

Finding the Light in the spirit of Ubuntu

 By Evan-Lee Courie

4 Apr 2024

It was in March 2022 when Jessica Ross and her husband came up with the idea to organise a concert bringing some fellow West End performers out to South Africa to raise money for charity. With just one call to South African producer, Daniel Galloway (formerly of the Fugard Theatre), the idea grew legs, and before they knew it, the Artscape Opera House was booked out for an evening with musical theatre stars and the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra.



L to R: Siya Kolisi, Jessica Ross, David Habbin and Rachel Kolisi. Image supplied

At a time when the arts are critically underfunded globally, particularly in developing countries, *Finding the Light – An evening of Musical Theatre Super Stars!* was born and will make its debut at the Artscape Opera House from 17 – 21 April 2024 in support of the Kolisi Foundation - founded by Rachel and Siya Kolisi with a mission to empower young people and positively impact local communities.

A beacon of hope

Hosted by Marc Lottering, *Finding the Light* is not just a show - it's a beacon of hope for our local communities, shining a spotlight on South African musical theatre talent alongside stars from London's West End and Broadway. It will offer audiences a chance to experience the magic of musical theatre while contributing to the betterment of South African communities.

It's a celebration of talent, humanity, and the transformative power of music!

Ross, executive producer of *Finding the Light* and also co-founder of Finding the Light (FTL) Foundation, describes the showcase as 100% not-for-profit fundraising events rooted in music and the spirit of Ubuntu.

The FTL Foundation is an initiative founded by Ross and her husband that aims to help unite and mobilise supporters of South Africans “at home” and abroad in support of those addressing frontline challenges in South Africa.

"For those of you who are not familiar with Ubuntu, it means 'I am because you are'. It is a beautiful African concept, and a principle we need to see more of everywhere," notes Ross.

"Our goal from the beginning was to use whatever talents, networks, skills, capital and time we could spare to help those doing the hard work of running grassroots development programmes in South Africa. The events are vehicles to attract sponsorship and donor support from varied communities – philanthropists, music lovers and those connected with the cause. Crucially, we wanted to take as much of the work involved in putting these events on off the shoulders of already resource-constrained charity teams," explains Ross.

Fostering collaboration

"We wanted to foster collaboration with good faith and integrity at the heart of everything we did. No one group, organisation or approach will move the needle on their own – it is only by connecting the work and good intentions of the many, and inspiring individuals to take action in whatever way they can, that we can hope to foster meaningful change," she adds.

With a commitment of selling close to 9,000 tickets for the show, it would be no easy feat doing it alone, so Ross ran the numbers and realised that the foundation needed to drive a few initiatives to make this possible.

This included a gala dinner for 300 at the iconic Savoy Hotel in London, held in partnership with the Kolisi Foundation, where Siya and Rachel Kolisi were guests of honour. Then, during the week of the show, there will be the launch of a pledge campaign, inviting every South African to pledge their support for not only the work, but also the spirit of the Kolisi Foundation.

In addition to the fundraising initiatives, Finding The Light will also hold a one-day conference at Artscape during the show, bringing together almost 30 organisations and some leading academics and practitioners to share knowledge, experiences and toolkits on addressing trauma and mental health interventions in programme work. They will also give 250 of beneficiaries of these organisations the chance to experience the magic of the theatre for the first time by attending the show.

Trauma impacts communities

Ross says, "It is hard to even contemplate some of the things our South African children and young people experience every day. According to a group called Waves for Change (which is funded by another wonderful organisation tangentially involved in Finding the Light, EMpower) South African youth, on average, experience eight 'highly traumatic' life events per year versus 4.8 in the entire lifetime of a child living in the USA/UK. This is dramatically higher than almost anywhere and the impact of this on South African communities cannot be understated. Moreover, we need to think carefully about how to intervene as early as possible and the toolkits that will foster healing and resilience in young people."

By raising as much money as possible, and fostering collaboration, resource sharing and giving greater leverage to the organisations they support, they now can focus more on the real work of running on-the-ground programmes in South

African communities.

"Moreover, it has been a gift to witness the incredible connection and passion of the individuals and volunteers who have come on board to help. We have had over 30 volunteers involved on top of the professional crew, who have largely chosen to be paid much less than they usually would be," she says.

"Maybe as important, if not more important, are the connections and collaboration that have been fostered. The incredible creative team have demonstrated not only their abundant talent, but the same desire and commitment to – in the words of the Kolisi Foundation - change the stories of inequality in South Africa."

Finding the Light

Finding the Light – An evening of Musical Theatre Super Stars! will feature talented lights of the West End and Broadway, and stars from South Africa, all accompanied by the full Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Brandon Phillips.

"When we look for light and connection, we find it most viscerally through art, through music, through stories, through sport, which is why they are such impactful intervention tools. Indeed, directors will tell actors to 'find their light'. We intuitively know we are connected, and this is often where we go to feel it," explains Ross.

Finding the Light – An evening of Musical Theatre Super Stars! will take place at the Artscape Opera House from 17–21 April 2024.

Tickets are available at www.webtickets.co.za

For more about the Finding the Light Foundation, visit <https://ftl.org.uk/>

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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