

# NET VIR PRET

## THE DAY OF RECONCILIATION PARADE DECEMBER 2018



The River Puppet arrives for the performance

The December **Day of Reconciliation** Giant Puppet Parade is the highlight of the **Net vir Pret** year. It brings together work developed across all our programmes in a stunning performance which is widely attended by a large part of the community.

The Net Vir Pret Annual Puppet Parade and Performance in partnership with the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape presents:

**River and Redfin**  
The 2018 Barrydale Parade

**Sunday  
16th December  
6pm**

Parade Performance to begin on the banks of the Klein Huis Rivier on Tinley street and proceed to BF Oosthuizen school.

#BarrydaleArtsMeander  
#HaveyoubeentoBarrydale  
#NetvirPretHeritageTours

DOIT KIN KIN  
Puppets in Critical Thought  
in African Humanities

CENTRE FOR HUMANITIES RESEARCH

Netvir Pret

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Handspring

Maggie  
Art Collective

CapeNature

FRESHWATER  
RESEARCH CENTRE

RMB

The outcome of a 7-year collaboration with the world-renowned **Handspring Puppet Company**, the event is run in partnership with the **Centre for Humanities Research** at the **University of the Western Cape** and the **Ukwanda Puppetry Collective**. It now attracts spectators to the small village of Barrydale from as far afield as Canada, the USA, the UK and Australia.

The theme for the event is determined early in the year. Over time it has come to be concerned with issues around conservation, our own unique history and with reconciliation and healing in our racially and geographically divided village.

In **2014** we explored the forgotten **KhoiSan First People**, who they were and what happened to them; in **2015** we told

the little-known story of another major input to our racial mix, the **Cape Slaves**.

The plight of the world's **Elephant** population was tackled in **2016**; similarly the desperate situation of the **Rhino** who are being poached to extinction provided the theme for **2017**.

In **2018** it was decided to focus on the predicament of the species of **Redfin Minnow**, unique to the **Huis River** which flows through our village, under threat from pollution, invasive alien predators and vegetation and from wasteful and reckless exploitation of this precious resource by humans.

Barrydale conservationists, **Prof. Les Minter** and **Flora Cameron** had brought our attention the year before to the plight of the Redfin; our Interns and teenage Young Leaders had responded



Cape Nature's Martine Jordaan with us at the Huis River

by signing up for a **Save the Red Fin Campaign** and with our children set about cleaning the river and cutting down alien growth on Wednesday afternoons.

The decision to make the Redfin the theme for 2018 seemed particularly appropriate and staff and Interns, with the help of **Cape Nature**, researched the situation. The July Holiday School featured the Redfin as



The 4-6 year olds present their contribution

its theme and the 130 youngsters who participated spent the week learning

about the Red Fin and its perilous situation. They were then tasked in age groups to improvise a play about the Red Fin for performance on the final day, complete with props and puppets.



In the second week, the Holiday School moved to the farms where a further 75 youngsters attended a similar programme.

In the meantime **Aja Marneweck**, a highly skilled and talented post-doctoral fellow at the **Centre for**

**Humanities Research** who has directed the show since 2012, came up to guide our team in constructing and scripting a story; the musicians in our **Jazz Programme** set about composing original lyrics and music for the show; the **Ukwanda** team started work on designing and





constructing the giant puppets and Net vir Pret crafters began designing the masks and the hand-held smaller puppets. They later trained Young Leaders to make prototypes who in turn would guide the youngsters in making their own individual puppets in the fortnight leading up to the Parade.



CHR provided training workshops for our actors run by **Itumeleng Wa Lehulere** and a water-sound workshop for our musicians run by artist-in-residence **Luis Gimenez**.

Water has been at the forefront of public awareness in recent years, made all the more urgent in the Western Cape because of ongoing drought, drying rivers, emptying dams and severe water shortages.

