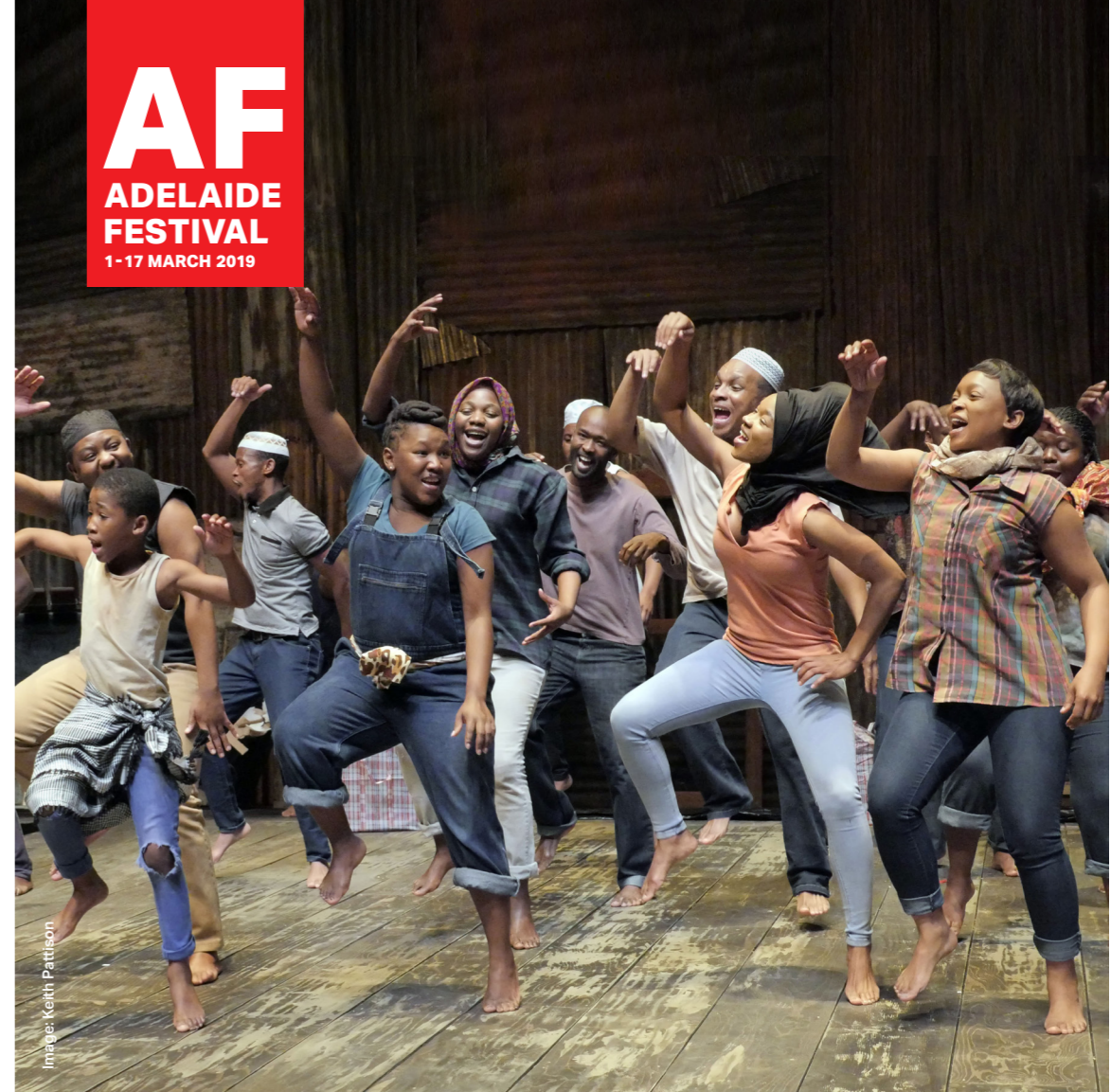
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CAST

