



Press Release – Montecasino – 20/09/2017

Diepsloot Dancers Learn with St. Peterburg Ballet

Sixteen young dancers from Diepsloot Combined School, one of the beneficiaries of the [Tsogo Sun Arts Academy](#), were given the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attend an interactive ballet workshop with the St Petersburg Ballet Company as part of a collaborative CSI initiative between [Tsogo Sun](#), [Montecasino](#) and the Company, aimed at broadening the horizons of these talented young people.

The children, aged between 14 and 18, have received training in free style dance as part of their curriculum with the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy. Says Shanda Paine, Group CSI Manager for Tsogo Sun, “When we were approached by the St Petersburg Ballet Company, we jumped at the opportunity to give our young arts students the opportunity to learn a different style of dance, delivered by the greatest ballet company in the world. Tsogo Sun’s approach to all our CSI initiatives is one of a journey, taking young learners who are passionate, willing to learn and committed, on a path that will see them realising their full potential. Giving them exposure to opportunities like this broadens their perspective, exposing them to role models and inspiring them to work even harder to reach their goals.”

Led by 16-year-old team leader Neyo Ramokone and his dancing partner, 14-year-old Sanah Mpipi, the children surprised the St Petersburg Ballet Company by teaching them a modern dance they had learnt through the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy. Neyo and Sanah this year participated in the Gauteng championships of the performing arts, and were selected to be part of the Team SA, representing South Africa in Los Angeles at the World Championships.

Says Neyo, “My partner and I started dancing for the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy four years ago and we are very passionate about dance. Diepsloot is a harsh environment for a young person and growing up there is not easy. Most of the kids our age are stuck in the streets, and some have dropped out of school. We believe that education is key and by working hard on our talents, we can become a success story and not a statistic. We grasp every opportunity given to us because no opportunity is too small or big – it all depends on how you use it.”



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Says Lizzie Coles, Executive Producer of the St Peterburg Ballet Company, “It was a privilege for our dancers to share their passion for their craft with the children from Diepsloot, and to share what goes into making your dream of being a dancer possible. We hope we have inspired them to apply their time and talents to realising their dreams and to have made a difference in the lives of these young people.”

Mike Page, GM of Montecasino, says, “The St Petersburg Ballet Theatre makes a strong and excellent impression on South African audiences every time it tours here, with its world-class performers, performances, and supporting team. We’re always delighted to welcome them to Montecasino and the Teatro. It was equally a pleasure today to welcome aspiring young performers from the Diepsloot Arts Academy, which is supported by Montecasino, to meet with St Petersburg ballet dancers, to be inspired and motivated, and to hear first-hand about the dedication and hard work needed to reach the top in this discipline. We extend our best wishes to both the children from Diepsloot and the Russian dancers for the future.”

Already, Neyo and Sanah have used their exposure to dance to make their own dreams possible, and to extend what they have learnt into the Diepsloot community. Says Neyo, “From the experience we gained as students of the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy, and having seen how it touched our lives, we opened our own dance and arts studio. We have 25 dancers and we use any free space we can find but mostly the school facilities and one of the churches in Diepsloot. We also started dancing for other dance studios to learn and share with those who have passion for dance like us. We have expanded the studio to Johannesburg Secondary School in Fordsburg, which is one of the schools we have danced with in the Tsogo Sun Arts Academy programme and our partnership is really growing.”