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DIFF world première documentary

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One of the gala highlights at DIFF (Durban International Film Festival) is the world première of *A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake*.

This is the much-anticipated documentary debut of celebrated television/film/theatre director Michael Lessac.

The gala screening promises to be one of the highlights of this year's festival – with some of the country's foremost peace mediators joining the director, special guests, and members of the cast and crew for the world première screening, followed by a Q&A session.

A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake follows a diverse group of South African actors as they tour global war-torn regions to share their country's experience of reconciliation. As they ignite dialogue among people with raw memories of atrocity, the actors find they must confront once again their homeland's complicated and violent past – and question their own capacity for healing and forgiveness.

A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake was edited by Joel Plotch (*In the Company of Men*; *Nurse Betty*; *Gone*). It was produced by Jacqueline Bertrand Lessac and Emma Tammi and Executive Produced by Jonathan Gray, and Robert Lear. It features never-before-heard original music by jazz legend Hugh Masekela, with lyrics taken from TRC personal testimonies.

“Can we forgive the past, to survive the future?” This profound question, posed by Nelson Mandela, became a mandate by which other nations could live. Lessac wanted to better understand the subtleties of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in so doing, bring the story of the TRC to a wider audience while exploring the possibility of the TRC as a concept which could successfully be exported to other post-conflict zones.

In 2001, Lessac returned to the Colonnades Theatre Laboratory, which he had founded 25 years before in New York City, to find a way of telling the story of the South African TRC as theatre's way of prompting others to drop their masks and tell the truth.

He wanted to look beyond the presentations of victim and perpetrator and instead examine the role of the interpreters who translated the TRC proceedings into SA's 11 official languages. Lessac was intrigued by the fact that the interpreters, simultaneously translating in the first person, could never turn away from atrocity. He was fascinated with what the TRC looked like through the eyes of people who, for two and a half years, verbalised every moment of the hearings. He met with actual TRC interpreters as they relived their stories and memories for the first time. Their experiences became the starting point for the journey ahead.

In 2003, after interviewing over 350 actors in SA, Lessac held a three-week workshop with the core of

chosen actors who developed script material out of their own life-experiences intertwined with the lives of the interpreters.

The theatrical vehicle for these conversations was a production entitled Truth in Translation, a hard-edged, multi-award winning theatrical production, with accompanying workshops, created between 2003 and 2006. It opened in Rwanda and toured to three continents; 11 countries and 26 cities. It has played to more than 55 000 people and facilitated conflict transformation workshops for more than 10 000 participants.

The documentary A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake is the result of this journey – a glimpse into the lives and minds of a group of South African performers who shared and listened; facilitated and responded to the heartbreaking real-life personal stories of the human casualties of global conflict. As South Africans representing various facets of South African society, they were forced to look at whether they themselves had even successfully "reconciled" their own individual pasts, and realised just how complex and challenging it is to engage with the multifaceted concept of forgiveness.

"For me, this film pays homage to a very special group of South African actors and interpreters who were warriors of the most special kind. They allowed themselves to travel through worlds that were often more painful than their own worst nightmares," considers Lessac.

The documentary's intriguing title refers to a question which often appears in conflict situations when asked why perpetrators killed young babies. The answer, irrespective of culture is always, one way or another, "A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake."

"The film was originally titled Truth in Translation, just like the play. We changed it to A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake because no matter how true that might be, when revenge is celebrated as heroism, it is a poor excuse for killing."

A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake premieres at the Durban International Film Festival taking place in venues in and around Durban from 17 - 27 July 2014. The gala screening is on 20 July at 17:15 in Suncoast (6).

Note to editors:

The original company of actors were: Quanita Adams, Nick Borraine, Andrew Buckland, Sibulele Gcilitshana, Bongani Gumede, Robert Koen, Jeroen Kranenburg, Sandile Matsheni, Fana Mokoena, Thembi Mtshali-Jones and Jenny Stead along with earlier contributors Lionel Newton, Helen Iskander, Hugh Masebenza, Mmabatho Mogomotsi, Lerato Moloi, Celest Mathews and Paul Savage.

Additional photos / biogs / interviews / trailer / additional information - available on request.

For more information on A Snake Gives Birth to a Snake contact

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