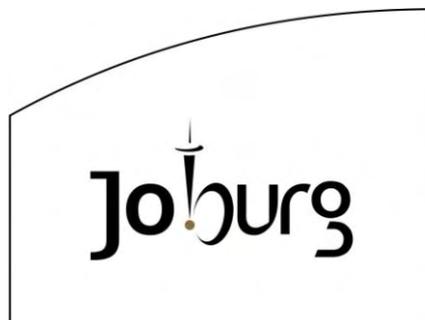


South Africa's Premier Home of Live Entertainment
THE JOHANNESBURG CIVIC THEATRE

1962 to 2007

THE FIRST 45 YEARS



a world class african city

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1962-2007
THE FIRST 45 YEARS

Commissioned by The Johannesburg Civic Theatre (Pty) Ltd

Researched and Compiled by J Brooks Spector

September 2007

FROM THE BEGINNING

When the Johannesburg City Council initially proposed construction of a Johannesburg Civic Theatre, Johannesburg had been a city for less than a century and the contours of its cultural landscape were very different from what they are now. Television broadcasts in South Africa were still fifteen years into the future. Commercial live theatres such as His Majesty's, The Empire and The Colosseum were clustered together downtown, forming a modest, local version of the West End or Broadway. Johannesburg also hosted a number of smaller theatres in what was then known as 'town', in Braamfontein, Hillbrow and a few close suburban neighbourhoods. These theatres included the Alexander, the Andre Huguenet, the Lake, the Victory, the Alhambra, the Brooke and the Intimate. The Market Theatre complex in Newtown was still the city's fresh produce market. In Pretoria, the State Theatre complex had not yet been planned or constructed.

The Johannesburg City Hall was the city's major concert venue for the SABC orchestra and university and church and school halls hosted a variety of drama, dance and music performances. Impresarios and booking agents such as Louis Burke, Brian Brooke, Alex Cherniavsky, the Quibell brothers and Leonard Schach, among others, promoted popular and classical performers – both domestic and international. These international performers frequently came to South Africa as part of tours that included performances throughout South Africa, then Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Southwest Africa - and sometimes even East Africa.

The provincial government performing arts councils of the Transvaal, Cape Province, Natal and the Orange Free State (PACT, CAPAB, NAPAC and PACOFS) had not yet been established. Private organizations such as the Johannesburg Operatic and Dramatic Society (JODS), the Johannesburg Repertory Players or the Johannesburg City Ballet produced or managed the majority of the operas, operettas, musicals, serious drama and classic dance performances in Johannesburg.

With the exception of the University of the Witwatersrand Great Hall, a few church halls and some events in the Johannesburg City Hall, performances in the city were generally only for white South African audiences, in accord with apartheid restrictions. Special dates were sometimes arranged for Coloured and Indian (but not usually black African) South Africans to attend some of these performances. However, these performances were usually restricted to a limited number of performances of particularly popular or thoroughly anodyne shows. A few cinemas in Fordsburg and Kliptown hosted live shows and films open to attendance by all races.

A black South African amateur theatre activist, now living in America, recalls: 'I did not participate in any of the Civic Theatre events except for one lapse when I saw EQUUS. For the most part we boycotted events at the Civic Theatre on those occasions when we were allowed to attend performances sponsored by non-profit groups such as The Association for Coloured and Indian Blind. For the most part our attendance and participation in performing arts events was restricted to The Wits Great Hall and the Coronationville Hall, which was a poor excuse for a theater venue.' – Basil Arendse

When construction of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was approved in the early 1960s, South Africa's cultural efflorescence of the 1970s and 80s – in which musicians, dramatists and choreographers found new, vigorous, and increasingly authentic local voices in opposition to the apartheid regime – remained a decade or more into the future. In the meantime, white South Africans remained generally unaware of existing black South African cultural activities.

This was true, save for the possible exceptions of mine dancing exhibitions, fading memories of Sophiatown's lively, polyglot culture, a few programs at Dorkay House, performances by the Eoan Group (a Coloured opera/ballet company based in Cape Town that occasionally toured Johannesburg and, in fact, performed a remarkable season of five different operas at the Civic during one Johannesburg tour), or the recently performed KING KONG. KING KONG, Todd Matshikiza's musical, had just launched the international careers of a group of now-renowned South African musicians: Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa and Abdullah Ibrahim.

One of South Africa's leading theatre managers remembers: 'The Johannesburg Civic Theatre rose on Braamfontein Hill while I was running the Playhouse Theatre in Braamfontein and working with Leonard Schach productions. It was then the largest new theatre to be built. It became my ambition to be the first technical director/production manager of that theatre when it opened.

I had come up the ranks of stage management and to run such a large and prestigious theatre was a feather in my cap as a young stage/production manager. With the job went a flat in the building. It was off the foyer on the gallery level in the southeast corner. While I did have a rent free apartment and phone, I also soon learnt that not one waking second was my own as I was always on duty whenever anyone wanted to enter the building even after hours and over weekends and the phone also rang at all hours of the day and night.

One of the most significant experiences that was to shape my thinking about this country was when, a month or so before the opening and as a young white man in his early twenties I had to interview a line up of black men old enough to be my father for the jobs of stage hand, flyman, cleaners, etc. There were hundreds of them and only about twenty jobs in all. Making those choices was the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. The need was enormous and I had to trust my sense of each person's capabilities. Many of those men that I chose became very good friends of mine during the two years I was at the Civic and many became outstanding technicians. But that experience confirmed for me that from then on I would do all in my small way to end apartheid.

Probably one of the most memorable performances during my time at the Civic was Leon Gluckman's presentation of LYSISTRATA and IPHIGENIA IN AULIS by the Athens Drama Company, performed in Greek. The entire company was brought over from Greece and Costis Michaelides directed them. I was the stage manager and I had to follow the script by literally following the vowel sounds that looked the same as in English! Their sold out performances made it all worth it.' - Mannie Manim

Initial funding for the construction of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre came from R100,000 originally set aside by the Johannesburg City Council in 1959 for an exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary of the Union of South Africa. When The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was initially designed and constructed, it was clearly understood by its proponents that it would function as a repository of European 'high culture', perched on the southern tip of Africa. Serving a city that had been a mining camp only eight decades earlier, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's organizers believed it was destined to become the focal point for an entire neighbourhood of cultural venues and arts education facilities. The original memorandum of association for the Civic Theatre described the goals of the new theatre:

...to promote and advance aesthetic education and the cultivation and improvement of public taste in drama, opera, ballet, dancing, music, painting and other similar arts in Johannesburg and other centres within the Republic. . . to promote and advance public interest in drama, opera, ballet, dancing, music, painting and other similar arts. To undertake, support or encourage the production and performance of drama, opera, ballet, eisteddfod festivals, symphonic and other musical concerts, dancing and other similar arts (excluding bioscope) and to subsidise any such productions or performances.