Abdi Thobile Jim Dyasi
Conductor/Johnny Mandisi Dyantyi
Old Woman Nombongo Wendy Fatyi
Rooda Zamile Christopher Gantana
Asad as a boy / Musharaf Siphosethu Hintsho
Death and Desk Clerk Nontsusa Louw
Asad as a boy / Musharaf Phielo Asakhe Makittle
Orange seller Zimkhitha Mathomane
Asad's mother Zanele Gracious Mbatha
English teacher and Foosiyah's friend Nolubabalo Mdayi
Madoda Sinethemba Mdena
Wedding guest Masixole Mgugunyeka
Yindy/Sadicya Zoleka Mpotsha
Asad as a young man Thandolwethu Mzembe
Yindy's Mother Siyanda Ncobo
Kaafi's wife Nonkululeko Nkwinti
Kaafi Sonwabo George Ntshata
Tube Melikhaya Edward Ntshuntshe
Foosiyah Cikizwa Rolomana
Assistant shopkeeper Masakana Cecil Sotayisi
Asad as a man Ayanda Siyabonga Tikolo
Yindy's father Philani Xhaga



5-11 Mar / Royalty Theatre

Duration 2hrs 30mins, including interval

THEATRE / SOUTH AFRICA

A Man of Good Hope

Young Vic and Isango Ensemble
AUSTRALIAN EXCLUSIVE

The musicians of the Olivier Award-winning, Cape Town-based Isango Ensemble are renowned for their ravishing adaptations of classic works, reimagining everything from Bizet to Britten to the Bible in a contemporary South African context. In *A Man of Good Hope* the company stays closer to home, taking up Jonny Steinberg's riveting book about a young Somali refugee who fled his country's civil war, only to find himself in a new violent reality in South Africa. Driven by Isango's powerhouse vocals and signature marimba, this dynamic new work delivers a clear-eyed portrait of resilience amid the challenges of displacement.

ISANGO ENSEMBLE

Founded in 2000 by Mark Dornford-May and Pauline Malefane, Isango draws its performers from once-disadvantaged townships to create performances with a strong South African flavour, often by re-imagining Western theatre classics within a South African setting. Isango has won international fame for its adaptations of classic operas such as the (Golden Bear-winning) feature film *uCarmen eKhayelitsha* and (Olivier Award-winning) *The Magic Flute* (*Impempe Yomlingo*), in contemporary South African township settings. Isango Ensemble first visited Australia when *The Magic Flute* was presented at the 2011 Melbourne Festival.

MARK DORNFORD-MAY Director

Mark is co-founder and Artistic Director of Isango Ensemble. Born in Yorkshire and brought up in Chester, he has worked in South Africa with members of the company since 2000. Mark has directed all of Isango's stage productions: *The Mysteries–Yiimangaliso*, *The Snow Queen*, *Der Silbersee*, *The Beggars Opera- Iballi Loo Tsotsi*, *Carmen*, *The Magic Flute–Impempe Yomlingo*, *A Christmas Carol–iKrismas Kherol*, *Aesop's Fables*, *La Bohème–Abanxaxhi*, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists–Izigwili Ezidlakazelayo*, *Venus and Adonis*, *uCarmen*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Man of Good Hope* and *Dancing the Death Drill–SS Mendi*; and produced and directed all its films: *uCarmen eKhayelitsha*, *Son of Man*, *Unogumbe–Noye's Fludde* and *Breathe–Umphefumlo*.

PAULINE MALEFANE Music Director

Pauline is co-founder and co-Music Director of Isango Ensemble. She has worked with members of the company since 2000. She is also an advocate for The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. She saw world-wide success playing the role of Carmen, both on stage and in the Golden Bear-winning feature film *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, for which she won a Golden Thumb from Roger Ebert. She was awarded the Best Actress Award at the South African Film & Television Awards for the film *Son of Man*. In 2006, she sang the role of Bess in *Porgy and Bess* at both Umea and Malmo in Sweden. In 2009, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle, she sang a series of concerts with the Berlin Philharmonic, which were broadcast on German television. In 2012, Pauline played the role of Venus in Isango's *Venus & Adonis*, which opened the Globe to Globe season at Shakespeare's Globe in London, and in 2015, the role of Zoleka in *Breathe–Umphefumlo*. On Isango's USA Tour in 2015, she once again played Carmen and sang Titania in the new adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 2016 Pauline created and played the roles of Yindy and Sadicya in *A Man of Good Hope* at London's Young Vic and New York's BAM.



