



INSTITCHES



In a country with 11 national languages, not all are equal. South African comedians are fighting back by standing up for their mother tongues—and healing the wounds of apartheid in the process.

LETTER  27
P R O D U C T I O N S

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FILMINFO

FILM TITLE
IN STITCHES

PRODUCTION COMPANY
Letter27 Productions

LOGLINE
In a country with 11 national languages, not all are equal. South African comedians are fighting back by standing up for their mother tongues—and healing the wounds of apartheid in the process.

RUNTIME
52 minutes

EXHIBITION FORMAT
H.264, DCP, DVD

ASPECT RATIO
16:9

LANGUAGES
English, Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi.
Hardcoded subtitles in English.

YEAR OF PRODUCTION
2018

FILMING LOCATIONS
Johannesburg, South Africa
Cape Town, South Africa

TRAILER
<https://vimeo.com/268999143>



SYNOPSIS

IN STITCHES follows three trailblazing South African comedians who are bringing their mother tongues to the stage. More than two decades after the fall of apartheid, 11 official languages thrive in South Africa. Despite this, English continues to dominate the comedy scene. Sixty percent of the population cannot understand a word.

Vernacular comedians Noko Moswete, Luphelo Kodwa, and Zicco Sithole are flipping the script. Addressing the long-ignored South African majority, these artists are decolonizing comedy. Audiences are hooked. Vernac shows buzz with unparalleled energy, somewhere between a rock concert and a sermon. Never before have black South African audiences shared such powerful catharsis, led by magnetic comedians who look and sound like them. If laughter is the best medicine, these artists act as guerrilla medics, using humor to tend to the untreated masses.

This work isn't easy. Offstage, these comedians face immense obstacles: media disinterest, family conflicts, sexism, and pressures to succeed in the nation's fastest city.

Featured comedians:



LUPHELO KODWA

LUPHELO left a stable life in his village to pursue comedy in Johannesburg. His family doesn't understand his ambitions, but as he gains traction in the comedy world, Luphelo dreams of revolutionizing the industry in his hometown.

Home language: Xhosa



NOKO MOSWETE

NOKO brings a much-needed feminist perspective to the stage, boldly confronting cultural taboos and spreading important lessons about female sexuality, body image, and sexual health—and ultimately sharing the stage with Trevor Noah.

Home language: Pedi



ZICCO SITHOLE

ZICCO looks to comedy as therapy—from working through his sister's death to confronting the legacy of apartheid violence in the township of Soweto. But by running Soweto's notorious bar comedy scene, he may just give more than he gets.

Home language: Zulu

Original artwork by Kiyomi Taylor (stills from hand-painted stop-motion animation sequences)

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The first time we saw South African stand-up comedy, we were hooked. It was 2015, and we were studying abroad at the University of Cape Town. Student protests against rising university fees were taking the country by storm. By day, we watched as demonstrators filled the streets, echoing protests of generations past. By night, we listened as comedians dug into complex national issues onstage, addressing wounds of a colonial legacy.

Meanwhile, Trevor Noah had just been tapped to host *The Daily Show* in the United States. The next year, comedians and satirists like Trevor took on an elevated role in our country as the events of the 2016 presidential election unfolded. At a time when the definition of truth was up for debate, comedians offered catharsis and clarity. We consumed endless sketches, late night bits, and stand-up sets, and we continued to turn to South African stand-up as a point of comparison and inspiration. If political turmoil begets good comedy, South Africa was the perfect breeding ground—a quarter century after the fall of apartheid, South Africa is ranked by the World Bank as the most unequal country in the world. It's no coincidence that it is home to some of the world's most powerful stand-up comedy.

After graduating from Bowdoin College in 2017, we decided to make a documentary about stand-up comedy in South Africa. We started exploring the comedy scene as soon as we touched down in Johannesburg. In our early conversations with comedians, it became clear that vernacular comedy was revolutionizing South African entertainment. Despite the dominance of English and the comedy industry's dismissal of indigenous languages, vernac comedians were bringing their mother tongues into the spotlight. At any given show, you could hear five or six languages. Audiences were electric. Xhosa speakers laughed at Pedi jokes, Zulu speakers laughed at Tswana jokes, and even us English speakers couldn't help but laugh along, too. The laughter was different at these shows—deeper, more urgent, more real.

As we went from gig to gig, we soon developed strong connections with Noko, Luphelo, and Zicco. They graciously welcomed us into their lives—between filming, we celebrated birthdays with Zicco, had sleepovers with Noko, and romped around the city with Luphelo. As production progressed, we began assembling an incredible South African team. Our editors' storytelling expertise helped us craft a story that would resonate with South African and American audiences alike. Our translators took on the daunting task of converting culturally specific stand-up jokes in three languages (we double-checked with the comedians for accuracy). Our composers created Xhosa songs with strong ties to the film's themes, combining traditional Xhosa instruments with modern electronic looping techniques. (Stick around for the end credits to hear the Xhosa rap). Without the crucial insight, perspective, and reality checks from our team, we could not have—and probably should not have—told this story.