However, the issue of the Barrydale Huis River is a sensitive one, and many people in the village have strong opinions, from the conservation-minded who want to protect the river and the

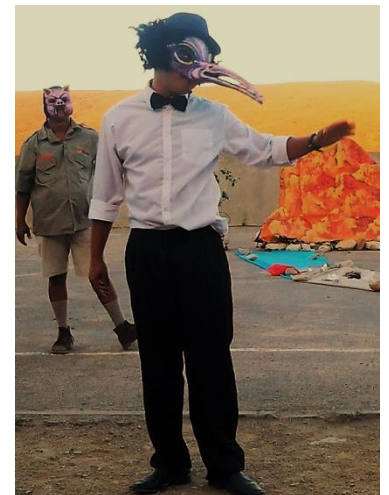


precious fish, to the farmers who pump water out for their crops in addition to their allowed allocation and can't see what the fuss over a small insignificant fish might be, together with home owners living along the river who cite "private property" and "water" rights.



Because of this sensitivity and inspired by George Orwell's **Animal Farm**, it was decided that no humans would feature in the show but that the story would be presented as a parable and all characters would be animals.

It was agreed that the two giant puppets would be the **Huis River** itself, and the **Redfin** fish.



Other animal characters would wear masks and the participating youngsters would carry hand-held puppets which they would make themselves.



The story began with the presentation of the river as the epicentre of a pristine world, inhabited by the Redfin, dragonflies, frogs, crabs, kingfishers - all living in harmony when there was no such thing as private property and the land belonged to all. Into this world



comes an invader in the shape of a gross pig character (the **Farmer**) who lays claim to the river and the



land around it which he then fences. He is soon followed by a **Mayor** who takes the form of the aggressive and noisy ha-de-dah (Egyptian Ibis) which has come to dominate our skies in recent years and the **Reverend Bass**, representing the compliant church and named after the greedy alien fish which threatens the indigenous species. They are supported by the **Fiskaal**, a policing official from the old colonising Dutch East India Company, taking the form of the Butcher Bird,

who helps them enforce their new rules.

These invaders and others who follow them soon despoil and pollute the environment to the distress of both the River and the Redfin. While the River sinks amid the trash polluting its waters, the Redfin comes forward to tell the audience of the destruction that is happening in a powerful and moving rap, written and delivered by Intern **Selanvor Platjies** who was also the lead manipulator in the Redfin puppet.



The Farmer, Mayor and Reverend agree to collaborate in setting up a business which will exploit the water for commercial gain and they start building their “water factory”. However, some young pigs have become aware of the damage being done to the environment by their elders and conflict ensues. This is only resolved when a mighty storm arises which breaks the River’s banks; all is swept away and the River and Redfin are restored to their former glory amid joyous celebration in

which all the other creatures take part.

The story, which included a circus scene, was told with a lightness of touch, much humour, sparkling



performances from the players and wonderful giant puppets. One hundred and fifty youngsters from the Barrydale township and the surrounding farms took part in the show and there is no doubt the experience will never leave them.

## Who does the river belong to?

Apart from the plight of the Redfin, other issues were touched upon.

Those Barrydale residents who were classified “Coloured” by the Apartheid regime were dispossessed of their homes in the 1950’s and moved to a dusty township over the hill and out of sight, which also cut them off from the river, a process they still refer to as

**Steek My Weg – Afrikaans for Hide Me Away.**



That this is still an issue is illustrated by two incidents:

As mentioned above Net vir Pret youngsters teamed up to clean the river on Wednesday afternoons and they were doing this when a furious property owner came storming out of his house shouting, **Get your children out of my river before I set the dogs on them.** Unimpressed and resistant to an attempt to explain that they were cleaning the polluted river, he demanded to see their permits.



**On their way down to fetch the River and Redfin puppets**

The second incident comes from the day of the Parade itself.