MANDISI DYANTYISI Music Director

Mandisi is Associate Director and co-Music Director of Isango Ensemble and has been with the company since 2006. He has been co-Music Director and arranger/composer for all Isango Ensemble productions including *The Magic Flute–Impempe Yomlingo*, *A Christmas Carol–iKrismas Kherol*, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Mysteries–Yiimangaliso*, *Aesop's Fables* and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists–Izigwili Ezidlakazelayo*. Mandisi travelled to New York to work with Graduate Acting students of New York University's Tisch School of Acting, as they explored relationships between South African and American theatre methods. He arranged and directed the music for the films *Unogumbe and Breathe–Umphefumlo*. In 2015 he adapted Bizet's *Carmen* and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Isango's USA Tour. In 2016 Mandisi composed and conducted the music for *A Man of Good Hope* which ran at London's Young Vic and New York's BAM.

LUNGELO NGAMLANA Choreographer

Lungelo Ngamlana is an associate artist of Isango Ensemble. He joined the company in 2007 and has been choreographer for all subsequent Isango Ensemble productions. His theatre credits include: *The Magic Flute–Impempe Yomlingo*, *A Christmas Carol–iKrismasKherol*, *The Mysteries–Yiimangaliso*, *Aesop's Fables*, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists–Izigwili Ezidlakazelayo*, *Venus and Adonis*, *La Bohème*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Carmen*, *A Man of Good Hope* and *Dancing the Death Drill–SS Mendi*. Prior to joining Isango Ensemble, Ngamlana worked as teacher, performer, and choreographer with many dance and theatre groups, both in South Africa and internationally.

MANUEL MANIM Lighting Designer

Mannie Manim is co-founder of the Market Theatre, and has been director of performing arts administration at the University of the Witwatersrand and director of the Baxter Theatre Centre. His career in theatre lighting and producing spans over 40 years and he has worked with Isango Ensemble since its first production 18 years ago. His accolades include: Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres from the French Government, Naledi Life Achievement Award, Fleur du Cap Lifetime Achievement Award, Arts and Culture Trust Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Silver National Order of Ikhamanga.

LESLEY NOTT MANIM Speech and Dialogue Coach

Lesley Nott Manim has worked in professional theatre, film, and television since 1975 as a performer and director, and vocal, acting, dialogue, text interpretation, and accent coach, for both South African and international productions. She has taught text interpretation at the Market Theatre Laboratory, voice classes and tutorials at the University of Witwatersrand, and text interpretation, accent, and performance skills at AFDA Cape Town. She has worked with Isango Ensemble since 2007 as speech, dialogue, and text interpretation coach.

CLAIRE BEJANIN Producer

Claire Béjanin has produced theatre, dance and opera throughout the world. She has been executive producer of Peter Brook's Bouffes du Nord theatre, the Aix-en-Provence Festival, the 'Bridge', a joint venture between The Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Old Vic, and director Sam Mendes. As Administrative Director of the MC 93 at Bobigny, Paris, she produced a vast array of creations including those of Deborah Warner, Robert Wilson, Steve Reich, Peter Greenaway, Peter Sellars, Philip Glass, William Forsythe. She is the Chair of Good Chance Theatre, Paris, and is touring the production of *The Jungle* world-wide. She is currently the executive producer of Repons Foundation in NY. Her collaboration with Isango Ensemble started in 2016 with *A Man of Good Hope* which toured BAM in New York, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg, RuhrFestspiele and Bergen Festival. 2017 saw the creation of Isango Ensemble's production of *Dancing the Death Drill–SS Mendi*, based on Fred Khumalo's book, presented at Nuffield Southampton Theatres in June/July 2018.

JONNY STEINBERG Author

Jonny Steinberg is an award-winning South African author. His books include: *Midlands*, *The Number* (both of which won the Sunday Times Alan Paton Award), *Three-Letter Plague* (*Sizwe's Test* in the US, which was named one of Washington Post's Books of the Year and shortlisted for the Wellcome Trust Book Prize), *Thin Blue*, *Little Liberia: An African Odyssey in New York*, and *A Man of Good Hope*. In 2013, Steinberg was among the inaugural winners of the Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes, awarded by Yale University. He currently teaches African studies at the University of Oxford.