

The history of the department can be divided into three phases. The foundation years under the leadership of Mr Jo Gevers (1965–1970), the years when Prof. Ben de Koker was head of the department (1970–1990) and consequently the years after Prof. Nico Luwes took over the reigns (1990– present).

Foundation years (1965–1970)

The Department of Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of the Free State was established in 1965, mainly due to the inexorable personal effort and enthusiasm of Prof. Gerhard Beukes and the late Prof. Robert Wahl. The curriculum was similar to those of existing drama departments at other universities. For this purpose, a Drama and Theatre Arts Committee was established, which consisted of Proff. Beukes, Wahl, CA van Rooyen and Mr Jo Gevers. Mr Gevers, a native Belgian who graduated from the University of Stellenbosch under the leadership of Prof. Fred Engelen, would in his capacity as senior lecturer act as the head of the department.

The first group of lecturing staff members who were involved with the department until the end of 1979, were Ms Annetjie Vorster (an actress involved with Pacofs and part-time lecturer in movement), Ms Ann Horak (English speech and recitation) and Ms Mariechen Naudé (Afrikaans speech and recitation).

Initially the new department only had the current Inter Hall on the first floor of the Main Building's North Block, available to them. This room was later converted into a small practical theatre, which could also be used as a lecturing hall. The annex of the H van der Merwe Scholtz Hall was also used for individual teaching, movement, improvisation and fencing. Later a lecture venue (N5) was added on the ground floor of the North Block for lecturing purposes and for teaching speech chorus and make-up art. Apart from this the department was dependant on isolated music rooms in the area of the President Steyn ladies residence, as well as the small tower room of the Main Building, which was used for drama lecturing and individual teaching.

Initially, the university only presented a three-year diploma course. The course entailed intensive training in all the branches (theoretical and practical) of theatre and performance arts and also included subject methodology. At first, there were eight students. After the first half of the first year of the course, two students discontinued their studies and at the end of 1967, three candidates obtained their diplomas in Drama and Theatre Art.

Mr Jo Gevers envisaged that his students should have the opportunity to perform with established theatre groups. This policy was constantly pursued through the years and many plays in collaboration with groups such as the University Theatre Movement (UTM) the Bloemfontein Theatre Group, the Reps Society and the Shakespeare Circle, were presented.

In June 1965, Mr Gevers directed the UTM and also played the lead role in *Jakkalstreke van Scapino* (Molière). Several drama students, as well as other interested students on campus took part in the play and after a run in the Civic Theatre, under the auspices of the Bloemfontein Theatre Group, the play went on tour to the Northern and Northeastern Free State. In September of that year, Mr Gevers trained the Bloemfontein Theatre Group in *Agt vroue* (Robert Thomas) and drama students actively took part in this play.

From 1966, apart from the diploma course, the department offered a fully-fledged degree course in Drama and Theatre Art. Fencing was also included in the curriculum in 1966 and was compulsory for all students from their second year. Mr Harold Schroder, trainer of the Free State Fencing Club, was appointed as part-time lecturer in this regard. Ms Annetjie Vorster (at that point in time she was already Ms Gevers) was appointed as full-time lecturer. Mr Arthur Hanna was appointed as lecturer in English speech training in lieu of Ms Ann Horak who had left Bloemfontein to get married. Mr Adam van Niekerk acted as technical assistant and was in charge of decor construction. Under his leadership the students were trained in the production of stage props.

In 1966 the department, in collaboration with the UTM, presented Nikolai Gogol's comedy *Die Inspekteur-generaal* in the Civic Theatre. Mr Gevers was the director and also played the lead role. Other roles were played by Ms Gevers and various drama students.

In 1967 Ms Marlene Kotzen was appointed as lecturer in English speech training. For the next twelve years she would be a tower of strength in the department and would focus on Shakespeare productions. She passed away in July 2010 in Johannesburg.

