

Stellenbosch bid for Unesco City of Literature status

Darryl David

Opinion

2021-07-29



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Darryl David (photo: provided)

- *Darryl David heads Stellenbosch's bid for Unesco City of Literature and writes about his vision below.*

I have dreamt of this day for over a decade.

Despite the numerous obstacles we faced putting this bid together, the planets seem to have aligned and in little over three months time we will know whether our bid to Unesco has been successful. All thanks to the Democratic Alliance (DA) who created an enabling environment for us and to Mayor Gesie van Deventer who endorsed this bid.

This is a very important point, because the first criterion one has to meet for such a bid is getting the designate city, in the person of the mayor, to endorse the bid. And then all thanks to the committee for opening doors that would otherwise have remained closed to “a boytjie from KZN”, as I call myself.

For the benefit of international readers: Stellenbosch is a city in the Western Cape province of South Africa, a mere 50 km from Cape Town, along the banks of the Eersterivier (literally First River) at the foot of the Stellenbosch Mountains. Stellenbosch is the largest settlement of the Stellenbosch Municipality. The greater city of Stellenbosch includes the smaller settlements of Pniel and Franschhoek (French Corner). According to the last census figures of 2011, the city of Stellenbosch has a population of 155 728. According to the same census the language demographics of the region were as follows: Afrikaans 67,7%; Xhosa 20,8%; English 7,2%. The town was named Stellenbosch in 1679 after the then governor, Simon van der Stel, making it the second oldest city in South Africa, after Cape Town. In its early days it was known primarily by the name Eikestad (City of Oaks) because of the vast number of oak trees planted by the Dutch settlers. When the French Huguenots arrived with their knowledge of viticulture, the first vines in South Africa were planted in the Stellenbosch area, establishing it as the wine capital of South Africa.

Stellenbosch oozes culture. This year the Stellenbosch Wine Route, for instance, celebrates its 50th anniversary of being the first wine route in South Africa. Franschhoek, the “French Quarter” of Greater Stellenbosch, has the reputation of being the gastronomy capital of South Africa and the capital of fizz, a reference to their leading role in the production of sparkling wine. Moreover, drive through the streets of Stellenbosch and you will find streets lined with posters advertising music festivals virtually every weekend of the year. The Stellenbosch University Choir, for instance, is the number one choir in the world! Strolling through the beautiful streets of Stellenbosch one is struck by the exquisite sculptures that enhance the old town centre. Many of the top vineyards boast some of the most exquisite sculptures in South Africa.

So why Stellenbosch as a Unesco City of Literature with a strong (but not exclusive) focus on Afrikaans literature? Below are the top 10 reasons to convince Unesco that Stellenbosch is worthy of the accolade City of Literature:

1. The Toyota US Woordfees (Word Festival) and its WOW (Words Open Worlds) project, the largest Afrikaans arts festival in the country, with Toyota and the University of Stellenbosch as sponsors. Their WOW festival for schools is, in a word, WOW!
2. Franschhoek, which hosts the largest English book festival in South Africa. Up until Covid, this festival was sponsored by *Sunday Times*, the largest newspaper in the country and headline sponsor of the two biggest literary prizes in English literature in South Africa, namely the Alan Paton Prize for non-fiction and the *Sunday Times* Literary Award for fiction.
3. LitNet, a multilingual South African journal for opinion, cultural and political debate, books and writing, lifestyle and accredited academic research, educational matters and new writing, based in Stellenbosch. Apart from Afrikaans, LitNet also publishes material in Nama, Kaaps, Dutch, English, Setswana and Xhosa. LitNet’s founder and editor in chief is Etienne van Heerden, the leading Afrikaans novelist of his generation. LitNet was founded towards the end of the previous century during the start-up era of the internet in South Africa, and has subsequently grown to a multimedia platform, including video news interviews, podcasts and blogs on contemporary political and cultural

