

How Cape Town's rainbow warriors are carving out their own pot of gold

The Rainbow Academy has given a group of youngsters the chance to taste a colourful new life, writes Frank Gormley

AS ONE of the greatest leaders of all time, Nelson Mandela has left a truly great legacy to his country. It is also one of South Africa's greatest challenges. Leaders are needed across all of society, in politics, business, sport and community life.

A small group of people, from all parts of society, set out on a journey with the aim of doing something special for themselves and others. The achievement would sustain and encourage others, give hope and inspiration, prove that the collective spirit can overcome the greatest challenges and lead the way for others to follow.

Seven months on and the lives of a small group of talented young people has changed forever. They have undergone a major life-enriching experience that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. It has been only a relatively short time, but it has been packed with learning, training, working, studying, singing, dancing, acting, travelling, stage performances and managing life balance with lots of fun, laughter and tears.

The Rainbow Room – a music/arts venue in the CBD that seats about 120 people – had already hosted many top South African performers and had some wonderfully entertaining nights. One of the things that emerged was the lack of opportunity for the many talented existing and upcoming new artists to perform, get experience and make a decent living.

In several nights of after-show chatter accompanied by some South African merlot and cabernet, the concept of the Rainbow Academy and the Cape Town Show were born.

The academy is still very much in its formative stage. It is, in many ways, just like starting in business: you start with a dream, an idea, a concept and you flesh it out as you move along. It will, in time, be a platform for leaders in its field. With any business you need a plan – one month, one year and, ideally, a medium to long-term version with goals for three to five years.

One of the first problems you will face is funding. Being entrepreneurial and creative is a wonderful thing, but if you cannot back it up with cash it is like trekking through a swamp.

It is a major problem in emerging economies, as risk capital is hard to come by, expensive, and the failure rate is high. With a good idea and business plan you can go to a bank, and maybe private equity funders or, if you are lucky, you might have some cash put aside or borrowed that you are willing to risk.

For an academy the problem is even greater because it has no obvious source of income and is therefore hugely difficult to sustain. You have to turn to the begging bowl. They say necessity is the mother of



FUTURE STARS: Performers in the Cape Town Show practise their moves on St George's Mall. They are members of the Rainbow Academy, an idea born of the desire to give young performers a chance to develop their talents.

PICTURE: JEFFREY ABRAHAMSON

invention and this dire need brought to the fore the concept of a successful performing show that would both showcase the emerging talent and give a much-needed revenue stream.

And so it was that three "dreamers" – Denay Willie, Alison McCutcheon and I – set about forming an academy and writing and performing a brand-new show.

To say it has been a struggle and a challenge would be a huge understatement, because these tasks are massive undertakings. Each of them carries the most wonderful sense of achievement as each little milestone is reached, as teamwork is built, as people's lives change for the better, as bright, articulate young people become leaders.

The first auditions took place at the Rainbow Room on May 15. There was great excitement with hundreds of excited, hopeful, talented youngsters arriving to perform and present their talents and ambitions.

The criteria were set around musical talent, personality, energy, leadership potential and commitment to stick with the challenges of the journey. Passion, commitment, honesty, focus, and determination had to accompany the musical talent – a lot to ask.

Choices were made, tough decisions taken and on May 17, Angus, Sinethemba, Nonke, Vuyo, Justin, Thabo, Nakeshia, Walied, Amy and Roxy started their journey as the first student intake of the Rainbow Academy – the class of 2010.

As Denay worked feverishly on writing a new musical, she and Alison gathered a team of volunteers and part-timers to create an infrastructure for training in various disciplines and experiences.

The sheer extent of the task soon became obvious. On the academy side, transport, skilled teachers, mentors, the massive time commitment required for all parties, gave

rise to problem after problem.

The students had to make great sacrifices to commit to long days and demanding schedules with a steep learning curve across a range of skills. There is a god – because each time a crisis arose, some angel appeared to fix the breach.

Over many months the group has become a tightly knit, resourceful, committed and a caring team. They wrote and adopted their own charter which fits neatly in an acronym "empowerment" and it is a true reflection of that reality.

This group has faced many challenges – work, personal, logistical and interpersonal – but with Denay as their chief mentor and "mama", and many other committed mentors, they have grown, coping with demanding life experiences.

They are now accomplished waiters, excellent communicators, great ambassadors and leaders for their communities and country.

They are also kind, dedicated and committed to their mentors, each other and the academy.