From 1965 the Department of Drama presented their own plays in the theatre in North Block 10. These productions consisted mainly of performance evenings, pantomine productions and mime but also included one-act plays. Up until 1967 the following productions under the direction of Annetjie and Jo Gevers, Mariechen Naudé and Marlene Kotzen were presented: *Riders to the sea* (Synge), *Die vrees* (Gerhard Beukes), *In camera* (Sartre), *Village wooing* (Shaw), *Op hoop van seën* (Heijermans), *Playing with fire* (Strindberg), an Eastern play *The faithful harlot* and a Medieval farce *Drie dae meester*. In 1968, a drama by Hugo Claus 'n *Bruid in die môre* was also presented in this little theatre, under the direction of Jo Gevers. *Liefde bring moleste* was also brought to the stage under the direction of Annetjie Gevers and in collaboration with the UTM.

At the end of 1968, the first degrees in Drama and Theatre Art were awarded. At this stage the department had ten first-year students, no second-year students and six third-year students – thus a total of sixteen – with five staff members. At the end of the same year, Jo and Annetjie Gevers left Bloemfontein to continue their professional activities in Belgium. In later years Jo became a well-known actor, director and theatre director at the Arkel Theatre in Ghent, Belgium.

Five years later and twenty years worth of growth (1970–1990)

Mr Ben de Koker from the Goudstad Education College was appointed as the new head of the department, but seeing that he could only fulfill his duties as of April 1969, Mr Henk Hugo, newly appointed lecturer and well-known TV director, was appointed as acting head of the department in the first term. Under his direction and in collaboration with UTM, *Piet se tante* (Brandon Thomas) was presented and a tour to the Southern Free State and Northern Cape was undertaken.

After accepting the post as head of the department, Mr De Koker (who shortly thereafter became Doctor and promptly Professor De Koker) immediately went into action to obtain the department's own theatre. As a matter of fact, Prof. De Koker was appointed on the terms that he would find an own theatre locally. This battle took fourteen years and the aim was finally reached in 1983 with the opening of the Wynand Mouton Theatre. Meanwhile, the University partially yielded to Prof. De Koker's pleas.

The first Scaena was an assembly building where the Thakaneng bridge is currently situated. A commemorative plaque in front of the Traümerei Restaurant shows the initial position. The first Scaena, which also consisted of five offices and four lecturing venues, was occupied in 1972. The theatre with a stage of eight metres wide and six metres deep, could house approximately 180 theatregoers. Since his arrival, Prof. De Koker actively took part in local amateur theatre activities. In 1969 he acted in Van Druten's *Ek onthou vir Mamma* and *Ou bokke en groen blaartjies* for the Theatre Group. He also directed Bartho Smit's *Don Juan onder die boere* for the same company. Various drama students took part in both productions.

In 1969, two former students were appointed as part-time lecturers. Ms Claudette Ferreira managed movement and Mr Benjamin Janeke lectured fencing. In 1971, Ms Adèle van Blommenstein, also a former student, was involved in the department as lecturer. In later years, well-known personalities such as Ms Annelise van der Rijst would undertake the teaching of movement and Mss Wilna Meyer, Kristie Herbst, Estelle de Waal and the now Academy-acclaimed actress, Ms Antoinette Kellerman would undertake individual teaching on a part-time basis.

In 1970, Mr Henk Hugo in collaboration with the UTM, directed *Piet Patelyn*, a Medieval farce and Ms Marlene Kotzen in collaboration with the Shakespeare Circle presented Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in the Civic Theatre. The leading roles were performed by drama students. During the same year, Drama and Theatre Art were recognised as two separate subjects.

In 1971, Ms Elsa Steenkamp was appointed as lecturer in the department and concentrated on the direction of children's theatre up until 1990, whereafter she continued with her private speech studio. During the same year Prof. De Koker directed *Is jy 'n bokryer?*, as well as an experimental one-act play *Maudie* which was presented at the congress of the SA Speech Guild in Johannesburg.

In 1972, the new (now demolished) building complex was occupied and the small theatre in the Inter Hall (North Block 10) was also stripped to be used as a venue for movement. The Scaena Theatre was officially inaugurated on 8 June 1972 with a performance of Euripides' *Die vroue van Troje* under the direction of Prof. De Koker. In

addition to Ms Elsa Steenkamp, two other lecturers namely Messrs Braam Cilliers and Terry Terblanche also took part. Terblanche later became a professor in Communication at the UFS. Both entered into service at the department at the beginning of 1972.

