

EIGHTEEN writers from 10 countries touch down in Durban for a swirling week of books, words, ideas, and talk at the 11th *Time of the Writer International Writers' Festival*, which takes place from March 25 to 30.

Hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts (University of KwaZulu-Natal), the festival enters its second decade with its customary extensive week-long programme of activities. Aside from Australian guest John Pilger, whose acclaimed journalistic commentary is astutely global, the festival features an exclusively South African and African presence this year, with a diverse gathering of novelists, short story writers, investigative journalists, publishers and political commentators, presenting their ideas in the public arena.

The eclectic mix includes the considered and provoking words of celebrated South African writer, poet, painter and essayist, Breyten Breytenbach. Breytenbach, who was instrumental in initiating the festival 11 years ago, will also deliver the festival's keynote address on opening night – Tuesday, March 25. Scholar, activist and writer, Mbulelo Mzamane (South Africa), whose fiction and poetry was banned by the apartheid government and whose academic scholarship is widely acclaimed, adds his experienced voice. Mzamane was described by Nelson Mandela as a "visionary leader, (and) one of South Africa's greatest intellectuals". Other South Africa voices include Angelina Sithabe, a geologist by training, whose dreamy, disturbing debut, *Holy Hill*, has been receiving critical praise. Kopano Matlwa, winner of the EULHerary Award for 2006/07, is a young South African writer whose debut novel, *Cocoon*, is part of a new wave of post-apartheid fiction.

Joining her is Jo-Anne Richards, author of the immensely popular *The Innocence of Roost Chicken*, which topped the South African bestseller list for 15 weeks. Richards, who launches her fourth novel, *My Brother's Book*, during the festival, is one of three participants launching books. Another is Durbanite Michael Green, who launches his much-awaited and impeccably researched new novel *For the Sake of Silence*, a work of historical fiction which examines with impressive insight the nineteenth-century Trappist endeavour in nineteenth-century South Africa.

David Evans, who was banned and imprisoned by the apartheid state, is the author of an oeuvre of novels, short stories, and plays whose narratives are remarkably engaging. Another brave voice is Max du Preez, perhaps the best known investigative journalist and political commentator in South Africa.

The writer's time



CLOCKWISE (from above left): Dayo Forster; Jo-Anne Richards; Max du Preez; Angelina Sithabe; Breyten Breytenbach; John Pilger and Shajilla Patel.

Africa is well represented at the festival with a particularly strong Kenyan and Zimbabwean presence. This comes at a time when Kenya is undergoing perhaps one of its most politically volatile periods in recent memory, and with Zimbabwean elections taking place during the festival period.

In a Writers Speak Out slot, Kenyan poet Shajilla Patel, last in the country for Poetry Africa 2007, will present a special Kenyan Bulletin, which will articulate the crisis facing her country. Dayo Forster, though Gambian by birth, is now a resident in Kenya and she too will no doubt add insight.

A scientist by training, Forster's debut novel *Reading the Ceiling* is a structurally daring exploration of the role of chance in a young woman's life. Kenyan publisher, writer, and scholar, Henry Chakava is perhaps the most famous African publisher of his generation. Among other achievements, he led the successful acquisition of Heinemann in East Africa by a group of

Kenyans, localising it and was also the only publisher to give a voice to the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mauritian writer, poet, essayist, and screenwriter, Ananda Devi, author of nine acclaimed novels, is recognised as one of the major Francophone writers from Mauritius and the Indian Ocean.

Fellow francophone novelist and playwright Emmanuel Dongala was forced to flee his home country of Congo (Brazzaville) after the civil war.

Part of a trio of writers with scientific backgrounds at this year's festival, Dongala, who has a PhD in Organic Chemistry, is a giant of contemporary African fiction.

His latest novel, *Johnny Mad Dog*, explores with remarkable depth the child soldiers of Sierra Leone. Angolan born Simao Kikamba's riveting debut novel, *Going Home*, winner of the Herman Charles Rosman award for English fiction in 2006, is based on his experiences as a political refugee from Angola and his subsequent life as a black immigrant in South Africa.

The world acclaimed investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker, John Pilger (Australia) brings this year's festival to a close with a Sunday evening of rousing discussion with *Mail & Guardian* editor Permal Haffajee and UKZN academic and writer, Patrick Bond. Presented as a Centre for Civil Society Harold Wolpe lecture entitled Truth, Propaganda and Power, the evening is prefaced with a sneak peak at Pilger's new film *The War on Democracy* and will end with an audience Q&A session.

Pilger will receive an honorary doctorate from Rhodes University in Grahamstown, on March 28. A festival of documentaries by John Pilger, with post-screening discussions facilitated by the Centre for Civil Society, begins on March 3.

A unique experiment at this year's festival is the "Writers Parliament – Notes Towards a Cultural Policy for Durban" session on Friday, March 28, at the council chambers of the Durban City Hall. Attended by all the festival writers, and open to the public, the parliament will, in a quick-fire morning session, attempt to hammer out a basic architecture required for an effective cultural policy for Durban. *Time of the Writer* hopes also, through this experiment, to reinvestigate the idea of parliament as a site of debate and speaking out, not just for politicians but for everyone.

Readings, discussions and book launches will take place nightly at the Elizabeth Sheddon Theatre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A broad range of day activities in the form of workshops, a day-long forum on publishing issues, and a prison writing programme, are formulated to promote a culture of reading, writing and creative expression.

With this wide-ranging programme of activities and culturally diverse line-up of writers, *Time of the Writer 2008* is set to deliver a lively literary platform for dialogue and exchange on wide-ranging subjects from historical and social issues to political and personal affairs, offering insights into the motivations and processes that inform the complex art of writing.

Tickets: R25 for evening sessions, R10 for students, through Computicket or at the door one hour before the event. Workshops and seminars are free.

Visit www.cca.ukzn.ac.za, phone 031 290 2506 or e-mail cca@ukzn.ac.za