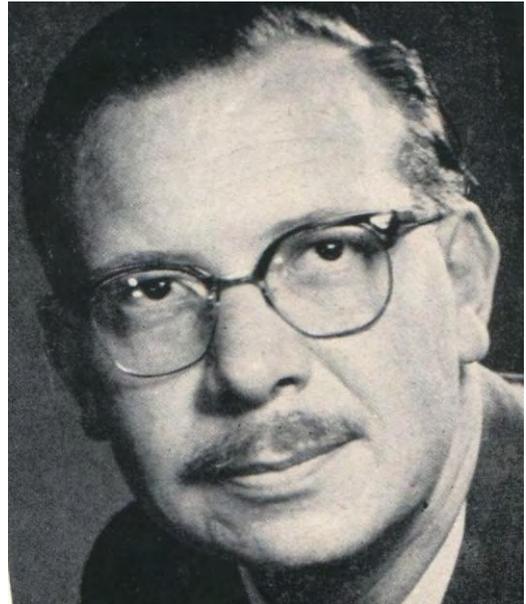
To run the new complex, the City Council selected Michal Grobbelaar, an experienced theatre manager and administrator, as its first head. Grobbelaar would continue as the head of the theatre for over thirty years, until 1993, when Alan Joseph, the general manager (and earlier the international and national tours manager) at the Market Theatre, replaced Grobbelaar at the helm of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre.



(left) Mayor Alec Gorshel at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Civic Theatre, Sept. 16, 1960

(above) The exterior of the new Johannesburg Civic Theatre, just prior to the completion of construction in 1962

(right) Michal Grobbelaar
first Managing Director (1960 to 1993)
of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre



OPENING THE THEATRE

Opening night at The Johannesburg Civic Theatre on August 27th 1962 was a gala event, nearly unprecedented in Johannesburg's history. The Mayor of Johannesburg and other civic dignitaries attended and special commemorative boxes of chocolate were given to every woman who attended the opening. Critics described the new theatre as a building for culture that finally was worthy of Johannesburg's business ascendancy on the continent.

(right)
Opening ceremonies of the
new Johannesburg Civic
Theatre 1962





(left)
Lid of the box of chocolates handed to all ladies attending the opening night of the new Civic Theatre, August 27, 1962



(above left) Interior of the main theatre of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre 1962

(above right) Exterior of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, showing the sculpture, 'The Playmakers', 1962

The Civic Theatre's early seasons were a clear underscoring of its role as the promoter and preserver of western culture. In its first year, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre presented the operas, THE TALES OF HOFFMANN starring Mimi Coertse, HANSEL AND GRETEL and THE MASKED BALL. Its inaugural season included A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS starring British actor William Roderick, Friedrich Durrenmatt's play, DIE BESOEK VAN DIE OU DAME in Afrikaans and the Frank Loesser musical, THE MOST HAPPY FELLA. The ballet for this opening season was COPPELIA and there were two instrumental concerts, one a programme of light orchestral music and the other a recital by the Trio di Trieste.

Three years after The Johannesburg Civic Theatre opened, the Chairman of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre Association, Pieter Roos, would report to the media that:

[The Johannesburg Civic Theatre] has made progress beyond all expectation. It has become the cultural focal point not only of Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand, but of the Transvaal. The policy has been to present a balanced programme in each season. This policy has not only enabled the Association to cater for the varied tastes of the community, but it has also developed, I believe, a specific Civic Theatre-going public. And the public has indicated by its support of the presentations at the theatre that the Council, erecting this temple for the performing arts, fulfilled a definite need. From 27th August 1962 to 30th June 1963 a total of 203 performances had an attendance of 145,620. During the period 1st July 1963 to 30th June 1964, 334 performances were attended by 216,216 theatregoers. From 1st July 1964 to 30th June 1965, 355 performances had an attendance of 274,191.

In the years following the theatre's opening, musicals and dramas on the Civic Theatre's stages included IPHIGENIA IN AULIS and LYSISTRATA by the Athens Drama Group (in Greek), Moliere's THE MISER, HAMLET (starring Francois Swart), A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM, ELEKTRA showcasing Anna Neethling-Pohl, AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS, KISS ME KATE, SHOWBOAT and SOUTH PACIFIC.

In SHOWBOAT, Inia Ti Wiata starred as Joe in two successive runs of the show, and then returned to star in the role of Emil de Becque in a production of SOUTH PACIFIC that ran for thirteen straight weeks. In addition, the Civic hosted THE CANTERBURY TALES, MAN OF LA MANCHA, APPLAUSE, KISMET, EQUUS, THE GREAT WALTZ, THE MERRY WIDOW, MAME, THE STUDENT PRINCE, GODSPELL starring black South African stage star Sam Marais, and BUDDY: THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY among many other productions that took place from the 1960s onward.