With the opening of the Scaena Theatre, the Department of Drama and Theatre Art found a temporary-permanent resort where they henceforth, and in line with the department's policy, could present full-length plays that would cater to the general public's taste and in doing so create a firm permanent audience. This was a huge success and it also led to the establishment of the Theatre Club, which currently has more than 1400 members. From 1972 to 1990, a total of 105 full-length plays both in Afrikaans and English were performed. A comprehensive list of plays and their directors is available in the programme of the Quarter-century Celebration of the Department of Drama, which is available in the Sasol Library and at the Department of Drama. In addition various tribute programmes, musicals and childrens' plays were performed.

Staff members varied throughout the years. In 1974 Mr Chris Fourie from the Cape Town Academy of Dramatic Art, was appointed and Mr Anton Welman in 1975. Mr Welman was a former student and Pacofs actor. The late Mr André du Plessis, formerly from the SABC, was involved with the departement from 1977 up until 1979 when he suddenly passed away.

At the end of 1978, Ms Marlene Kotzen left the department and Ms Francesca Bantock was responsible for English speech and recitation for the following two years, after which Ms Ann Ranger took over until 1990. She was also involved with the department in 1965 as Ms Horak. Mr Nico Luwes, also a former student and Pacofs actor was appointed in 1980. During these years Mr Pine Pienaar and later Mr Peter Walter acted as technical staff.

A stalwart in the post of managing technician was Mr Ronnie Christowitz whereafter Mr Francois Venter took over the post of professional officer up until Mr Walter's appointment at the Department of Drama at the University of Pretoria. During 1983 Ms Marjorie Nortjé assisted temporarily with individual speech training. Mr Philip du Plessis, previously from the Wellington Educational College, held the position of senior lecturer from 1984 until the end of 1987. Mr Harry Bristow was appointed as theatre caretaker from 1984 until 1994 when Mr Pieter Venter took over as theatre manager in 1995.

After the sudden death of our cherished secretary, Ms Tokkie Schwartz in 1985, the very efficient Ms Gene Smith held the position of secretary from 1986 until 2003. At the end of 1991 Messrs Christowitz and Chris Fourie together with Ms Ann Ranger retired and Ms Karen van der Vyfer was temporarily appointed until 2003 when she left the department to work in the private sector. In these years Mr James Cairns was appointed as movement lecturer after which e he decided to explore the television industry.

During this period Messrs Cloete Greef and Leendert de Jager consequently served as technical managing officials in the Wynand Mouton Theatre. Ms Hanlie Dalton was appointed as theatre manager for a period of two years thereafter and Ms Emmie van Wyk was appointed as secretary from 2003 to 2008 when she replaced Ms Dalton as theatre manager.

The building of the Wynand Mouton Theatre heralded a new era. After Prof. De Koker's pleas to obtain a new adequate theatre for the department, the first milestone was reached in 1975 when an initial design for an experimental theatre was approved. This theatre would be built near the University's main entrance and would be named after the late Prof. Flippie Groenewoud. However, building plans were once again put on hold and only after the special mediation of the former rector, Prof. Wynand Mouton, a new design for an even bigger and ultra modern theatre was launched. Eventually new premises, at the former botanical gardens of the University, was identified. The sod-turning was in 1980 and in 1983 the theatre was inaugurated with *Hamlet* under the direction of Prof. De Koker.

In 1983 the great ideal of so many co-workers throughout the years was finally realised. The Department of Drama and Theatre Art saw the occupation of their new home, not only as the fruit of all the years of labour, but also out of appreciation as a challenge, to maintain its current standard of performances in the future. The new theatre was initially known as the Scaena Theatre, but was renamed after Prof. Mouton after his retirement. The old Scaena Theatre, which meanwhile was known as the Little Theatre, regained its former name until it was demolished to make way for the Thakaneng complex.

