



COLIN McCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Theatrefront founder Daryl Cloran, right, directs the cast of *Ubuntu (The Cape Town Project)*, which opens for previews at the Tarragon Theatre on Jan. 21.

# Theatre with frequent flyer points

Theatrefront's company travels to Cape Town to explain that country's evolving racial struggle

**RICHARD OUZOUNIAN**  
THEATRE CRITIC

The wise artist knows how to look beyond the borders of his everyday world to find the answers to problems that may seem impossible to solve at home.

Daryl Cloran is such a man and his company, Theatrefront, is devoted to just that kind of intellectual and emotional outreach.

Over the past few years, their journeys have taken them to far-flung corners of the globe and the result of their latest efforts, *Ubuntu (The Cape Town Project)*, starts previews on Jan. 21 at Tarragon Theatre.

On a late-night break from setting lighting cues, the company's founder and artistic director reflected on the road that had led him and his company to this place.

"In 2001," Cloran recalls, "Theatrefront made the transition from an ad hoc group of like-minded theatre artists to a full-fledged company with a board of directors. I had to put together a mission statement for the company, so I sat down with the ensemble and we talked about Theatrefront's goals. We decided that we were most interested in focusing internationally. Not only presenting our own work interna-

tionally, but working with other theatre artists around the world to create work together. We wanted to learn about other cultures and theatrical practices as well as share our own beliefs and theatre traditions."

Cloran and his company started a list of countries with theatre practices that they felt were inspiring — places where theatre had a powerful political or social voice, or countries with unique styles of theatrical performance.

The first country they travelled to was Bosnia — and together with artists from Sarajevo they created *Return (The Sarajevo Project)*, which premiered to great acclaim in 2006.

After that, the focus shifted to South Africa. Cloran explains why:

"The theatre of South Africa had been such an important voice in the struggle against apartheid. And because the performance style of much South African theatre is incredibly visceral and physical. We felt we would learn a great deal from working with South African theatre artists. And we were right."

Cloran spent a week in South Africa by himself in 2004 laying the groundwork for the show and auditioning South African actors. Then he returned in 2005 with four Canadian members of his company: actors Holly Lewis, Patricia Fagan and Christopher Morris and playwright Adam Pettle.

They worked with four South African actors from the Baxter Thea-

tre Centre in Cape Town.

"It was an incredible experience," Cloran says. "Cape Town is a beautiful city where there is great wealth, but there is also striking poverty. The disparity is quite shocking. The crime level is quite high in the city.

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**DARYL CLORAN**

"On the very first day of rehearsal," he recalls, "one of the South African actors arrived late. He apologized and explained that he had been stabbed the night before. He was in the hospital all night and had come directly from there to rehearsal. There was still blood on his shirt. It was a very clear illustration about how lucky we are in Canada."

It's impossible to discuss South Africa without delving into its ever-evolving racial struggle, but Cloran and his company were up to the task.

"We did a workshop presentation of the project at the Baxter Theatre

in Cape Town," he explains. "One of the characters in the script at that point was a racist. There was quite a strong reaction from the audience, some of who, told us that people like that were an image from South Africa's past — not a true portrayal of the South Africa of today.

"However, just as many audience members approached me after the show to tell me that they felt the racist character was very accurate and striking to them. They felt that while racist practices were 'officially' over in South Africa, that it was still a reality they had to deal with daily."

The show that finally evolved into the project beginning next week at Tarragon tells the story of a young South African man who travels to Canada to find his father, and the buried truths he discovers.

Cloran explains that *Ubuntu* means "A person is a person through other persons" or "I am because we are."

Its final message, hopes Cloran, will be about "our interconnectedness with one another, whether next door or across the ocean."

## Just the facts

**WHAT:** *Ubuntu (The Cape Town Project)*

**WHEN:** Jan. 29 to March 1 (previews from Jan. 21)

**WHERE:** Tarragon Theatre, 30 Bridgman Ave.

**TICKETS:** \$20 to \$32 at 416-531-1827