

Sunday Tribune SM

A Festival Like No Other, Darling

Illa Thompson

The 11th annual **Voorkamerfest** will soon every inch infuse the tiny Western Cape town of Darling - offering a fabulous line-up of local and Dutch artists presenting intimate concerts in the *voorkamers* of their hosts; the residents of Darling.

I experienced the most amazing festival encounter last year ago in the chocolate-box beautiful, quaintly-named Darling in the heart of the Western Cape – exploring pocket-sized performances in the comfort of the front rooms of homes of enthusiastic residents across the length and breadth of the small town.

The concept is simultaneously simple and profound... but a logistical game of chess to pull off seamlessly. It is thrilling, efficient and exciting... and ticks more boxes than a bumper crossword puzzle: social-cohesion; nation-building; community-engagement; affirmation and pride. It educates while it entertains and smashes social and economic barriers irreparably.

The **Voorkamerfest** is an intimate lucky-dip of a festival. The concept is easy – you buy a ticket for a “route” – seven in total – all of which are colour-coded. You queue up at the local kombi-taxi rank and when the taxi with your colour sticker comes along, you hop on – destination unknown. You travel with a kombi-load of strangers, who by the end of the route, are your new best-friends. The kombi drops you off at three different *voorkamers* during the course of one route – you could end up at a modest RDP house in the dusty yet impressively neat and tidy township, or at the posh school master’s grand Cape Dutch house in the centre of town.

Each show lasts 40 minutes and each is totally different in style, texture and content. Each route offers three stops: three homes with three entertainment options – from jazz to classical music, comedy to drama and poetry to circus acts.

I gather that the concept came out of an inspired chat between Pieter Dirk Uys – the patron saint of Darling – and Wim Visser and Inge Bos, two beautiful creative souls from Amsterdam who spend a fair amount of time in the Cape. They adapted and evolved a quaint Dutch tradition of visiting friends’ *voorkamers* where live entertainment is hosted, adapted it to a South African context and formalised it into a community festival. A whole bunch of their associates from Holland come out too, resulting in the entertainment having a strong Dutch collaborative spirit.

Voorkamerfest is astonishing. It has been going for 11 years this year, and has developed a strong educational component with schools workshops and activities. The hub is of course the delightful Evita se Perron – the old Darling station now community theatre venue.... and preferred performance “platform” of tannie Evita at 8 Arcadia Street.

The **Voorkamerfest** is intrinsically linked to the Darling community in such a fundamental meaningful way that all parties benefit. Homeowners literally become venue managers; taxi drivers become festival hosts, townsfolk make the meals, sell their crafts and accommodate visitors. Everyone gets involved, takes ownership and feels responsible.

The **Voorkamerfest** has so got it right. It is cutting-edge and adventurous, distinctive and fun, bold and exciting – all in all, it is everything an arts festival should be...

Dates and starting times of the taxi routes and 21 intimate concerts:

- 5 September FRIDAY at 17:00
- 6 September SAT at 12:00 and at 17:00
- 7 September SUN at 12:00

On Sunday at 16:00 the open air concert will take place in Darling East.

At this vibrant event festival artists will do a 5 min performance each. Entrance is Free.

- The Eleventh Celebration of the **Darling Voorkamerfest** takes place on 5, 6 and 7 September 2014.
- For Voorkamerfest tickets, contact Chanda: 082 321 7542 / bookings@voorkamerfest-darling.co.za
- Visit: www.voorkamerfest.co.za to view the artist line-up for 2014
Email: info@voorkamerfest-darling.co.za
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Ends

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