The department participated in the annual ATKV Campus Theatre Project since its inception and various writers, both young and established, who presented new plays successfully became well-known playwrights.

By 1990, the year after Prof. De Koker's retirement, the department gradually developed and extended. In the Department of Drama a study was made (over a period of three years) of dramas and theatre history from the Greek period up until modern times. The different aspects in the department comprised the theory of acting, microphone and television technique, interpretation, practical acting, make-up, movement, improvisation, mime and the technical aspects of the theatre including design, lighting, decor construction and the manufacturing of props.

A staff of six lecturers, including the head of the department took care of the lecturing, practical teaching, directing plays and other general duties. In 1990 the department had excellent training facilities at its disposal, including the most modern and best equipped university theatres in South Africa. Furthermore, the department delivered an interdepartmental service to a total of 70 students from the Department of Occupational Therapy and the Faculties of Theology and Education. Fourteen honours students and two masters students obtained their degrees by 1990, while the number of undergraduate students was between 40 and 50. The quarter-century celebration and reunion of former students on 29 September 1990 was the ideal opportunity for Prof. Ben de Koker to direct *Ou bokke en groen blare* for the last time.

History after Prof. Ben de Koker's retirement (1990 – present)

Prof. Nico Luwes was appointed as head of the department in January 1990 and in 2002 he was promoted to assistant professor and programme director. An unprecedented growth in student numbers occurred. Between 1990 and 2010 undergraduate and honours student numbers increased to 139.

The postgraduate area has seen the most proliferation since 1990, with 26 honours, 14 masters and four doctoral degrees awarded. Meanwhile, 125 undergraduate, 20 honours and eight masters students registered in 2010. One PhD was submitted in 2010, while Prof. Luwes submitted his PhD under the mentorship of Prof. Hennie van Coller from the Department of Afrikaans and Dutch, French and German. By 2009, 553 drama students ranging from undergraduate to masters level have been awarded degrees.

Staff

Various members had retired during the rationalisation process (1990–1991) at the UFS and new academics and technicians have been appointed over the years. Dr Pieter Venter, who previously was the theatre manager, joined the academic staff in 2002 and is currently a senior lecturer. Dr Stef Brink, currently a lecturer, started out as a temporary employee in 1995 until 2003 when she was appointed permanently. Mr Gerben Kamper, a senior lecturer, also started as a temporary employee in 2001 until he was appointed permanently in 2002 after the sudden passing of Mr Anton Welman. Mr DeBeer Cloete was appointed part-time from 2004 to 2009, after which he was appointed permanently in 2010 as junior lecturer. Mr Thys Heydenrych was appointed permanently as junior lecturer in 2010 after working in the department since 2006. Mr Kingdom Moshounyane was appointed as junior lecturer under the Grow Our Own Timber programme (GOOT) in 2005 until he was appointed by the Tshwane University in 2009. Mr Godfrey Manenye whose temporary contract ended in 2007 was appointed under the GOOT programme in 2009, while Ms Karabello Lekalake also joined the staff by means of the GOOT programme in January 2010. Both are currently appointed as junior lecturers.

Ms Jean Cattel (née Herbst) worked in the department as secretary and research assistant from 2005 until 2007. After she left for the United Kingdom, Ms Van Wyk and consequently Ms Marijda Kamper were appointed as secretaries in 2008. In 2005, a former student and lecturer from the University of Namibia, Mr Danie Strydom, lectured at the UFS for a year during his sabbatical, just before he passed away.

During the last few years various international students from Lesotho, America, China and Zimbabwe came here to study on undergraduate and postgraduate level. In 2011 Prof. Charles Dumas from America was appointed as extraordinary professor for three months per year for the following three years to give students international exposure.

After switching to the module system in 2005, staff members such as JP du Plessis, Michelle Luwes, Braam Muller, Anton Smith, Ann Ranger, Hanna von Wiellich, Lulu Botha and Gustav Gerdener were appointed temporarily on module contracts – a tradition that has been accepted annually should the

need arise. In 2005, the tradition of producing short films under the leadership of DeBeer Cloete was introduced and television training gained new momentum.