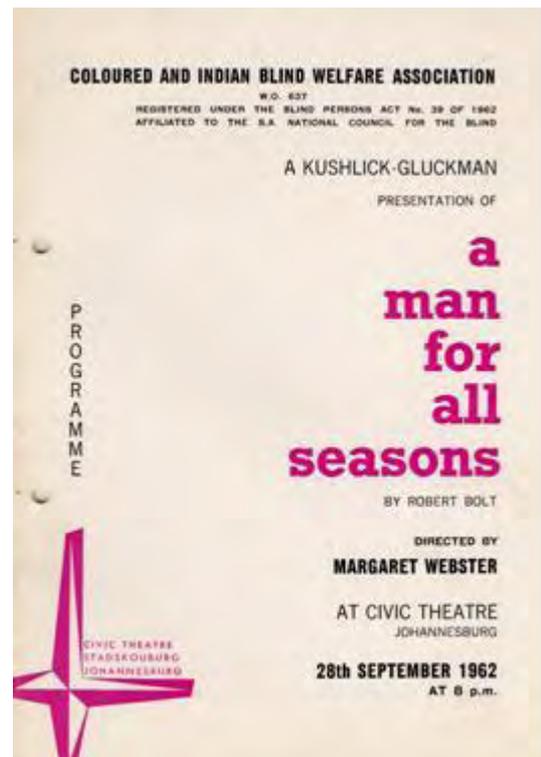
Over the years, operas on the Civic Theatre's main stage included classics such as THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, TOSCA, THE SECRET OF SUSANNAH, IL TROVATORE (with Emma Renzi), LUCIA DE LAMMERMOOR (with Mimi Coertse), NABUCCO, LA BOHEME, CARMEN, MACBETH and LA TRAVIATA (with Metropolitan Opera star Richard Tucker). The theatre hosted the Cape Town-based Eoan Group's productions of LA TRAVIATA, LA BOHEME, IL TROVATORE, L'ELISIR D'AMORE and CARMEN, as well as the University of Cape Town Opera's productions of TURANDOT starring Joyce Barker and Ge' Korsten and THE BARBER OF SEVILLE with Gregorio Fiasconaro. Other opera productions included TOSCA (with the great Italian singer, Tito Gobbi), DON GIOVANNI, AIDA, THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, LA FORZA DEL DESTINO, Janacek's JENUFA, FAUST, MADAMA BUTTERFLY (with Japanese diva Yasuko Hayashi), COSI FAN TUTTE, SIMON BOCCANEGRA, ANDREA CHENIER, RIGOLETTO, NORMA (with Montserrat Caballe) and DON CARLOS.

Ballet productions included GISELLE, CAPRICCIO, RAKA (based on a work by Afrikaans poet N. P. van Wyk Louw), the University of Cape Town Ballet's production of ROMEO AND JULIET, LA FILLE MAL GARDEE, ANNA KARENINA, LES PATINEURS, AGON, John Cranko's THE TAMING OF THE SHREW and CINDERELLA and SWAN LAKE and GISELLE, showcasing Natalia Makarova.

Many of these operas, dramas and ballet productions were by the new Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT), once it had been established. PACT was the quasi-governmental culture administration based in Pretoria, and it remained a pillar of support for the South African government throughout the apartheid era in the cultural realm.

Critic, novelist and poet Robert Greig remembers: 'For me, the Civic theatre is associated with three triumphs of imagination: the classical, the experimental and the civil. The classical, in the 70s, was Francois Swart as Hamlet borne on the daggery stride of an animated pair of compasses. This performance helped establish a benchmark of classical excellence. Later, in the early 70s, Gary Burns' extraordinary dance drama NONQUAWUSE became one of my benchmarks of the experimental. I realized then that - in art - making it new must provoke and offend. When the side panels of the theatre opened to unleash the sound and sight of a rock band, the tight-sphinctered balletomane half of the audience departed this now sadly forgotten, path-finding work. Finally, Bernard Jay's remarkable and continuing transformation of a drab municipal theatre into a vibrant and accessible civic theatre is the third triumph. It demonstrates that administrative and theatrical talent have a close and fruitful relationship. It suggests, too, that both require governments to keep their hands off.'

While The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was generally segregated in keeping with South African practice, benefit performances on behalf of various charitable organisations provided for integrated audiences who attended scheduled works to support charities like the Johannesburg Coloured and Indian Association for the Blind. These benefit performances for privately managed charitable organisations became a significant element of the Johannesburg social calendar throughout the 1960s, 70s and into the early 80s. Although these performances were ostensibly private functions, such performances still required South African Government permits to allow black South Africans to use facilities designated by law for whites.



(above)

Programmes from benefit performances in aid of the Coloured and Indian Blind Welfare Association of **SHOWBOAT** and **A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS**.

An early Johannesburg Civic Theatre project in association with JODS, the Johannesburg Operatic and Dramatic Society, deserves fuller consideration. This was the spectacular, critically acclaimed production in 1963 by Anthony Farmer of the American Broadway classic, **SHOWBOAT** (and reprised in 1964). It was also an early 'integrated' production on the Johannesburg Civic Theatre's stage. On the face of it, **SHOWBOAT** would seem to have been a highly unusual selection for apartheid era South Africa, what with its depiction of the personal suffering caused by racial intolerance as a principal subplot.

However, a successful film version of **SHOWBOAT** had just been in worldwide release and this live production was expressly designed to entertain and overwhelm South African audiences. The Mississippi River showboat on the stage, for example, appeared quite literally to be steaming through the churning water. Critic Louis Sowden, like others, raved about the show, writing, 'This is an occasion when the boat runs away with the show. Anthony Farmer, as producer and designer, having a Mississippi river boat to play with, has made sure that everyone should enjoy it as much as he. And so we do.'

Black and white choirs actually appeared on the same stage, albeit on separate parts of the set – one representing the river levee for the black choir and one the multi-tiered decks of the showboat for a white choir of showboat performers. In a nod towards government racial regulations, these two parts of the stage did not actually touch, preserving a form of racial separation on stage.

This performance also showcased internationally acclaimed singer Inia Ti Wiata, brought from England for the show and cast in the role of Joe, with his showstopper solo number, 'Ole Man River'. As a Maori New Zealander – even one based in London – Wiata would have been classified 'Coloured' under South African law and disallowed from performing together with the other white leads, save for the fact he was quickly and quietly reclassified as a white person under South African law, by virtue of a Scandinavian grandmother.



SHOWBOAT (1963)

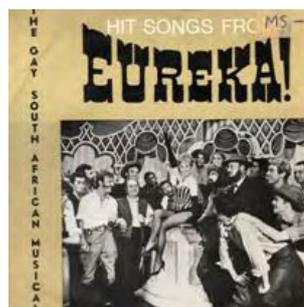
EUREKA!

Early on, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's management decided that one of its roles was to commission new works for its stages for its Johannesburg audiences. The first result was a 1968 musical celebrating an early South African gold rush in Barberton, in what is now Mpumalanga Province. Composer Bertha Egnos and drama critic and playwright Percy Baneshik were partnered to create EUREKA!