issues, accredited academic research, social media such as YouTube, Instagram and Facebook, and a community radio slot on Radio 786 in Athlone, Cape Town. Most recently, in June 2021, LitNet had 299 709 unique users who downloaded 769 061 pages during the month. LitNet's tagline is "the house with many dwellings". It has a component for Afrikaans and other subjects at schools, featuring, for example, past exam papers with memoranda, lesson content, and competitions in creative writing. They partner with virtually every single Afrikaans arts/book festival in the country, such as Woordfees, Suidoosterfees and Aardklop. *LitNet Akademies*, an academic online journal for higher education research, is integrated with the LitNet platform. In 2020 they published 91 accredited research articles. Recently LitNet launched www.voertaal.nu to deepen postcolonial ties and conversation between South Africa, the Low Countries and other former Dutch colonies, for example Suriname. They built on these ties by expanding LitNet Akademies now to include conversations with academics in the Low Countries. LitNet is involved in writing workshops and retreats, like the Kommadagga writing workshop in Somerset East in the Karoo, in collaboration with the Jakes Gerwel Foundation. LitNet is truly a welcoming home for South African debate, books and new writing. They work together with organisations like the ATKV, PEN Afrikaans, Afrikaanse Taalmuseum en -monument, Stigting vir die Bemagtiging van Afrikaans.

4. Stellenbosch is the city with the largest concentration of Afrikaans writers in the world. It is home to such world famous writers as Deon Meyer, Athol Fugard, Marlene van Niekerk, Etienne van Heerden and Ingrid Winterbach, to name but a few of the writers who have made their mark internationally.
5. The Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT) project of the University of Stellenbosch. WAT has succeeded in making the much maligned dictionary sexy. They attempt to educate people on the value of words, the role that words play in their lives. Their Borg 'n Woord project (Sponsor a Word project) is unparalleled in South Africa. In this project they ask members of the public to sponsor a word or idiomatic expression for R100. In exchange people get a certificate with their name and the sponsored word/idiom on it. And Afrikaans through all its varieties is one of the most creative, innovative languages in South Africa. Over the last 12 years WAT have managed to raise an average of R350 000 per annum in this way. Let that sink in! This allows them to fund the wonderful work that they do and ensure the growth of the Afrikaans language.
6. Stellenbosch will become home to the soon to be launched South African Festival of Children's Literature, hosted by the neighbouring University of the Western Cape. This will be the first festival of its kind to focus solely on literature for children and adolescents. Coupled with the Woordfees's WOW programme and the Franschhoek Literary Festival's Schools programme, this will make Stellenbosch's commitment to children's literature unmatched in South Africa.
7. In the suburb of Kayamandi (Nice home), literature in Xhosa, the second most spoken language of the city, is flourishing. The Lokxion Foundation does tireless work in promoting Xhosa literature in Kayamandi, with one of its flagship projects being the Africa Day Poetry Festival. And then there is Amazink, the very first township theatre-restaurant.
8. The nearby hamlet of Pniel is home to the Adam Small Festival. Adam Small remains not only the greatest so-called coloured writer in South Africa to emerge from the margins of Afrikaans literature during the height of apartheid, but also one of the greatest Afrikaans writers ever, full stop! The trauma of slavery pulses through the veins of Pniel's residents, and festivals like the Adam Small Festival play a central role in the destigmatisation of Afrikaans.
9. Which other city has a dedicated magazine? Yes, *Visio* is unique in South Africa. Not only do they promote Stellenbosch, but in every edition they promote Afrikaans poetry with a page dedicated to an Afrikaans poem.
10. The ATKV has an office in Stellenbosch. This organisation goes to great lengths to promote Afrikaans literature and build bridges for Afrikaans in South Africa. The ATKV funded the UKZN Kinderboekfees for five years in that most English of provinces sometimes popularly referred to as

“the last outpost of the British Empire”. They even helped fund the Soweto Literary Festival, the first book festival in an African township. They will no doubt be key partners in this bid.

But it is within a 15 km radius of Stellenbosch that a compelling case can be made for an Afrikaans Unesco City of Literature. The Afrikaans Taalmuseum en -monument is situated in neighbouring Paarl. The University of the Western Cape hosts the Madibaland World Literary Festival, the largest online literary festival in South Africa, there, as well as the South African Festival of Children’s Literature. The Breytenbach Centre in Wellington hosts one of the most joyous poetry festivals in the country, Tuin van die Digtters. PEN Afrikaans does invaluable work by taking Afrikaans literature to the rest of the world through their Translation Project. Media24 with their head office in Cape Town are generous patrons of not only Afrikaans literature, but all the languages of South Africa. One has only to think of their kykNET *Rapport* Prize or their Media24 literary prizes. Or the Hertzog Prize. Or the Jan Rabie Marjorie Wallace Prize administered by University of the Western Cape’s Afrikaans Department. And the wonderful legacy that another famous son of the University of the Western Cape and South Africa, the late Jakes Gerwel, has bequeathed to Afrikaans writers through his writers’ residency offered to writers at his former home in Somerset East.