By following driven, talented, funny individuals fighting for their place in the spotlight, *IN STITCHES* educates American audiences about the power of laughter in a nation best known for its tragedies. It also amplifies the phenomenon of vernacular comedy within South Africa, in an entertainment industry that has often overlooked it. As both countries become increasingly multicultural and multilingual, it is important to empathize with the unfamiliar, to take an interest in art that was not created to reflect your own life experiences—or mother tongues, for that matter. It is elucidating and humbling to shed your linguistic privilege and immerse yourself in something you don't fully understand. What better vehicle for empathy than stand-up comedy? Laughter is the best medicine, after all.

Hannah Falkner *Meg Keefe*



THE TEAM



HANNAH RAFKIN (Right), *Director/Producer, Director of Photography*

Hannah has been obsessed with comedy every since her parents let her stay up past bedtime to watch *Saturday Night Live* in elementary school. She is a freelance videographer, photographer, and video editor in Portland, Maine, and also leads social justice filmmaking workshops with high school students. Hannah graduated from Bowdoin College in 2017.

MEG ROBBINS (Left), *Director/Producer, Sound Engineer*

Meg is a multimedia journalist by training and brought her background as a drummer to bear as she tinkered with sound on the set of *IN STITCHES*. She is currently a reporter for the *Morning Sentinel*, a daily newspaper in rural central Maine. Meg's writing, photography, and data journalism has appeared in the *Portland Press Herald*, the *Vineyard Gazette*, *Pine Tree Watch*, *NJ Spotlight* and various other outlets. She has won several regional reporting awards for her work in New England. Meg graduated from Bowdoin College in 2017.



KHALID SHAMIS, *Editor*

Khalid has worked in the film and TV industry in the UK, Middle East and Southern Africa since 1997. Although trained as a director, he much prefers editing and has brought numerous documentaries to light with some of the best directors and producers in South Africa. Many of the films Khalid edits have featured at major festivals around the world, including hajooj kuka's *BEATS OF THE ANTONOV*, winning Best Film at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival. Khalid has held an associate lectureship position at the University of the Witwatersrand, was integral in the running of Africa's first Rough Cut Edit Lab with the Encounters International Documentary Film Festival, and was awarded the 2017 SAFTA Golden Horn Award for Editing in a Documentary Short.



PITCH HER PRODUCTIONS, *Associate Producers, Fiscal Sponsor*

Pitch Her Productions is a non-profit production company formed for the purpose of encouraging, fostering, and promoting the advancement of women in the film industry, including the creation of more roles for women, both in front of and behind the camera. They seek to enhance the female voice and to inspire girls and women of all ages. Their desire is to create work that benefits female artists and filmmakers, a demographic which has historically been underrepresented in the film industry.

PRODUCTION CREW



Kyle Wallace
Assistant Editor



Dumama & Kechou
Composers



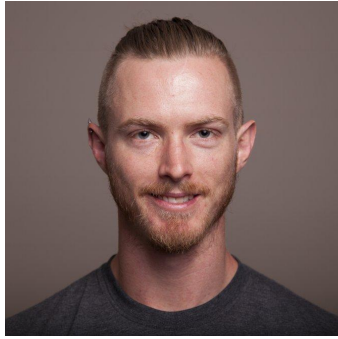
Kiyomi Taylor
Animator



Brett Rayner
Colorist



Vuyo Rhoda
Audio Mixer



Daniel Stevenson
Visual Effects



Noma Moshani
Translator



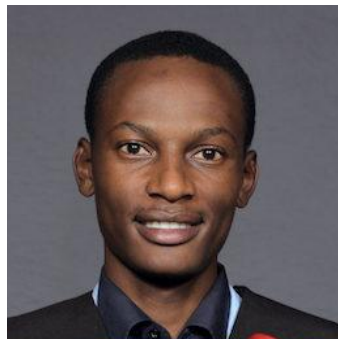
Rhandzeka Mawuku
Translator



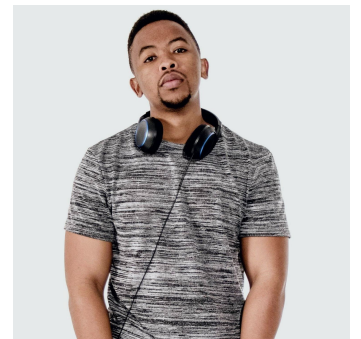
Gelo Maredi
Translator



Kurt Orderson
Story Consultant



LeeRoy Moyo
Production Assistant



Apendule Pakade
Production Assistant

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DISTRIBUTION

Festivals

Margaret Mead Film Festival (New York, New York)

Docs Without Borders Film Festival (Online)

Lift-Off Global Network Festival (New York, New York)

Encounters South African Documentary Film Festival (Johannesburg, South Africa - World Premiere)

Jozi Film Festival (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Muizenberg Festival (Cape Town, South Africa)

SOMA Film Festival (Maplewood, New Jersey)

Watch This! Film Festival (Portland, Maine)

Africa World Documentary Festival (Nigeria, Ghana, Barbados, Thailand, Jamaica, South Africa, US)

Screenings

Sunshine Cinema Ignite Your Rights Tour (South Africa, Zambia, Botswana)

Alexander Bar & Theatre (Cape Town, South Africa)

Council on International Educational Exchange (Portland, Maine)

Bertha Movie House (Cape Town, South Africa)

Frontier Cafe and Cinema (Brunswick, Maine)

Bowdoin College (Brunswick, Maine)

Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia)

Maine Film Association (Portland, Maine)



CONTACTUS



Screeners available upon request.



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