

{ THEATRE }

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"IN VERY GOOD
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REFLECTIONS ON SURVIVAL: Mncedisi Shabangu and Philip Dikotla in 'Fishers of Hope' Picture: OSCAR O'RYAN

Hope floats

Lara Foot tells **Eugene Yiga** how she pulled a play out of the water in Kenya

BAXTER Theatre CEO Lara Foot's latest play, *Fishers of Hope* (subtitled *Tawaret* after the Egyptian goddess of childbirth and fertility), is based on the lives of fishing communities who live along the lake shores in Kenya.

Foot went to Kenya, with a Masai warrior as her guide, to learn about her subjects' hopes and struggles. Blending biblical metaphor, physical theatre and African music, the play tells the story of a fisherman (played by Philip Tipo Tendisa) who is unable to provide for his family after being attacked by a hippo. The fisherman's forward-thinking wife (Lesedi Job), her brother (Philip Dikotla) and his mute son (Shaun Oelf) have to come up with a survival plan.

Nina Swart and I went to Kenya to research the narrative for *Fishers of Hope*. She is a wonderful documentary-maker and researcher. She is fantastic at getting stories out of people, and so I asked her to assist me with the research and documentation of the journey. Later we used her video visuals as a backdrop in the play.

Masai warrior Miyere Miyandazi was our tour guide in Kenya. My PA met him at Jazzart some years back and asked him to set up an itinerary of interesting places for us to visit on the lake. As soon as I met him, I knew that his voice would resonate in the production. He is a great thinker and philosopher.

We spent two weeks on the lakes of Kenya. It was liberating being outside South Africa, and yet still being attached to our continent. I learnt about and experienced a country 50 years into independence. The desolation of its rural people, the souls of the fishermen and fisherwomen, the colour of the sunset, corruption, hope and hippopotamuses.

I was inspired by the documentary *Darwin's Nightmare*. [Hubert Sauper's 2004 film about the social and environmental effects of the fishing industry around Lake Victoria in Tanzania.] The world created in the film stayed with me for a long time. The subjectivity of the lens was extraordinary in how it told the truth, but at the same time had such a strong opinion. The story and landscape were haunting. It inspired me.

Many of my works have explored social issues. In *Fishers of Hope*, I explore the concept of hope. Where does it come from? Is it something that you are born with? Is it a belief? Or something you might have been taught by your mother or a pastor? I explore a woman's choice to survive and live. And I explore the longing, need and love within a family relationship. Is hope a choice or an instinct? Perhaps we need it to survive. **LS**

● *Fishers of Hope* is on at Cape Town's Baxter Theatre until August 2. Book at Computicket. PG-13

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