EUREKA! was a meticulously researched production, from the accurately designed sets of a mining camp to characters modelled on actual historical figures. The show received a respectful, if not rapturous, response from its Johannesburg public and the critics. Nonetheless, the work was an early indication that beyond operatic, dance and theatrical classics, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre would also seek new South African works for its stages.

EUREKA!, however, was also thoroughly of its time and place. While this story about South African gold mining had characters representing immigrants from around the world - Americans, British, Europeans and Australians - it managed to avoid including among its many characters any black South Africans.

(right)
Cover of record album
made of songs from the show



Early on, many of the Civic Theatre's productions were done with JODS or the Johannesburg City Ballet. When the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) began its various dance, opera and theatre performance components, management of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre embarked on a long partnership with PACT to host its major productions in Johannesburg.

However, once the State Theatre complex was in operation in Pretoria after 1981, the Civic Theatre / PACT relationship became more complicated. Besides the growing budgetary pressures faced by PACT to make maximum use of the new State Theatre's facilities, the costs of mounting major productions on two stages of different sizes and configurations in two neighbouring but separate cities meant a decrease in the number of PACT productions brought to Johannesburg from Pretoria.

Overall, this helped lead to a slow cooling of the relationship in the mid-1980s. The opening of the Sun City complex a few hours away from Johannesburg had a further dampening effect on the Civic Theatre as Sun City's much larger production budgets made it attractive for large-scale extravaganzas unsuited for the Civic Theatre's stage.

In response, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre management worked to fill this gap with a variety of productions from other promoters and impresarios. Noteworthy productions included the splashy, glittering Broadway musicals and musical revues of such hit shows as A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM, MAME, BARNUM and RAZZLE DAZZLE (starring a young, motorcycle-riding Richard Loring), produced by independent impresarios such as Louis Burke and often starring Joan Brickhill.



(left)
1972
10th anniversary celebrations
of the opening of
The Johannesburg
Civic Theatre

Several of these later musicals came from a production partnership between Burke and the Civic Theatre. This partnership planned to start its productions in Johannesburg, garner publicity and momentum from those runs, and then move them throughout the country. The plan was further designed to generate income from one show that the partnership could then use as seed money to fund their subsequent productions. The plan began well but declines in theatre attendance, deteriorating economic conditions in the country and increasingly turbulent political and social circumstances during the 'state of emergency' helped bring the partnership to an end on a less than profitable note.

In its early years, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre also frequently hosted shows or solo recitals by leading international performers such as singers Montserrat Caballe, Richard Tucker, Carlo Bergonzi, and Victoria de los Angeles, pianists Peter Frankl and Peter Nero, the Vienna Boys Choir, jazz band leader Stan Getz, two tours by actress Marlene Dietrich – and even a talk by Joy Adamson about her lions and lionesses.

Marlene Dietrich, in particular, generated much media frenzy with her mix of glamour and allure. These performances and performers encouraged The Johannesburg Civic Theatre to start its Hollywood-style 'Walk of Fame' - handprints in a cement pavement outside the theatre by famous performers who had appeared on its stages.

(right)
Actress Moira Lister signing
The Johannesburg Civic
Theatre Walk of Fame



Managing Director Michal Grobbelaar also had a particular fascination and interest in puppetry and puppet theatre, leading to the establishment of the Civic Theatre's own puppet theatre in 1964 for performances for children. Through the 1980s (until the theatre was closed for a major renovation), The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's puppet theatre provided children's entertainment inside the Civic Theatre complex, at the yearly Rand Easter Show and at venues around the city, through the use of a specially outfitted city bus. Well-remembered productions included SENOR ONYON, ALADDIN and THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE. These were often reprised during the existence of the Civic Theatre's puppet theatre. The puppet theatre also offered versions of long-established works like AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS and PETER AND THE WOLF for its audiences.

The Civic Theatre's puppet theatre was complemented by international tours of leading European puppet theatre companies and an international conference on puppets and children's theatre, hosted by the Civic Theatre. When the puppet theatre company was eventually disbanded, as the Civic Theatre entered into a prolonged renovation period, the theatre donated the puppets to the then Rand Afrikaans University – now the University of Johannesburg. Johannesburg was also home base for the PACT Ballet Company until PACT management moved the company to Pretoria in 1981 to the new State Theatre.



(left)
Publicity still of puppet-making
for the Civic Theatre's Puppet Theatre

SOUTH AFRICAN REALITIES

Despite The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's efforts to embrace an ethos of art for art's sake, it was inevitable its circumstances could not be isolated from the larger social and political impacts of apartheid. In the wake of a tour by pop star Dusty Springfield, a 1965 national government gazette stated that, in accord with the Group Areas Act, admission of mixed audiences to live theatre without a special permit would be judged a criminal offence.

The Star drama critic, Percy Baneshik, wrote in response that, 'the government's hardening of heart on the multi-racial issue sounded the knell of an influx of scripts (and their interpreters) of any significance from abroad.' In particular, this more stringent government position meant that many British playwrights were even more determined to prevent their work from being performed in South Africa - and therefore at The Johannesburg Civic Theatre.

This was not just an issue for government-supported theatres. The privately managed and organised Johannesburg Repertory Theatre's home base was in the Alexander Theatre, near The Johannesburg Civic Theatre. In the JRT's 1967 annual report it noted that the boycott by British and American authors who objected to South Africa's policy of apartheid was making it more difficult for the Rep Theatre to acquire or present the very plays its audiences hoped to see.

Until it reopened after a five-year renovation hiatus, the management of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was composed only of white South Africans and the theatre's board of governors and management committee comprised City Council members and a group of carefully selected civic leaders – similarly all white. Their views inevitably reflected only a portion of the city's population. Nonetheless, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's board of governors encountered the effects of apartheid regulations in many different ways.

In one case, for example, it received a fire marshal's report that black support staff from a visiting company had been discovered staying overnight in the theatre's orchestra pit, as there was no other place in Johannesburg for them to sleep after evening performances. Management struggled for months to find a way to accommodate travelling black staffers without violating apartheid era laws, even as it still met the theatre's own need to accommodate the staff of visiting companies.

Once television broadcasts began in January 1976, theatre managements throughout South Africa, including that of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, began to be concerned about the impact of these broadcasts on theatre audiences (and income) in South Africa. Given the restrictions on integrated audiences that limited audience expansion, home television viewing threatened to cut live theatre attendance even further.

