

New South African Shakespeare film to preview at Woordfees 2023

Shakespeare meets the contemporary world in South Africa's many languages

Cape Town, 4 October 2023

Two preview screenings in Stellenbosch during Woordfees 2023 will offer audiences a first look at a groundbreaking new feature-length film currently being shot in the Western Cape. *Speak Me A Speech*, the new film from Cape Town's CineSouth Studios, produced in association with Wits University's Tsikinya-Chaka Centre, is still in production, with shooting scheduled to continue to end 2024. The 42-minute preview created by *Speak Me A Speech* director Victor van Aswegen for Woordfees from material filmed for the project to date gives a foretaste of the film that will be released only in 2025.

The festival screenings are a rare opportunity for the public to get an early look into a forthcoming feature-length work still in production and meet the people behind the project. The Woordfees preview screenings, sponsored by EasyEquities, start at 2pm on Tuesday 10 and Friday 13 October in the Neelsie Cinema on the Stellenbosch campus, and are followed by Q&A with the director and producers Chris Thurman and Victor van Aswegen.

"With this project," says CineSouth Studios founder and *Speak Me A Speech* director Victor van Aswegen, "we are bringing to life an astonishing 28 Shakespeare characters in 10 South African languages through 35 iconic monologues. But more than that: we are also presenting these characters reimagined as inhabitants of the modern-day world, speaking to us in a natural, colloquial, conversational style as contemporaries. And what they're articulating are timeless human concerns – as pertinent to our lives as these were to the lives of the people in Shakespeare's audiences over four hundred years ago. Transplanted to new and strikingly different contexts, these performances highlight multiple fresh nuances and variations on the familiar. But underlying all variety of history, culture, language and place, what shines through is a sense of hard unvarying human fundamentals being laid bare – movingly, pitch-perfectly, enlighteningly. So the project deliberately transcends the colonial past with which Shakespeare has often been burdened, and speaks across cultural and linguistic boundaries to our common humanity."

The preview film screened at Woordfees features outstanding performances by celebrated actors Anelisa Phewa, Royston Stoffels, Chantal Stanfield and Buhle Ngaba, bringing to life in isiZulu, Afrikaans and Setswana four unforgettable Shakespeare characters: Thomas More, Sir John Falstaff, Mistress Page and Portia from the plays *Sir Thomas More*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry IV Part II* and *Julius Caesar* – the first time these characters, created by Shakespeare over four centuries ago, have been realised and presented on film in these languages. While the performance in Setswana draws from the near-century-old classic translation by Sol Plaatje dating from the 1930s, the other translations were created for the film – the isiZulu by actor Anelisa Phewa and the Afrikaans by director Victor van Aswegen – and have never before been presented to the public in a cinema screening.

The five monologues in the preview film – Falstaff as a giant among Shakespeare characters gets two – were carefully selected for the satisfyingly wide range of topics, situations and emotions they cover. Old-age mischief-making for love and money, indignation at the receipt of an unwanted advance, and eloquent words on the manifold merits of sherry give us Shakespeare in light-hearted mode – in Afrikaans. A shift of tone takes us into the life and mind of a Setswana-speaking woman trapped in an unhappy marriage, and finally to an impassioned speech delivered by a Zulu leader to a violent, xenophobic mob.

As in the full-length film, the monologues in South African languages are punctuated by reflection in English on some of the material – in this case an extended sequence in which Anelisa Phewa shares with magisterial eloquence some of the thinking underpinning his work on the translation and performance of the powerful speech against xenophobia by Thomas More, effectively taking the audience behind the scenes, while also highlighting the timelessness of Shakespeare’s themes, thoughts and words.

“The project draws on and showcases the extraordinary talents of the actors and translators working in South Africa today,” says Prof Chris Thurman, founding director of the Tsikinya-Chaka Centre and producer alongside van Aswegen of *Speak Me A Speech*. “What a privilege to be able to work with creative, gifted individuals of this calibre – and such a pleasure for us to play a role in exposing their work to an even wider audience. These actors bring a depth of experience to this project from their work on stage, screen and television over decades, and are well known to local audiences. What their participation in *Speak Me A Speech* offers them is a rare opportunity to perform great monologues by iconic Shakespeare characters in their own languages – and to have their performances captured in a film studio setting, and presented to local and global audiences at cinema-level quality.”

All monologues filmed for the project are made publicly available on the web platform www.speak-me-a-speech.com, with user-selectable subtitle options (Shakespeare, the South African language being spoken, and the translation into contemporary English of the spoken language), and texts.

The Wordfees screenings are made possible by the generous sponsorship of EasyEquities.

Screenings of *Speak Me A Speech: Preview*:

Tuesday 10 October 2023 2pm

Friday 13 October 2023 2pm

Neelsie Cinema, Stellenbosch

42 minutes, followed by Q&A with director and producers

Sponsored by EasyEquities: www.easyequities.co.za

Admission free • Limited seating • Arrive early

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High-resolution images available for download on:

<https://www.cinesouthstudios.com/press-room/>

About the Speak Me A Speech project:

<https://speak-me-a-speech.com>

About the film *Speak Me A Speech*:

<https://speak-me-a-speech.com/speak-me-a-speech-film/>

About CineSouth Studios:

<https://www.cinesouthstudios.com/>

About the Tsikinya-Chaka Centre:

<https://www.tsikinya-chaka.org/>

About Victor van Aswegen:

<https://speak-me-a-speech.com/victor-van-aswegen>

About Prof Chris Thurman:

<https://speak-me-a-speech.com/prof-chris-thurman/>

About Anelisa Phewa:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anelisa_Phewa

About Royston Stoffels:

https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Royston_Stoffels

About Chantal Stanfield:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chantal_Stanford

About Buhle Ngaba:

<https://buhlengaba.com/>

About EasyEquities:

<https://www.easyequities.co.za/>