

Gogo and Big Sister



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Salem College's
Shirley
Recital Hall

Tues, Aug. 4	8 p.m.
Wed, Aug. 5	3 p.m.
Wed, Aug. 5	8 p.m.
Thurs, Aug. 6	8 p.m.

\$41

*Hlengiwe Lushaba
Madlala, Thembi
Mtshali-Jones and
Lillian Tshabalala of
"Gogo and Big Sister."*

"Gogo and Big Sister" is billed as a "captivating, humorous and emotional journey, where the fine art of storytelling and musical interludes cut across all generations."

Originally created by Thembi Mtshali-Jones and presented by her Cape Town, South Africa-based Spirit Sister Productions, the musical drama explores the early days of African jazz, when female legends like Miriam Makeba, the Dark City Sisters, the Mahotella Queens, Dolly Rathebe and Margaret Mcingana ruled. The setting is backstage at a concert given by Gogo, played by Mtshali-Jones, who is returning from performing abroad to make her South African debut. With her backstage are her opening act, Big Sister (Hlengiwe Lushaba Madlala), and Little Sister (Lillian Tshabalala), who is a rising singing sensation. Gogo takes them and the audience back in the day, as she recalls her storied career and the struggles faced by musicians who paved the way and contributed to South Africa's musical liberation. The walk down memory lane and the songs the women perform have been praised for making audiences cry, laugh and sing along.

"Gogo" is one of two international productions being staged at this year's festival. (The other is Brazil's "Body of a Woman as Battlefield.")

Mtshali-Jones is a NBTF vet, having starred in the gripping drama "Mother to Mother" in 2013. In 2004, she wrote and first starred in "Gogo and Big Sister" as a BBC Radio 4 drama. It was then chosen as the Play of the Week by the BBC World Service and broadcast globally to an estimated audience of 45 million.

Mtshali-Jones was born to perform. She started singing as a child in KwaMashu Township in Durban. Today, she is recognized as one of South Africa's most celebrated artists. As a singer, she has performed with artists like Dizzy Gillespie, Makeba, Hugh Masekela and Abdullah Ibrahim and has recorded several albums, including solo records and ones as the lead vocalist for The Spho Gumede Band and the African Jazz Pioneers.

Mtshali-Jones has been an artist-in-residence at two U.S. colleges – Gallaudette University in Washington, D.C. and the University of Louisville in Kentucky. In 2009, she was given a Living Legend Award by the City of Durban and the premier of KwaZulu Natal province.

Madlala, a legendary performer in her own right, is known for creating "It's Not Over Until the Fat Phat Lady Sings," which she performed in Africa, France and Switzerland. In 2009, Tshabalala co-wrote and performed the production "Tick Tock" at the Sibikwa Arts Festival, where she picked up Best Actress and Best Writer awards.

"Gogo" was staged last year at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, with award-winner Princess Zinzi Mhlongo in the director's chair. Ezbie Moilwa served as the musical director. ■