As a result, theatre managers joined an increasingly acrimonious public debate about prospects for the integration of theatre spaces in South Africa. The on again, off again integration of CAPAB's Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town (now Artscape) increased the tempo of the debate further. Meanwhile, the opening of the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 1976 – an integrated theatre from the outset - contributed to a realisation on the part of many that integrated theatres were possible – even under apartheid in South Africa.

The national theatre managers' association, along with other allies, pressed government ministers to relent and issue a blanket approval for integrated shows and theatres. Finally, in April 1978, after years of debate, the government granted blanket approval for integrated performances at theatres, although regulations like the Liquor Act still had the potential to make integration a complicated procedure for theatres. Despite a regulatory change of heart, the changing nature of South African society and the political struggle following the Soweto Uprising made it increasingly unpalatable for most black South Africans to attend performances at city-run, provincial or nationally managed theatres such as the Nico Malan, the State Theatre and The Johannesburg Civic Theatre.

In the meanwhile, the international cultural boycott directed against South Africa increasingly affected the flow of performers and rights to produce works for South African audiences. It became virtually impossible to obtain the rights to new hit musicals and many plays by authors like Arthur Miller, Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter, among a growing number of others. Eventually, popular performers began to avoid South African tours more generally, especially in the wake of international anti-apartheid campaigns like the 'Ain't Going to Play Sun City' music video on the new MTV cable television channel – first in America and then worldwide.

Increasingly, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, like other performance venues throughout the country, turned to domestic products and performers. One such problematic production was the science-fiction fantasy, THE ARCHON, a tale of alien visitors come to Earth to sort out terrestrial problems, in a musical of less than critically acclaimed quality.

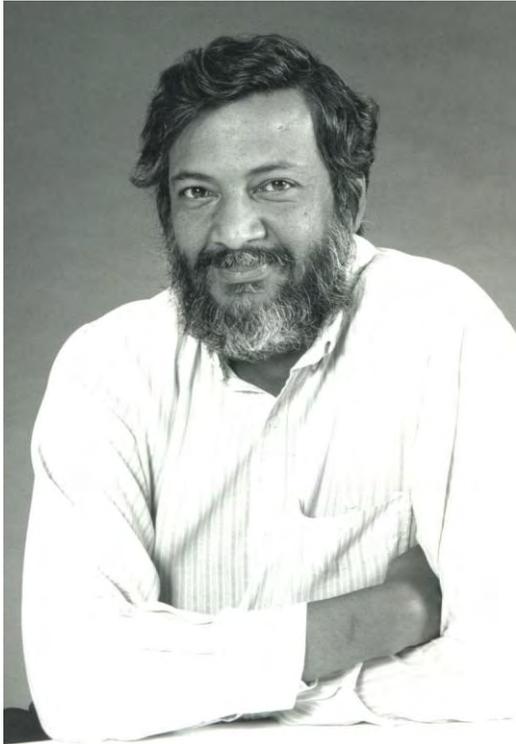
RECONSTRUCTION AND A RE-OPENING

By the mid-1980s it had become clear to the theatre's management that the complex needed renovation and reconstruction. Originally scheduled to take two years and cost R29 million, as work went on and additional changes and requirements were added, the price tag rose to R120 million and the period of reconstruction grew to encompass half a decade. In the end, the reconstruction totally overhauled backstage facilities and technical areas, increased the height of the main theatre and upgraded electrical work, lighting, cooling and heating for the entire complex.

One effect from the long hiatus of productions at The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, however, was a shift of nearly all of PACT's productions to the State Theatre in Pretoria. Another was the sizeable financial burden of paying off the cost of the theatre renovation – a challenge that would weigh heavily upon the theatre's administration and viability in the future.

Moreover, by the time the theatre management was ready to plan its schedule of performances for a reopening in late 1992, the political circumstances in South Africa dictated a very different way of operation in contrast to the time when the building had been closed for renovations. Coming on a growing tide of social protest, anti-apartheid organisations and activists were now insistent that all government structures needed to include broader representation in their management - and different missions and purposes. In that line, community arts activists were similarly insistent that the management of the newly renovated Civic Theatre would have to become fundamentally different from its previous model.

There was yet another issue. Despite their desire to create a glittering re-opening season for the theatre, the theatre's management team and governing board was being stymied by the international cultural boycott against apartheid. Protracted negotiations to secure the international mega-hit musical, LES MISERABLES, ended in failure when the international promoter and producer declined to bring the show to South Africa, as he came under increasing public pressure from both international and local anti-apartheid activists. This failure left the theatre's management with no show for the November 1992 reopening. Management began considering emergency alternatives such as a new, untried, locally commissioned work or even a variety show or pantomime to rescue an increasingly awkward and embarrassing situation.



(above)
Alan Joseph
Executive Director (1993-1996) of
The Johannesburg Civic Theatre

THE DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

Meanwhile, the Market Theatre, the City of Johannesburg's Department of Arts and Culture, a major bank, and the American Embassy were in the midst of negotiations for a South African tour by an American dance company, the renowned Dance Theatre of Harlem. Slowly a bargain coalesced behind the scenes. Social and political activists would be represented on the Civic Theatre's new board. The Market Theatre, with its widely acknowledged anti-apartheid struggle credentials, would co-produce the Dance Theatre of Harlem tour with The Johannesburg Civic Theatre and the Dance Theatre of Harlem tour would become the opening event at the newly reopened Civic Theatre. In addition, to make this project possible, the theatre would move its reopening date forward by several months and the newly legalised anti-apartheid political movements would endorse the entire agreement publicly.