Artistic boom

During the four years after 1990, the department experienced an artistic boom. Not only since the inception of the ATKV Campus Theatre Competition has the department left its mark with new Afrikaans productions, but it also produced 214 full-length plays, musicals and children's pieces within a time span of 14 years from 1990 to 2004. During the following six years (2004–2009) the department expanded their success with the production of an unbelievable 119 productions being brought to the stage, many of them at National Arts Festivals.

Comprehensive information in this regard and the various workshops that have been presented over the years and courses that staff members have attended is available on the RIMS system of the UFS.

New writing

Several new dramas and comedies have been written by staff members, former and current students. Many of these dramas and comedies have been performed all over the country at Arts Festivals and some have even been performed by professional theatre groups. A few names that stand out are Reza de Wet, Nico Luwes, Chris Fourie, Marietjie Pretorius, Niel van Niekerk, Amore Slabbert, Elsa Krantz, Yolandi van Staden, Karen Gouws, Anton Welman, Pieter Venter, André van Deventer, James Cairns, Petrus du Preez, Welma de Beer, Gerben Kamper, Stef Brink, Cornel van Zyl, Retha Loubser, Michelle Luwes, Kingdom Moshounyane, JP du Plessis, Wendy Kleynhans, Ilne Fourie and Marcelle Pieterse. Over the years many adaptations by Thys Heydenrych, Michelle Luwes, Gerben Kamper, Stephanie Brink, DeBeer Cloete, Nico Luwes and Godfrey Manenye have seen the light.

National and international achievements

With the introduction of the Sanlam award for new Afrikaans theatre, a concept initiated by Prof. Luwes, the department made a clean sweep at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival with awards for best new play, directed production and performance by staff and students.

At the KKNK, the department entered the Sanlam competition with, amongst others *Knorrries en die krisis* (2004), *Aasvoëls* (2005) and *Spokie Snygans maak sy buiging* (2008). Regular prize winners for best new text, best production, best direction and performance were pieces such as *Zollie* (2005), which made a clean sweep. *Lewensreg* (2007) won with best text, production, direction and actor and *Die Begrafnis* (2008) also made a clean sweep with all of the awards. The competition is no longer presented by Sanlam, but new attempts are being made for its revival.

During an international festival in Cairo, students performed in *Road to Mecca* and was invited to London to perform *The woman who cooked her husband*. Hilletjie Möller received a National Council for the Arts award for postgraduate studies in New York. Several undergraduate and honours students annually receive generous National Council for the Arts grants and other bursaries. Through the years

the grants have grown from R40 000, R60 000 to R160 000 and during the financial vicegrip of 2010, stood at R100 000. During the years several postgraduate students have received funding from the National Council for the Arts. Staff members, student writers and directors have also profited from generous grants for new writing and productions.

Staff members perform as actors and directors at national arts festivals. Mr Gerben Kamper, Prof. Luwes and Dr Venter were named as Volksblad Arts Festival artists during the past few years. Mr Kamper was nominated for the Fleur du Cap award and has won several Vita awards and Sanlam prizes for direction at the KKNK. Mr Kemper and Prof Luwes also won the Piers Nicholson award for the best artistic contribution towards theatre in the Free State. Prof. Luwes was nominated as Bloemfontein of the year (2009) and directed two plays in the Chekhov Theatre in Kazakhstan. He also presents writing schools in Amsterdam.

FACTS

With the foundation of the professional group FACTS, that is based in the department, funds to the value of R4.2 million were obtained from the Lotto and several professional theatre productions and musicals were performed. A further six new dramas and three musicals are in the pipeline, to be performed in the next two years. In this way graduated students have the opportunity to make their professional theatre debut alongside other professional staff.

Conclusion

The department is looking forward to the future with anticipation. The close relationship that the department has established over the years with professional theatre and role players in the entertainment industry, will be expanded in future. International relations should be developed further. The appointment of Prof. Dumas is a positive step in that direction. In the near future, several young academics who represent the gender and racial profile of the country will lead the department and future students in a rapidly changing entertainment industry.