

THE ENGLISH ACADEMY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

P.O. Box 124, Wits 2050 • Telephone/Facsimile: (011) 717-9339
e-mail: englishacademy@societies.wits.ac.za

Pieter-Dirk Uys - CITATION

Gold Medal Award of the English Academy of Southern Africa, 2017

Pieter-Dirk Uys received the Gold Medal of the English Academy of Southern Africa in recognition of the way in he has conspicuously served the cause of English for more than 50 years. Pieter Dirk Uys was born in Cape Town in 1945 and has been in the theatre since the mid- 1960s. Closely associated with both the Space Theatre in Cape Town and Johannesburg's Market Theatre during the 1970s and 1980s, he has written and performed numerous plays, revues, films, television series and one- man shows throughout South Africa and abroad during the past 56 years and continues to present his one-man shows regularly at a variety of venues throughout South Africa and abroad.

Although Uys was concerned that after the demise of apartheid in 1994 he would no longer have politicians to “*write his scripts for him*”, he is “*delighted that the members of the current democratically elected government are once again writing some of his best material*”. Uys is perhaps most well-known, both nationally and internationally, for his alter ego, Mrs Evita Bezuidenhout, former wife of a National Party Cabinet Member and Ambassador of the now defunct fictitious homeland of Bapetikosweti, and currently a respected member of the ANC and ‘in-house chef’ at Luthuli House. While Uys uses a variety of languages in his works, his main medium is English which he employs as both a satirical tool and the voice of laughter. His approach has been two-fold – to make his audiences laugh, not only at other people but also at themselves, and, in so doing, raise their awareness of important political and social issues affecting their lives (which they probably would have otherwise ignored) and if his words inspire them to make their voices heard, so much the better. During this period Uys has “assimilated, adapted and reinvented” English, the global lingua franca, to reflect the politics, culture and rapidly changing nature of South African society. We believe that Uys has used English ‘as a force for effective change during both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras in South Africa’.

As further evidence of his commitment to using language effectively, Uys has since 2000 travelled around South Africa, visiting over 1.5 million school children, as well as prisons and reformatories, with a free AIDS- awareness entertainment called *For Facts Sake!* In the words of critics Uys is not only a performer and comedian, but an intelligent and brilliant writer who through his humorous yet thought-provoking one-man shows offers “*a timely and truthful message about where we were, where we are, and where we could go if we don't wake up*” (taken from reviews of Adapt or Fly in Cape Town —

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Patrons: Njabulo Ndebele and Pitika Ntuli

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January 2014 Benn van der Westhuizen, Artslink, 11 January 2014, Beverley Brommert, Cape Argus, 15 January 2014.

Chris Bartlett of The Stage said of Foreign Aids (a revue drawing attention of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for which Uys won an Obie Award in New York in 2004): *“It is testament to Uys’s skills as a performer and the regard in which he is held, that he can deliver such chilling material while using his devilish wit to find humour in the bleakest of corners.”* The UK Comedy Guide called it *“a thought-provoking, moving and personal piece of satirical theatre of the kind we see all too rarely these days”*. Pieter-Dirk Uys was awarded South Africa’s prestigious Truth and Reconciliation Award in 2001. He has received honorary degrees from Rhodes University, the University of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape, the University of the Witwatersrand and University of Kwazulu-Natal. As well, his celebrated alter ego, Evita Bezuidenhout, proudly received the Living Legacy 2000 Award in San Diego, USA. His performance of Foreign Aids at La Mama received the Obie Award in New York in 2004. In 2011 Uys was honoured with a lifetime achievement Teddy Award at the Berlin International Film Festival; in 2012 he received both the FW de Klerk Goodwill Award and the German-Africa Award; and in 2016 he was the recipient of the ACT Lifetime Achievement Award for Theatre.

We feel that Pieter-Dirk Uys is a worthy nominee for the English Academy of Southern Africa’s prestigious Gold Medal.

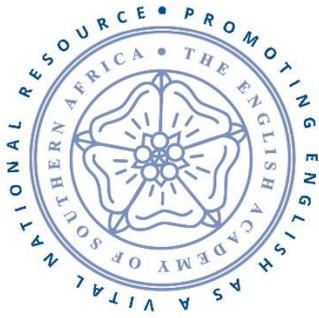
Barbara Basel and Rajendra Chetty

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