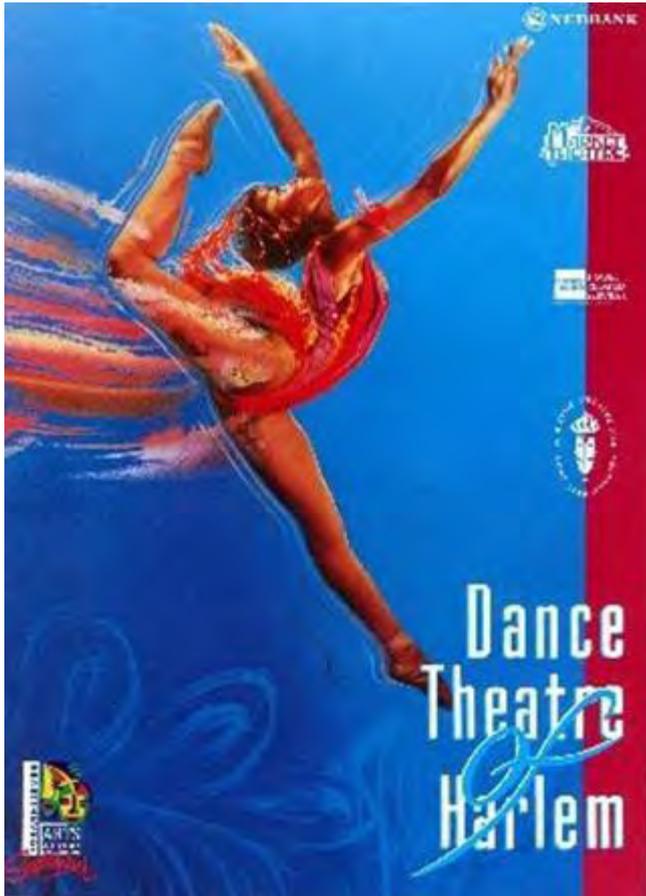
This visit thereby brought three South African dancers back to their own country, where none of them had previously had an opportunity to perform professionally – Augustus van Heerden, Felicity de Jager and Laveen Naidu. Officially, the entire project became a co-production by the Market Theatre and The Johannesburg Civic Theatre. The Civic Theatre now had a management structure that took cognisance of the need for greater representativeness in its governing body. When the Dance Theatre of Harlem's visit was officially announced, The Sowetan published the news under the banner headline 'Dancers to Open Civic Theatre — Big Break: Famous Harlem Group to Herald End of Cultural Isolation'.

The Sowetan reported: 'It is now official that the famous Dance Theatre of Harlem is to open Johannesburg's newly renovated Civic Theatre on September 15. This was confirmed by the Market Theatre Foundation, the City of Johannesburg and Nedbank. This will be the first time an American dance company of international repute tours South Africa. The tour starts on September 7 and will feature DTH's community outreach programme. This will include arts exposure, lectures and demonstrations aimed at educating and developing audience participation. Master classes for aspiring South African dancers, lectures and workshops on production, wardrobe and repertoire will also be held'.

Nelson Mandela, in his endorsement of the DTH visit, wrote to DTH artistic director Arthur Mitchell that the company would:

'... serve as an inspiration to our artists, who have struggled to maintain their vision and creativity despite brutal apartheid oppression ... Our great challenge here is to democratise our cultural and social institutions, over which the apartheid ideology has sought to dominate. The transitional process we are struggling to engender is a difficult one, to which your visit will make positive contributions'.

And so the just-renovated Johannesburg Civic Theatre reopened in September 1992 with an initially controversial but ultimately acclaimed tour by the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Besides a nearly sold-out, month-long run, the dancers and their leader, Arthur Mitchell, carried out a schedule of workshops, demonstrations and master-classes - co-organised with the Market Theatre, community organisations and dance groups - that reached more than 25,000 people throughout the entire Witwatersrand area. This tour marked the simultaneous end of the cultural boycott and the peaceful transformation of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's management into a body more representative of the whole population of the city.



(left)
 Poster for the visit of
 The Dance Theatre of Harlem,
 September 1992. Logos are
 from the Market Theatre, The
 Johannesburg Civic Theatre,
 Nedbank, American Express
 and Johannesburg's 'Arts Alive'
 project.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Shortly after the reopening of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, Michal Grobbelaar, the man who had guided the theatre for three decades, announced his retirement for 1993. After considering numerous candidates, the board offered the position to the Market Theatre's Alan Joseph in recognition, at least in part, of his role in bringing the Market Theatre / Civic Theatre's Dance Theatre of Harlem tour to a successful conclusion. Joseph moved to broaden the programmatic ethos of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, bringing Janice Honeyman on as artistic director and giving her a mandate to produce a wide range of projects at the theatre complex. At the time, Honeyman described her feelings by saying, 'I have a bubble of enthusiasm which I'm finding hard to contain, but it is a massive task to turn the theatre into a community centre.' Janice Honeyman would succeed Alan Joseph as the chief of the Civic Theatre in 1996 when Joseph moved to the State Theatre in Pretoria as the last head of PACT. Janice Honeyman is a multi-talented director/writer from Cape Town who had received her start in Johannesburg in 1976, directing Arthur Miller's THE CRUCIBLE at the Market Theatre.

Joseph and Honeyman launched an ambitious programme of commissioned productions to complement programmes brought to the theatre by promoters and outside producers. International musicals like THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, works by local composers like Mbongeni Ngema's MAGIC AT 4AM, musical revues by rising stars such as Sibongile Khumalo, music performances by veteran South African black music icons Philip Tabane and Hugh Masekela, plays by emerging, young black playwrights, all jostled for attention along with glittering performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Birmingham National Ballet and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, among other international visitors.



(left)
1997 production of
KIPPIE – THE LEGEND IS REMEMBERED!
written by Mthobi Mutloatse.



(left) James Ngcobo and Russel Savadier in the 1998 production of WAITING FOR GODOT at The Johannesburg Civic Theatre



(right) Artwork for the 1999 production of the musical adaptation of Dalene Mattee's novel, FIELA'S CHILD.

The Janice Honeyman holiday pantomime tradition began at this time as well with its patented formula of using British vaudeville fundamentals, slapstick humour, local dramatic and linguistic textures, and the casting of unlikely local celebrities and stars in incongruous roles. A children's theatre, the new Punchline Pub venue, an art gallery and a series of restaurants that aimed to provide a touch of elegance to a visit to the Civic all complemented The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's regular stages.



(left)
Janice Honeyman
Artistic Director (1993-1996)
and Executive / Artistic Director (1996-2000)
of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater arrived for its two widely heralded tours in 1997 and 1998. The effort brought together sponsorship from the J. P. Morgan banking group and several South African-based companies, along with an increasingly confident Civic Theatre management. Both Alvin Ailey company visits featured workshops, master-classes, and other presentations directed towards South Africa's dance community, in addition to the actual theatre performances. Growing financial pressures on the Civic Theatre, however, cast continuing shadows over arrangements for the tours.

