Abdullahi and its hero, Asad
production is based, Isango Ensemble’s
Hope about writing his
Author Jonny
#AdlFest
on which
A Man of Good
is therapeutic. I think that Asad has taught me otherwise. He gave me
moments: moments of mystical feeling, of love, of the desire for
present. Better to see his past in flashes, to keep in his mind particular
in his imagination, was to rob himself of the wherewithal to live in the
perennially rejected boy, forever kicked around like a stone, installed
to him, I believe. More than that, it was destructive. To have this
his past as a narrative unspooling through time was simply unhelpful
It took a long while for me to settle upon an explanation. Taking in
forensic interest in his history and his refusal to read about it was a
discovered something of the lost genealogy of his family. Between my
found long-lost relatives of his in various parts of the world, and had
writing I had retraced most of his steps through the Horn of Africa, had
read it. He refused. The story of his past was simply too sad, he said.
When the first draft of the manuscript was written I asked him to
1-17 MARCH 2019
ARTS PROJECTS
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.
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 and night 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 disappointed. 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 paraphrastically rejected by, 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 cultures 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.
Music Director

Mandisi is Associate Director and co-Music Director of Isango Ensemble and has been with the company since 2006. He has co-Music Director and arrangement composer for all Isango Ensemble productions including The Magic Flute–Impempe Yomlingo, A Christmas Carol–Krismas Kherol, Venus and Adonis, The Mysteries–Yimmimangaliso, Aesop’s Fables and The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists–Ibali Loo Tsotsi. Mandisi composed and produced the music for the films Unogumbe, A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Breathe–Umphefumlo. In 2015 he adapted Bietz’s Carmen and Betts’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.

"Isango Ensemble is renowned for their ravishing adaptations of Western theatre classics within a South African setting. Isango Ensemble started in 2000 by Mark Dornford-May and Pauline Malefane, Isango draws its performers from once-disadvantaged townships to create new work delivers a clear-eyed portrait of resilience amid the challenges of displacement.

Founded in 2000 by Mark Dornford-May and Pauline Malefane, Isango Ensemble is renowned for their ravishing adaptations of classic works, reimagining everything from Bizet to Britten in a contemporary South African context. In A Man of Good Hope the company stays close 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.

Pauline is co-founder and co-Music Director of Isango Ensemble. She has worked with members of the company since 2000. Mark has directed all of Isango’s stage productions: The Mysteries–Yimmimangaliso, The Snow Queen, Der Silbersee, The Beggars Opera- Ibali Loo Tsotsi, Aesop’s Carol–Krismas Khensu, Aesop’s Fables, La Boheme-Albawishi, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists–Impempe Yomlingo, Venus and Adonis, The Magic Flute–Impempe Yomlingo, A Christmas Carol–Krismas Khend, Venus and Adonis, The Mysteries–Yimmimangaliso, Aesop’s Fables and The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists–Ibali Loo Tsotsi. Mandisi traveled 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 Bietz’s Carmen and Betts’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.


Jonny Steinberg is an award-winning South African author. His books include: Midlands, The Number Both of which won the Sunday Times Alternative Novel Prize, Three-Letter Plague (Stevie’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 Baa, Little Liberia An African Odyssey in New York, and 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.

Mannie Marin 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 Treat 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, Nakadi Prize Lifetime Achievement Award, Durban Film Life Time Achievement award, Art and Culture Trust Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Silver National Order of Ikhamanga.

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

Claire Beljassin has produced theatre, dance and opera throughout the world. She has been executive producer of Peter Brook’s Bouffes du Nord theatre, the Alice in Wonderland 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, Philip Glass, William Forsythe. She is the Chair of Good Chance Theatre, Paris, and is touring the production of The Jungle-world-wide. She currently is the executive producer of Rispina Foundation in NY. Her collaboration with Isango Ensemble started in 2006. Good Hope which toured BAM in New York, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg, RuhrFeste 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 Theatre in June/July 2018.

"Isango Ensemble are renowned for their ravishing adaptations of Western theatre classics within a South African setting. Isango Ensemble started in 2000 by Mark Dornford-May and Pauline Malefane, Isango draws its performers from once-disadvantaged townships to create new work delivers a clear-eyed portrait of resilience amid the challenges of displacement."