



Photograph courtesy of Andries Vrey

Q: Since graduating from the Drama Department, your career has taken some interesting turns. Tell us about your career trajectory.

A: A trajectory seems to imply that there was some sort of planning involved, which, in my case, wasn't so. I have been very fortunate in being given opportunities throughout my career that has enabled me to do a number of things.

While at high school I joined the local emergency services and trained as firefighter and paramedic. While I never considered it as a career, it was the most formative period of my life and I spent a total of 10 years in this field in various part-time and full-time positions. I studied communications management on a part-time basis, but at the time my ambition was to go into teaching. A chance encounter led me to a decision to enter the drama programme (at the age of 22), and I completed my degree in 2002.

After completing my studies I was employed as a writer for a local soap opera, but decided that I wanted to do some travelling. I left for Europe with my wife (then still my girlfriend), who I had met at Tuks Drama, and we spent a year in Europe, during which time I worked as paramedic for the National Health Service in London. During my stay in the UK I also worked as freelance theatre critic for a number of Publications (British and South-African), and wrote a play, which I entered for the Absa KKNK. When the play was accepted we travelled back to South Africa to perform (I also performed in the production), after which we never went back to the UK.

I soon landed a position at M-Net, followed by a brief stint as marketing manager for Aardklop, after which I was appointed assistant editor of Rapport. I was promoted several times and ended up as the General Manager of the Afrikaans products within the MIH (Naspers) stable. In December 2009 I was approached by Aardklop board members regarding the position of CEO, and finally took office in March 2010.

Teaching, however, is still something I'd very much like to do, and I hope that, somewhere in my career, I'd be in a position to do so. In my book it's the only noble profession.

Q: To be the CEO of one of the major arts festivals in the country (and at your age) is no small feat.

A: I don't consider my age or position as any major achievement - the right person could do the job even in their 20's. We live in an age in which youth is treasured and valued, and it's perhaps only a pity that young people doesn't realise the opportunities that are available. In today's life, at 38, I'm almost getting too old - it's young people that are currently driving change and innovation in the world.

Q: Can you tell us about some of the learning curves that you experienced in your professional career?

A: The most important thing: there's no such thing as a selfmade man/woman. Nobody gets anywhere without the assistance, guidance or input from others. I have been very fortunate in that a number of people have given me opportunities and served as mentors. One only needs to grab these opportunities and learn as much from others as one possibly can.

Q: Tell us a bit about some of your memorable experiences as a student at Tuks Drama.

A: Obviously, meeting my future wife, must be the most memorable (I'm reminded of that every day).



Andries Vrey and Lily Radloff in *The Virtuous Burglar* directed by Marié-Heleen Coetzee (2002)

Q: What did the drama programme offer you that you have applied in your working life?

A: While I have over qualifications that are often first sighted when people review my CV, I believe that the skills I acquired during my dramatic training often provide the competitive edge over peers. Technical skills, in any discipline, obviously forms the backbone of knowledge within that specific field, but in addition to those I believe my drama training has equipped me with a skill set that enables me to better analyse people and situations, and to react appropriately.

Another aspect, that I often wish more drama students would realise, is that drama training in no way equals actor training - acting may be part of it, but it is not the only thing it's about.

Q: You initiated a programme for student-artists as part of the Clover/Aardklop National Arts Festival called "No Boundaries". Why did you decide to specifically create this opportunity for students and young artists?

A: Since joining the festival I've been extremely surprised at how few drama students make contact with a view on becoming involved to learn more about the industry. I get requests from business students, engineering students and even tourism students, all asking to become involved through internships to enable them to learn and grow. Very seldom, however, has a drama student approached us with such a request - and yet, talk to any drama student, and you're told of their supposed "passion" for the industry. Passion is meaningless - commitment, hard work and drive is what's needed. With this in mind we started this programme with the aim of introducing students to the industry in a safe environment - fact is, 90% of all theatre productions in South Africa are commissioned by festivals. Any student, therefore, who wishes to pursue a career in theatre should learn and understand the festival circuit as soon as possible.

Q: What advice would you give to aspiring young artists and performing arts administrators?

A: In South Africa you cannot be either an artist or an administrator - in our industry you'll have to, at the very least, manage your own administration, and therefore it's of utmost importance for industry practitioners to gain as much as possible experience. It's a fact: all graduates may not find employment in the industry, but it's equally true that the very best will (and talent doesn't make you the best).