(right) The Alvin Ailey American
Dance Theatre's signature work,
REVELATIONS



These tours were clear aesthetic successes and they heightened the international prestige of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre. However, they also led to considerable negative financial consequences for the increasingly slender resources of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, as well as a considerable drain on management energies as theatre management needed to focus extensively on fundraising to avoid cancelling these eagerly anticipated tours.

Alan Joseph and Janice Honeyman's ambitious artistic and social goals for The Johannesburg Civic Theatre were also running up against heightening civic decline and the 'crime and grime' issues confronting the city's downtown zone. These concerns were helping depress attendance (and therefore theatre income), there were growing budgetary pressures from the ambitious programme and expanding staff, and there was the cost of servicing payments on the theatre's earlier reconstruction costs.

To cope with this increasingly precarious financial situation, management was forced to engage in painful cost-cutting exercises – including a major staff reduction – in an effort to bring financial stability to the theatre. Newspaper reports openly speculated about the possibility that The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, like the State Theatre in Pretoria, might soon be shuttered and mothballed.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

The City of Johannesburg, confronted with the looming financial failure at the Civic Theatre and along with financial and budgetary difficulties at a number of other city enterprises, embarked on a new relationship with these city enterprises. The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was corporatised, and its financing separated from the city council. A new, independent board of directors was appointed and the board began a search to appoint a new head to replace Janice Honeyman. Honeyman had resigned to return full time to her creative efforts and endeavours.

The result of the search was to select Bernard Jay, a British theatre veteran who had spent considerable time working with theatre-related organisations in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Jay was appointed Chief Executive Officer and, under its new management, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was reconfigured into a 'receiving house' – designed to house productions brought into the theatre by outside, independent producers. With a dramatically reduced staff cost, lower overheads and a decreased responsibility to fund productions, direct costs began to come under control.

In this new era, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre initiatives include The Actors Centre, an independently managed training and education institution independently run by professional actors. The Actors Centre organises a whole schedule of classes as well as rehearsed play readings, guest lectures and other theatrically related presentations. In addition, The Peoples Theatre has an active programme of shows directed at young children. An art gallery, The Premises, has a programme of unusual, often multi-media art exhibitions. The theatre's newest restaurant, the News Café, has become a popular meeting place for theatregoers – so much so that it has been expanded to double its capacity.

Still in collaboration with writer/director Janice Honeyman, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre also produces the holiday pantomime, an event that is eagerly anticipated by thousands of people every year.

Most recently, The South African Ballet Theatre (SABT) has relocated from Pretoria to a new, purpose-built facility in the Civic Theatre complex. Then SABT CEO Dirk Badenhorst explained the rationale of the move from Pretoria by noting, 'Johannesburg is a city whose vitality shapes the personality of the whole country and in making our decision we have been acutely alive to the opportunities for growth that this offers.'

The dance studios development now has a south-facing glass façade, allowing members of the public relaxing in the new piazza to watch dance rehearsals, creating a sightseeing phenomenon in Braamfontein. At the time the ballet moved (back) to The Johannesburg Civic Theatre, CEO Bernard Jay said that, 'the theatre's new dance studios will become a magnet of interest and fascination for the citizens of Johannesburg, and a focal point in the city's cultural arc.'

Following a decade-long downturn in Braamfontein's fortunes, this investment in physical plant and people represents a turnaround in efforts to rejuvenate the area. Concurrently, since the late 1990s when the theatre's civic subsidy approached R30 million yearly, and then R20 million in 2000 at a time of increasingly stringent city budgetary limits, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's subsidy has declined to less than R15 million per year.

Dramatist and director / producer Deon Opperman writes: 'At the time of my entry to the professional theatre in 1985, the Civic Theatre stood as the largest theatre serving the Johannesburg Metropolitan District. Also, given that during the Apartheid regime the State Theatre, Windybrow and the Alexander were managed by PACT and not open for general rental by private companies, as Pieter Toerien's theatres were not either, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre was the one of the few and largest distribution platforms for independent producers. After a period of terrible decline, the Civic was finally placed in the hands of

Bernard Jay, who halted the decay, turning the theatre into a world class-receiving house. Given the mostly monopolistic charters attached to the casino theatres, the Civic, ironically, still remains the most accessible distribution platform for large-scale theatrical productions. It is, and will remain for many years to come, the primary staging platform for my theatre production company, Packed House Productions.

As a part of the Braamfontein developments, the City of Johannesburg cooperated with The Johannesburg Civic Theatre and neighbouring corporate giant Sappi by renovating the Theatre Gardens on the southern side of the theatre, which have become a magnet for office workers and students.

Playwright Mike van Graan writes: 'As a rental house, the preferred form of theatre infrastructure of the current government, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre is unsurpassed. It generates the most box office income of all public theatres and attracts more patrons in a year than many of our sports stadiums. With its dynamic and visionary CEO, Bernard Jay, it hosts a range of international performing arts events that play to the high end of the entertainment market. Given its financial success, it is able to support important local initiatives like The Actors Centre, the Premises Gallery and the studios for The South African Ballet Theatre company, and provides work for local performing artists through many of its productions.

Some would critique it for producing little local work, for playing to a primarily privileged market and for not being an accessible public theatre with its high ticket prices. However, with the nearby Market Theatre, the Windybrow Arts Centre and the Wits University theatre spaces serving other roles and markets, The Johannesburg Civic Theatre has established itself as a unique and significant component of the Johannesburg theatre mix.

Bernard Jay, the theatre's CEO, defines the theatre's obligations to the City of Johannesburg and the future of the Civic when he said:

The Johannesburg Civic Theatre operates as a part of the City of Johannesburg's Community Development Sector. The theatre is primarily a receiving house where our Nelson Mandela Theatre stage concentrates on the core business of providing well-attended entertainments. In contrast, for the Tesson Theatre, we strongly encourage its use by South African artists, directors, choreographers and writers to develop less

obviously commercial, more innovative and exploratory ventures. It is important to note that The Johannesburg Civic Theatre management assists its Tesson Theatre tenants with reduced rental terms, participation in marketing budgets, and many other activities.