We had thought to begin the show with the youngsters coming from the township over and down the hill to the river in the village. There they would seek out the giant River and Redfin puppets who were hiding in the river. They would then hum and sing the haunting **River Song** composed by **Gari**

**Crawford**, our music tutor, and entice both puppets to accompany them back

up to the township school on the hill where the performance would take place.

We were plotting the action on the river bed one afternoon in the fortnight before the show, only to find the next day that the owner of the house on the river at that spot had put up a fence and **Private Property** sign overnight.

We went to negotiate and he eventually agreed to allow the puppets access on the day of the show but **not** the children who would have to keep to the road.



In a curious twist, which could easily have been part of the script, four out-of-town visitors (including a private donor to Net vir Pret and an Australian guest) were sitting on the river bank, but outside of his fence, waiting to join the procession, when they were confronted by this owner who ordered them off his land saying, **I don't allow brown people to sit here, so you can't either.**

## Going forward

However, the overwhelming response to the Parade has been resoundingly positive and many people



**Project Hope boys in action**

from both parts of the village have come forward to congratulate us on what they consider to be the best show yet.

A heartening feature was that our **Project Hope** boys were part of the Parade for the first time. Readers of these pages will know

that this group of 17 school drop-outs were mostly in conflict with the law and at risk on the streets before Net vir Pret took them in. Under staff member **Herman Witbooi** who is tasked with their care, these youngsters, widely regarded as useless no-goods, designed and built the set and the props for the show, trained as the stage hands, seamlessly changing the scene several times, and took part in the action, watched in admiration by everyone.

A further aspect is that while in the early years professional and technical expertise for the show had to



be imported from Cape Town, we are now increasingly taking over these roles ourselves. The story came from staff and Interns; **Donna Kouter** functioned as Assistant Director and also wrote the script with the help of **Selanvor Platjies** while the Interns fine-tuned the dialogue during rehearsals; **Clarisa Jonas** designed the masks and the children's puppets, **Herman Witbooi** designed and built the set and the props with the help of the Project Hope boys, **Angelo Endley** acted as

Assistant Stage Manager, responsible for sound and lighting, **William Michaels** was the Acting Coach, **Peter Takelo** wrote the songs and trained the riel dancers and the show was produced by **Derek Joubert**, all of whom are staff members, Interns or Young Leaders at Net vir Pret. The lead characters were played by ex-Young Leaders while the present crop of Young Leaders headed



up the children's groups. The lead puppeteers in the giant puppets were Interns and Young Leaders, assisted by two members of the **Mothertongue Project** from the nearby village of McGregor whom we have been training since 2016.

The clean-up team of youngsters has swelled in number and they now call themselves the **Eco Warriors**. They are being supported by adults from the village and a programme is being formulated for their development. Last week they were addressed by a snake catcher who brought a variety of snakes with him, showed them how to distinguish between poisonous and harmless snakes and what to do when you encounter them.

The partnership with **CapeNature** is growing. An official **Save the RedFin** campaign has been launched and a meeting is planned in this month to discuss strategies.

We are also pleased to announce that the theme for the 2019 Parade has been agreed on. We plan to build story around the arrival in our village of a visitor from another far-off world who has decided to spend a vacation on our Blue Planet. We imagine that his/her impressions of Barrydale will surprise and may shock us.



**Auditioning for a puppeteering role:  
the task - to bring life to the paper**

The extraordinary seven-year partnership with Handspring and the CHR has transformed Net vir Pret beyond imagining. The parade provides a focus each year for work across the entire spectrum of our programmes, sparking creativity on every side. From story-telling, scripting and acting, to music, song and dance, as well as the design, construction and manipulation of puppets, youngsters are learning new skills on many levels.

Above all, the Parade has become an instrument in preparing our youth for responsible citizenship by raising their awareness of the issues in the world around them, prompting them to investigate and research, seek solutions, formulate positions and plan strategies for intervention. This process is helping our isolated and divided community develop a strong sense of local trust and pride.