Make no mistake, this is a compelling bid. And well deserved should we succeed. A literature that has produced names like André P Brink, Adam Small, NP Van Wyk Louw, Diana Ferrus, Elisabeth Eybers, Etienne van Heerden, Ronelda Kamfer, Dalene Mathee, Etienne Leroux, Dirk Opperman, Antjie Krog, Deon Meyer, Ingrid Winterbach, Dana Snyman, Marlene van Niekerk, Athol Fugard, Braam de Vries, Clinton du Plessis, Eben Venter, Elsa Joubert and Breyten Breytenbach, to name just a sprinkling ... such a literature deserves a dwelling in the house of world literature.

Also read:

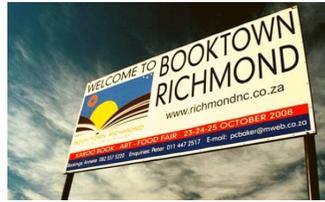
Pniël Adam Small Fees 2019: Darryl David gesels met Naomi Meyer



“Die proses om die Adam Small-fees in die lewe te roep het my genees. Ek sê altyd vir mense: As jy Pniël toe gaan, voel jy die liefde. Sommige gemeenskappe is net so.” Die Pniël Adam Small Fees vind vanaf 22 tot 24 Februarie plaas. Naomi Meyer het

die feesorganiseerder, Darryl David, uitgevra.

BookBedonnerd XII: 'n onderhoud met Darryl David

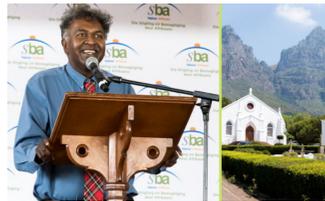


"Hierdie fees, Naomi, het 'hart' – dis sonder fieterjasies. Dis 'n fees waar skrywers hulle eie boeke smous. En dis 'n fees waar 'n mens unieke boeke sal ontdek."



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Adam Small-fees 2020: 'n onderhoud met Darryl David



"Lank nadat ons dood is, gaan Adam Small in Pniël en die Afrikaanse letterkunde bly lewe."



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South African Festival of Children's Literature: an interview with Darryl David



"With this festival, I wanted to honour the *unloved* writers. For writers of children's literature are, in a sense, the *unloved* ones. They never get the credit they deserve."



LitNet

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The Madibaland World Literary Festival: an interview with Darryl David



"We may be divided by oceans. We may be divided by time zones, and circumstances, and more. But we are linked by stories, by our desire to dialogue – and I think this festival will be the perfect chance to celebrate that."



LitNet

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Hermanus, UNESCO City of Gastronomy? An interview with Darryl David



Darryl David talks to Naomi Meyer about the leading of a very special bid.



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Kommentaar



Hans Richardt

2021-07-29 at 20:48

Wat maak Stellenbosch eienaar van Afrikaans? Dis vermetel.

Reply



Hans Richardt

2021-08-01 at 09:10

The fact that there are writers who do use Afrikaans in Stellenbosch, sometimes, doesn't qualify Stellenbosch as the primary town of origin of Afrikaans. Doesn't Orania qualify as an exclusive Afrikaans based town, more than Stellenbosch? To big an emphasis was wrongly given to Paarl, as the "town" where Afrikaans was developed, because of the British colonial history of the Cape province until 1922. The old ZAR and Orange Free state were primary areas where Dutch-Afrikaans were spoken as primary mothertongue.

Reply



Hans Richardt

2021-08-01 at 09:11

Burgersdorp has the first Dutch/Afrikaans language monument in SA.

Reply

Reageer

Jou e-posadres sal nie gepubliseer word nie. Kommentaar is onderhewig aan moderering.

Reageer

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Jou e-posadres*

Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

PLAAS

Stel my in kennis indien nuwe kommentaar bygevoeg word.