

My Word! in West End berth



ROBYN COHEN

in the limelight

My Word! Redesigning Buckingham Palace, a tribute to the life and work of the late writer Richard Rive, has been selected to be part of The South African Season at London's Jermy Street Theatre in June and July.

This five-week season includes work by Athol Fugard and Reza de Wet. Ahead of its London performances, *My Word!* will be at Artscape for three performances from May 15 to 17 and at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Written by Sylvia Vollenhoven and Basil Appollis, it stars Appollis and is directed by Sandra Temmingh.

My Word! is Appollis and Vollenhoven's second tribute to Rive. Their first, *A Writer's Last Word*, opened in 1998 at the National Arts Festival and went on to play at the Baxter and the Market.

Interest was rekindled last year when Appollis read extracts at launches of Shaun Viljoen's biography of Rive. They were urged to do a revival and did a major rewrite. They retitled it, making reference to Rive's seminal novel, *Buckingham Palace, District Six*, after the residents of District Six who lived in a row of houses called Buckingham Palace.

The new play was staged over the festive season at the Baxter. Tremendous interest from locals and visitors led to the inclusion on the Jermy Street Season.

For London, the title will be changed to *District 6, Our Buckingham Palace*.

Vollenhoven explains: "In Cape Town – with the novel being a school network, and harking back to the previous play *A Writer's Last Word* – the *My Word!* title made sense. But in the UK we have to opt for a title that is a bit more self-explanatory."

She says they are looking at tweaking aspects of the text for a UK audience but points out it's a universal story: "The story of a working-class writer who becomes

famous and the callous destruction of the place where he was born is not culture-specific."

In addition to *My Word!*, they are working on a multimedia venture – *The Keeper of the Kumm* – the story of "a 19th-century rainmaker who searches for someone to record the stories of his people. Along the way he finds Victorian researcher Lucy Lloyd and linguist Wilhelm Bleek. *Kumm* is the word for story, news or anything told and retold in the now-extinct / Xam language of the people of the Northern Cape."

The project includes a film, a novel and musical theatre adaptation. The film – in development – has been chosen for this year's Cannes Film Festival. It's all happening – albeit with challenges. "While this is such an exciting opportunity to be taking our work to London and Cannes, I am a bit taken aback by how difficult it is to raise the additional funding we need," says Vollenhoven who is hoping to attract sponsors.

● Tickets for the Artscape season are R80 and R40 for students; call Computicket on 0861 915 8000.



IN TRIBUTE: Basil Appollis stars in *My Word!*, Redesigning Buckingham Palace.

On the Boards

● **PaperBoy:** Grant Jacobs won a Standard Bank Ovation award for this comedy. The show is at the Galloway Theatre, Waterfront, from May 7 to 17. Tickets are R100 and 2-for-1 on Wednesday, May 7. Book at www.waterfronttheatreschool.co.za

● **Show and Tell:** Michele Maxwell and Roland Perold collaborate in this new show about the entertainment industry at the Kalk Bay Theatre from May 7 to 31. Tickets are R70-R90. Visit www.kalkbaytheatre.co.za

● **UCT Drama's The Autumn Season:** Three plays at the Rosebank Theatre, performed by graduating students, from May 12-17. Tickets at www.webtickets.co.za – Robyn Cohen