

MARK BECKMAN ACCEPTS AN INVITATION FOR COFFEE WITH SA ENTERTAINMENT'S LEADING TRY-SCORER, LAURIKA RAUCH

Best wishes

The legendary Springbok rugby player, Mannetjies Roux, has always been quick to point out that his achievements should always be viewed against the backdrop of the team of the day. So it comes as no surprise to me that the music legend that celebrates Rugby's Roux in song is also quick to warn that her success is due to the god-given teamwork between her and writer-husband, Chris Torr.

Laurika and Chris have decided to celebrate her career and their successes in a new show, 'Stuur Groete aan Mannetjies Roux', that debuts at the Atterbury Theatre in May. It's a show that combines a story with some of the timeless songs she has shared with fans for almost three decades. "My drama background pre-dates my singing career so in many ways the wheel has come full circle. For me the musical presents both an acting and a singing challenge for me," she shares excitedly. "I've been wearing the singing hat for quite a while, so it's time to wear the acting hat again. For Chris, it is the

culmination of many years of song-writing. He is also wearing two hats – that of song-writer and script-writer. These dualities inspire both of us - they present fantastic new challenges."

Laurika is the narrator in the production, under the direction of Paul Eilers, the veteran of SA entertainment, with 40 years as an actor, director and radio presenter. It's a compelling combination of storytelling in both song and narrated word. Laurika explains, "Chris has tried to weave the songs around a story and vice versa so that the dialogue doesn't come across as a series of song introductions. For instance, he has written a new song – Die liefde is 'n wonderlike ding, which starts off as dialogue and thereafter branches into song."

Because of the way the show has been constructed, the audiences should be acquainted with many of the songs. No doubt fans of Laurika will know all the words for songs like Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux, so Chris wanted the audiences to experience the songs in a new way. To this end, the characters on stage will

Paul Eilers is a South African actor and has been seen in movies such as "Back to Freedom", (1988), in which he portrayed Col. Morales, "Rhodes" (1998) and "Country of My Skull" (2004). He is recently directed the acclaimed movie "Roepman."

doubtless provide rich new material. It will be interesting to see how he will turn the meanings of some of the songs around, or at least provide a different way of looking at, or interpreting the lyrics.

I ask about the process behind Chris & Laurika's collaboration in creating so many life-punctuating songs, and the passion in her response is palpable. She paints the picture with her hand as she speaks. "Perhaps the best way to describe our work process is to say that to a large extent we work serially rather than simultaneously – at least in the initial stages. Chris writes a song (as complete as possible) and then plays it to me."

"If I like it," she smiles cheekily, "we move to the next stage where I go on to give it my interpretation. Obviously there are variations on this theme. The point I want

to get across is that it's not as though we sit at a piano and write a song together. Our strengths participate in a song's creation. It's beautiful!"

Times were heady in the early nineties when Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux, the song, became a hit. It was a song that punctuated a time when the people of our country were trying to define and hold their identity. So it is little wonder that Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux topped, or at least equaled, the power of Kinders van die Wind. It's fair to say that it is one of Laurika's most well-known and best-loved songs. So it seemed the right place to start in interweaving the story and songs.

"There are so many beautiful things that people have shared with me about the song over the years," Laurika recalls, "One of my favourites, is hearing about a campfire

gathering where the teenagers were playing folksy songs on their guitars, and everybody around the campfire would join in for a singalong. It came to pass, however, that they decided not to play Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux. When I asked the reason, one of the teenagers said that the song caused even the strongest of the men to get emotional, and because they did not know how to handle it they rather avoided playing the song!"

She laughs and sits back reverently. "When I phoned Mannetjies early one morning to ask his blessing for the song to be recorded, Charlotte, his wife, answered. Mannetjies had already gone out to the veld, so I sang the song to her over the telephone. There was a long silence at the other end of the line after I finished. All she could say, in a very emotional tone, was –

Laurika Rauch and Chris Torr



"By all means, go ahead, Mannetjies will be honoured."

The song came out around 1990 and much has changed in South Africa in the last 21 years. In the sense that the song represents longing for something. Perhaps peace through celebrating glory? I want to know if Laurika thinks

'Mannetjies Roux' that represents the high premium we place on excellence and individual brilliance. She doesn't hesitate. "Yes, Victor Matfield! He pays a high price each time he runs onto the field. But his passion and maturity in search of excellence is obvious."

In many ways, the play represents the culmination of Chris & Laurika's musical relationship. Around the time that they got married, Laurika asked Chris if he could write a song for her to sing. He'd never done that kind of thing before. Since then, Chris hasn't stopped writing and creating. His songs have an undeniably Karoo theme and for the last 25 years he has been

writing about Karoo episodes, so some sort of nostalgia is generally involved. The episodic nature has now culminated in a more general picture. What the longing is for, is not always clear, but what is clear, is that we don't only long for rain.

Laurika and Chris have certainly 'scored

a try' with the superb team they have behind them. "We are all in this together," she adds. "We have a saying in our team, which is not altogether a joke, and not altogether serious, that we all only want to work with nice people

– if they are inordinately talented, as is the case with this team, it is a bonus. It makes life and work so much easier and so much more pleasing."

One thing is for sure. Laurika Rauch and Chris Torr are nice people – nice people with nice stories. **OE**

For information on the new play visit www.stuurgroete.co.za

“There are so many beautiful stories that people have shared with me about the song over the years”



Chris Torr – creative genius at work.