Thus the theatre sees its dual obligation to its shareholder (the City of Johannesburg) as meeting its corporate governance and fiduciary targets through the Nelson Mandela Theatre and achieving an annual 'bottom-line'; and in meeting its community development targets through the studios and facilities of The Actors Centre, The Peoples Theatre, the dance studios, the Tesson Theatre and The Premises Gallery. The Johannesburg Civic Theatre (Pty) Ltd supports all of these important activities with waived (or heavily reduced) rentals.

The theatre now hosts a vigorous range of live entertainment, dance shows from across the globe, new musical productions, travelling and local productions of Broadway and West End hits, ballet and modern dance performances, cabaret, contemporary plays - as well as the annual, irrepressible holiday pantomime. The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's foremost challenge for the future will be to continue being booked and busy in a city that is seeing a rebirth of old theatres and the creation of new ones throughout the greater metropolitan area.



(above) South facing view of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre 2007



(left)
The marble foyer of
The Johannesburg Civic Theatre
2007



(above) The interior of The Nelson Mandela Theatre -
from the stage 2007

THE JOHANNESBURG CIVIC THEATRE FACILITIES

Former South African President Nelson Mandela agreed to the re-naming of the Main Theatre in his honour in August 2001. Nelson Mandela agreed that this theatre would be the only so-named theatre in the world. Having The Johannesburg Civic Theatre's main stage named after Mr Mandela has helped to attract international performers to work in the complex and to perform on a stage named in honour of one of the world's most distinguished statesmen. The Nelson Mandela Theatre seats a maximum capacity of 1,069.

The Nelson Mandela Theatre features staging facilities that are among the most sophisticated in the world. The main stage includes five computer-controlled stage lifts; five stage wagons facilitating the movement of sets/cast across the stage; a stage wagon which provides outer and inner revolves; an adjustable proscenium; and extensive sound and lighting options.

The Tesson Theatre was named after Michal Tesson. He was a French economist, stockbroker and banker who worked for years in South Africa and in Morocco after serving in World War II with Free French military forces. Tesson helped finance ballet productions in South Africa, the U.K. and France and he established a bursary for the training of young dancers. Tesson died on December 9, 1986. The Tesson Theatre has a fixed seating capacity of 251.

The Johannesburg Civic Theatre has seven, five-star hospitality venues, of which three are private dining rooms, available for exclusive hire. The Shakespeare and Verdi Rooms each seat twenty people and the Mozart Room seats ten. Multi-purpose private venues City Lights, The Brickhill, The Jozi Lounge and The PT Barnum Lounge can be used for lunches, dinners, cocktail parties, meetings and seminars.

Parking is secure and is patrolled by uniformed security guards. Parking for disabled persons is available.

PROFILE OF THE CURRENT CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
BERNARD JAY



Bernard Jay was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1946. At the age of sixteen he began a long and comprehensive career in entertainment administration by learning his craft in management positions at such British government-subsidised theatres as York Theatre Royal, Malvern Festival Theatre and London's Hampstead Theatre. During this period, Bernard also received a Bursary from the Arts Council of Great Britain to study theatre administration.

At age twenty-four, he was appointed General Manager of the City of London's famous Mermaid Theatre, where he worked alongside Artistic Director Sir Bernard Miles. During his three-year tenure at the Mermaid, Bernard was responsible for bringing the renowned young actors from the USSR's Theatre for Young Spectators to London.

The success – and importance of the political breakthrough – of the company's season at the Mermaid led to his receiving a second Bursary from the Arts Council; this time to study the practice of children's theatre at the Russian actors' famed home base in Leningrad. After five annual visits, Bernard was honoured to become the first official non-Soviet Member of the Theatre for Young Spectators.

In 1973, Bernard entered the world of commercial theatre production by being appointed General Manager of London's Triumph Theatre Productions. He was responsible for overseeing many stage productions in a period of two years. Notable among these were: The UK première of GREASE, starring Richard Gere and Elaine Paige; and worldwide tours - including a season on Broadway - by Roy Dotrice in his one-man show, BRIEF LIVES.

In 1975, Bernard left Triumph to become Associate Producer of Paul Elliott Entertainments Ltd, based in London, New York, Toronto and Sydney. The company pioneered the concept of global touring theatre with such successful stage productions as: Rock Hudson and Juliet Prowse in the musical I DO! I DO!; Lee Remick in BUS STOP; Sir Michael Redgrave in the anthology SHAKESPEARE'S PEOPLE; Douglas Fairbanks Jr in the comedy THE PLEASURE OF HIS COMPANY; and The Royal Shakespeare Company productions of HEDDA GABLER - starring Glenda Jackson - and SHERLOCK HOLMES.

Bernard immigrated to the United States in 1978 and formed his own personal management and theatre production company. Based in Manhattan for the next eleven years, he produced off-Broadway and engineered the career development of many American performers as diverse as former member of The Supremes, Cindy Birdsong, cabaret diva Nancy LaMott and America's most controversial cult "superstar", Divine.

Following the untimely death in 1988 of Divine, Bernard was commissioned by the publishers Virgin Books to write a personalised biography of the extraordinary star. His book, NOT SIMPLY DIVINE - written over a five-week period in Spain - was published by Virgin in the UK in 1993 and subsequently by Simon and Schuster in the US and in Japan.

In 1993, Computicket founder Percy Tucker invited Bernard to relocate to South Africa to become Entertainment Director of the ticketing company. In 1997, Bernard joined South African music promoter Attie van Wyk's Big Concerts as Deputy Managing Director, where he was responsible for overseeing such successful presentations as Steve Hofmeyr in the musical SUMMER HOLIDAY, Michael Flatley in LORD OF THE DANCE, THE MAGIC OF DAVID COPPERFIELD and OPERAMA'S AIDA at the Loftus Stadium in Pretoria.

Bernard was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre on July 1st 2000. His work as Executive Producer for shows at the theatre since 2000 has included Janice Honeyman pantomimes SLEEPING BEAUTY, JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, CINDERELLA, GOLDBLOCKS & THE THREE BEARS, ALADDIN and PETER PAN and the successful South African premier production of the Tony Award winning musical THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE.

Bernard has recently had his term of contract as CEO of The Johannesburg Civic Theatre extended until June 30th 2012.

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August 2007

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