

Timothy Moloï Special Place

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“A special place is somewhere you haven’t been for a while, it makes you happy, and you can forget about the world for bit,” says singer and media star Timothy Moloï. And our locale certainly fits the bill. We are sitting at Eagles Fare, the restaurant at the Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens in Roodepoort. The sky is African, wide and blue, the gardens look lovely and lush. Timothy echoes my own thoughts when he says, “Sitting here we could be anywhere – being at one with nature, shutting out the noises of the city.”

Timothy began visiting the gardens in the early 2000s when it was still called the Witwatersrand Botanical Gardens. The Soweto-born performer had studied in the United States for five years before returning in 1999. He started his career in this country performing in Little Shop of Horrors, and moved into Little Falls, nearby. “We had family and friends who told us about this place, it’s an incredible getaway from the city. At that point you couldn’t picnic inside the gardens, but it was peaceful and cheap, an affordable place to come. As a broke artist I could come and contemplate life and get away from it all!”

He continues: “We started coming with family and friends, most friends were surprised, they didn’t know where it was.” The gardens soon began hosting a series of concerts, which continues to this day. One year, Timothy and his partner Brian Heathfield decided to have a New Year’s picnic at the gardens – a different and informal way of seeing friends, as opposed to always seeing each other at work.

“We’ve done a handful of picnics now,” he says. One year, over 80 people showed up. “We come in, go left up the hill, there are family, friends, children who can go riding on the little train that operates around the gardens. People bring their drinks and food. Some friends go on walks. It’s become a fellowship.”

Other places of interest include experiencing the different landscapes in the park, seeing the bird sanctuary. “There’s a viewing deck there, I’m starting to be a birdwatcher!” says Timothy. And, of course posing next to the Witpoortjie Waterfall is a must. You can also climb to the top of the falls – take sturdy foot gear and a walking stick, the climb is strenuous – to take in the view that the resident Verreaux’s eagles. “They are a big attraction,” says Timothy, “the eagles have been here since the 1940s.” The hatching of the chicks is an event, and the latest, says Timothy, has just been named Ayanda and there is even a webcam you can tune into and watch the eagles, Timothy tells me.

What is special too about the gardens is that even when it’s full, they are big enough not to feel packed, as so many other parks tend to, Timothy comments. “The huge thing too is the security,” he says, “you feel secure, you pay an entrance fee, the gardens are well taken care of. I’d say they are one the best parks in the country. It’s a respite from the madness of Johannesburg.”

Another respite, and special place, is home in Little Falls, with his partner, a place where he likes to “clock out”, watching sport, Formula 1, and cricket. And he describes Little Falls as a sanctuary of sorts.

Timothy is also a brand ambassador for 67 Blankets for Nelson Mandela Day and is pretty handy with the knitting needles, having knitted a variety of blankets for the projects. He also took part in the “67 Blankets” picnic knitathon at the Gardens in 2016.

Timothy muses that living in Gauteng means nature is on our doorstep, from the Magaliesberg for example, where another special place beckons him, Mountain Sanctuary, a delightfully rustic nature reserve there, which is also affordable and quiet. “It doesn’t cost an arm and a leg. There are camping areas, you can braai. Some of the chalets

are on stilts and it's lovely to be in nature." He also mentions his discovery of the Dutch cheese farm, Maropeng and the Cradle of Humankind, saying, "These are lovely, simple experiences."

And they are – as is strolling through the Gardens with Timothy, taking in the sky, the waterfall, finding yourself calming down, becoming gentle and unhurried, taking a look at the plants, the information boards telling us what we are looking at – enjoying this lovely, simple experience.