As well as working with the academy, Denay Willie continued to write the new show *My Africa* – with a Cape Town-based story line.

Months of research were followed by months of writing scores, dedicating parts, cutting, refining, teaching, rehearsing hour after hour, day after day, week after week. All were new and challenging, requiring massive commitment for what seemed like very little reward.

Through it all, the team grew stronger. In the heat of battle the team has faced many demons, many crises, much hardship but the basic bonds and values of trust, honesty, love, friendship, compassion and the will to succeed ultimately triumphed.

There are still many hurdles to overcome with funding a key issue but the ethos and the values have

been established and they truly reflect the spirit of ubuntu.

Finally, in early November, the Cape Town Show opened in the Rainbow Room at the beautiful Mandela Rhodes Place. I have no doubt Madiba would endorse and be very proud of what this amazing group of young students and their mentors and fellow artists have achieved.

Just like their lives and their journey the show is full of magical moments that will make you cry, laugh, feel good and guilty, sing and dance, but in the end feel proud at the outcome. In a very moving way it uses song, music and performance to record the colourful amazingly rich cultural diversity that makes up this great nation.

After only eight performances the show gets slicker and better, the artists grow in confidence and performance levels, the feedback from a range of African and international audiences has been outstanding –

Mission statement

Equality: Treat everyone equally and with respect – there is no place for arrogance.
Motivation: Stay fit physically and emotionally, mentally focused on our vision, our goals individually, and as a unit.
Patience: Be patient with each other, continually supporting each other's decisions and goals, even if not fully understood.
Openness: Always be open and honest with each other rather than gossip. Never forget to laugh, enjoy, socialise.
Work ethos: Work together, work smart, as a unit, undivided and focused towards reaching our goals.
Engage: Engage with true commitment to each other and the Cape Town Show.
Respect: Respect each other regardless of circumstances, race, language and background. Show kindness to all who cross our path.
Maintain: Maintain the spirit of ubuntu at all times, to give, care, share, receive and return – among ourselves and with others.
Energise: Approach each obstacle with positivity and energy, always giving our best.
Nurture: Nurture each other's creativity, never discouraging freedom of thought, speech and movement.
Take time: Be punctual at all times, respect and adhere to our schedules, plans and programmes.

LEADSA

A call for robust citizenship - join the dialogue on the Cape Argus SMS line at 32027 (each SMS costs R1) or on the LeadSA website at www.leadsa.co.za

THE DAY of Reconciliation brought its usual crop of sour mutterings by newspaper columnists and politicians, complaining that, after so many years of freedom, South Africans have still not become reconciled across the racial divides.

Whites tend to hang out with other whites and people of colour stick with their own groups.

This may be true, but I am an optimist and I am amazed by the changes I see around me.

At a steakhouse at lunchtime last week, I noticed many family groups that included children of all colours – and their parents. The children laughed and squabbled with each other as children do everywhere.

This simply didn't happen 15 years ago.

I watch children coming out of their school gates at the end of a day – children of every hue, walking together, playing together, arguing together, and often setting off to spend the afternoon together at one or other of their homes.

This all leads to parents of different backgrounds meeting at school functions and becoming house friends.

This is where real change is happening. No politicians can simply give the order "integrate!" and expect everybody to rush out and hug a stranger. Human nature isn't like that.

I can greet my black neighbour in a friendly way across the garden fence, but that doesn't put me on dining-together terms.

This is not racism. I have had white neighbours for more than 20 years. We treat each other with civil-



DAVID BIGGS

Tavern of the Seas

ity and always give a friendly greeting when we see each other.

But I have never been into their home and neither have they been into mine.

Things are probably very different for the next generation.

Their children make friends with children of all races at school. Naturally they play together after school and their parents come to collect them after playtime. They're invited in for a cup of coffee. They chat. They find they have common interests.

They discuss their children's progress and problems at school.

Pretty soon they become friends. This is the normal way people find each other.

It is happening all around us, even if the politicians prefer not to see it.

I believe we can confidently look forward to a properly reconciled future, even if it seems to be happening slowly. Trees that grow slowly

are always stronger than those that shoot up overnight.

Our rainbow can be a strong one. We just have to persuade the politicians to keep their evil little noses out of it.

Last Laugh

At the wedding, the master of ceremonies suggested that happily married couples at the reception may be able to offer the bridal couple some good advice.

He asked the guests who had been married longest. It turned out to be the bride's parents.

