

Jonathan Slaff & Associates

Press Representative - 55 Perry Street, #1M - New York, NY 10014
Tel. (212) 924-0496 - js@jsnyc.com - www.jsnyc.com

NEW FEDERAL THEATRE'S VIRTUAL READING OF "WIDOWS" BY MFUNDI VUNDLA, OFFERED FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH, WILL ILLUMINATE STRUGGLES OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN DURING APARTHEID.

NEW YORK, February 22 – As part of "New Federal Theatre Celebrates Black History Month," Woodie King, Jr.'s **New Federal Theatre** (NFT) is offering a live streaming virtual reading of "**Widows**" by **Mfundu Vundla** on **February 27 at 7:00 PM**. The reading will be **available on-demand through March 1**. This drama, originally presented by NFT in 1981, is about the struggle of three African women to overcome oppressive conditions in South Africa.

Directed by **Clinton Turner Davis**, it features three actresses from Southern Africa: **Zoleka Vundla** (South Africa), **Phindi Mkhizwe Wilson** (South Africa) and **Tanya Nomaziko Zondo** (Zimbabwe). Dialogue coach is **Seth Sibanda**. The reading will be free and accessible from NFT's website, <https://www.newfederaltheatre.com> and donations will be gratefully accepted.

The play is a story of three women who are archetypal of South African life: a peasant, a maid who works in a city, and a revolutionary fighter whose role is that of an intelligence officer. It takes place in a cell and a strategic hamlet in south-east South Africa. We watch as the women overcome mistrust and build a relationship which ultimately unites them to work together for the liberation of their country. The play has stylistic elements that are typical of South African protest plays during the apartheid period: actors playing many parts, flashbacks within flashbacks, singing and dancing. The play's rich poetic imagery and its commanding language give it a unique power.

The actresses and their director report that rehearsal has been an emotionally charged process, evoking painful memories of the period of the play. The script contains a line, "sometimes it's like scratching a scab and the wound bleeds again." This succinctly describes an experience the actresses have shared first-hand: painful memories of apartheid being re-awakened, leading to many revelatory stories. Director Clinton Turner Davis, while not South African himself, relates suffering painful memories of South African friends who died in the struggle.

Elizabeth Van Dyke, Artistic Director of New Federal Theatre, writes, "We revisit this painful period in our history to remember and honor those who courageously fought for freedom. We are inspired, emboldened, and enlightened by this moving, meaningful play."

Director Clinton Turner Davis met playwright Mfundu Vundla in New York in the 1970s and directed his early play, "Visitor to the Veldt," at Amistad Theater Company. Vundla, who was living in exile in the USA, subsequently married Karen Johnson, who was then an administrator at the Negro Ensemble Company. Their first child, a son, was born here. When Nelson Mandela was released and apartheid ended, the family returned to South Africa and Vundla achieved worldwide fame as creator and producer of "Generations," the long-running South African soap opera. He also created the iconic youth drama series "Backstage," which has launched the careers of numerous prominent South African young actors, and the popular hospital drama "Jozi-H." His daughter, Zoleka Vundla, appears in this reading.

"Widows" was originally presented in 1981 by New Federal Theatre, which was then in residence at Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand Street, and was directed by Vantile E. Whittfield. It was acted by Victoria Howard, Pamela Poitier and Tina Stattin.

CAST OF THE VIRTUAL READING

Zoleka Vundla, daughter of playwright Mfundi Vundla, is an actor, writer, and producer from Johannesburg, South Africa. She graduated from SUNY Purchase College earning a BFA in Acting. She appeared in New Federal Theatre's Annual Ntozake Shange Readings Series in 2019. Most recently, she has written and starred in her own short film, "Fixed," which she will be submitting to festivals soon.

Phindile Mkhize Wilson is a native of South Africa. She performed with Michael Jackson at Nelson Mandela's 80th birthday and appeared in "Mama" and "Sarafina 2" by Mbongeni Ngema (co-author of "Woza Albert!") in Europe and Australia. She played Rafiki (the mandrill shaman) in the Las Vegas, Madrid and Brazil productions of Disney's "The Lion King" and The Festival of The Lion King in Hong Kong. Most recently, Ms. Wilson worked in developmental workshops of three productions, "Mandela," "The Wildflower" and "Dreaming Zenzile." She has been a nominee for the The Helen Hayes Awards in Washington, DC.

Tanya Nomaziko Zondo was born in Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. She has appeared in plays including "SING! A South African and American Musical," produced by Eric Krebs and "Generations" by Debbie Tucker Green at the Soho Rep. She trained at Amakhosi Theater in Bulawayo, where she appeared in many plays directed by Cont Mhlanga.

Director **Clinton Turner Davis** is a prolific director Off-Broadway and in regional theaters and is a noted interpreter of August Wilson. His last NFT production was "Two Can Play" by Trevor Rhone, whose run was interrupted last March by the Covid-19 shutdown. Davis' Off-Broadway credits include "Harriet's Return," "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," "The Conjure Man Dies" and "Divine Comedy" for New Federal Theatre, "Puppetplay," "Abercrombie Apocalypse," "Two Can Play," "House of Shadows" and "Box X Man" for The Negro Ensemble Company, "One Night" by Charles Fuller at Cherry Lane Theater and "The African Company Presents Richard III" for The Acting Company. He has received the Lloyd Richards directing Award from the National Black Theatre Festival.

For more info on "New Federal Theatre Celebrates Black History Month," visit http://www.jsnyc.com/season/NFT_Black_Hist.htm.

ABOUT NEW FEDERAL THEATRE

New Federal Theatre's Mission is to integrate artists of color and women into the mainstream of American theatre by training artists for the profession, and by presenting plays by writers of color and women to integrated, multicultural audiences - plays which evoke the truth through beautiful and artistic re-creations of ourselves. To-date, the company has produced over 450 mainstage plays, an astonishing and influential record of achievement, sending multiple plays to Broadway and launching numerous playwrights actors, directors, designers into prominent careers. Its alumni are an honor roll of artists of color from the 1970s through today. For more info, including an expanded list of the company's distinguished alumni, see: http://www.jsnyc.com/season/about_NFT.html.

The troupe is now in the beginning of its 51st season. In May, 2020 the Off Broadway Alliance named Woodie King, Jr., Founding Director of New Federal Theatre, a "Legend of Off Broadway," recognizing his sustained achievement in Off Broadway theater.

###

PHOTOS: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/y7mBijfUkToub8aEA>