The master of ceremonies then called the bride's mother to the microphone and asked her: "What advice would you give to the newly married couple?"

After a moment of thought, the mother of the bride said: "The three most important words in a marriage are, 'You're probably right.'"

There were cheers from the guests and the MC handed the microphone to the bride's father.

"Sir," he said, "what can you add to your wife's advice to your daughter?"

Without hesitation, he replied: "She's probably right."

The Wanderer

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Stats vs guts as cricket's greats clash over eras

IN A RIVETING Test match littered with historic and record-breaking landmarks, one feat towered above all else – Sachin Tendulkar's 50th Test century.

When the Little Master pierced the offside field to seal his century at SuperSport Park yesterday, he lifted his eyes heavenward in a gesture of thanksgiving. It was a moment of pure theatre. The achievement. The occasion. The hero.

All around him, on the pitch, on the grass banks, the stadium seats, the VIP suites and the players' lounges the applause rang out long and hard. It was not hard to imagine the sheer pandemonium in India at that precise moment.

And rightly so, for when one looks at the record books, the name of SR Tendulkar (India) shines brightest. Fifty Test centuries and counting. The next best are Ricky Ponting of Australia with 39 and South Africa's Jacques Kallis with 38.

In terms of runs scored in Test matches, Tendulkar (14 509) also leads the way ahead of Ponting (12 333) and Rahul Dravid (12 000).

In terms of sheer weight of Test runs and centuries, Tendulkar occupies a different universe.

It is a testament to his genius and longevity in the game, the single-minded focus and determination to be the best.

But here comes the rub. For all



LINDIZ VAN ZILLE

The Clubhouse

his cricketing genius and statistical superiority which place him at the top or with the very best of all time, I do harbour some reservations – not so much about his unquestioned greatness, but more about how to truly measure true greatness.

Should statistics be the sole arbiter? Tendulkar has played in a world record 175 Test matches, in itself a remarkable achievement.

But greats of years gone by played in far fewer due to the lengthy periods between major cricketing tours – Sir Vivian Richards (24 centuries in 121 matches), Sir Garfield Sobers (26 centuries in 93 Tests) and Wally Hammond (22 hundreds in 85 Test matches) are examples of leading Test batsmen with significantly fewer matches behind their name.

One could use fairly simple

mathematical formulae to project how many centuries the aforementioned players would have garnered during the course of 175 Test matches and see whether they might have achieved the same level as Tendulkar.

But what about the unquantifiables?

Modern-day batsmen play with all manner of body protection (even Tendulkar), from helmets, to reinforced gloves, thigh pads, chest protectors and arm guards.

Up until the 1970s, pads, gloves, thigh pads and gloves were it in terms of protection for batsmen. And how do you measure the greatness of someone like Viv Richards who scorned the use of a helmet, hooking and pulling the fastest bowlers of the day with contempt and ease.

Speaking of fast bowlers, Tendulkar, Kallis and Ponting of the modern-day greats still playing, were spared the brutal onslaught of the great West Indian and Australian teams of the 1970s and 80s.

Can you imagine facing the likes of Michael Holding, Malcolm Marshall, Joel Garner; the menacing Andy Roberts, Jeff Thomson and Dennis Lillee for hour after hour on under-prepared wickets? Hardly any mention of spinners or military medium pacers for a brief respite. Just relentless, hostile fast bowling of the highest calibre.

Of the three mentioned above,

only Ponting hooks and pulls with any authority.

When Kallis was grinding the fading West Indian side into the dust a couple of seasons back, scoring century after century, Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh were two proud but ageing warriors, desperately trying to keep the flickering flame of West Indian fast bowling alive.

Look around the world today and the majority of pitches are flat-tracks, devoid of life and bounce. Not so in the heyday of the West Indies when pitches were a battle field where survival was uppermost in the minds of most batsmen and only the greatest prospered.

Then there are likes of Bangladesh, New Zealand and for many years Sri Lanka. Cannon fodder for top teams and players. Tendulkar has three Test centuries against each Bangladesh and Zimbabwe while Kallis has milked Zimbabwe for three hundreds and Bangladesh for one.

Statistics are one of the attractions of sport – able to bring about comparisons, evoke and settle debates and give rise to "greatest ever" arguments.

For sheer accumulator of runs, Tendulkar is without peer. His greatness is recorded in the record books and will in all likelihood not be surpassed.

While statistics do not lie, they do not tell the whole tale either.