

BIT OF CHAUVINISM, LOTS OF CLASS IN 'AFRIKAAPS'

Scintillating show with little propaganda

AFRIKAAPS. Directed by Catherine Henegan, with Jitsvinger (Quintin Goliath), Kyle Shepherd, Emile Jansen, Blaq Pearl (Janine van Rooi), Monox (Moenier Adams), Shane Cooper and Bliksemstraal (Charl van der Westhuisen). At the Baxter Theatre until April 23. **TYRONE AUGUST** reviews.

THE THEATRE production *Afrikaaps* is breathtaking in its scope and ambition. It seeks to retell the story of the origin and evolution of Afrikaans, and tries to do so through a daring mixture of poetry, music, film, narration, even dance.

It is an audacious project. But despite the breadth of its vision, it is spectacularly successful.

This is in no small measure due to the talents of the seven-member ensemble. It is they who bring to life an idea that, in less capable hands, may have become weighed down by its own sense of self-importance.

Afrikaaps brings together some of the most dynamic artists in the Cape: the musical talents of Kyle Shepherd and Shane Cooper; the voices of Blaq Pearl and Monox; the word skills of Jitsvinger (both written and oral), and the performing talents of Emile Jansen and Bliksemstraal.

Yet, in quite extraordinary fashion, they weave effortlessly in and out of the different performing arts employed in *Afrikaaps*.

They are obviously comfortable in a wide range of fields.

What also makes the production a pleasure to behold is that the ensemble works together so well. There is no grandstanding; they clearly take great delight in each other's performance, an indication both of their maturity as artists and of their unity of purpose: to reclaim part of Afrikaans.

It would be unfair to single out any of them for particular attention. But perhaps it would be even more unfair not to mention the imposing stage presence of Jitsvinger; the emotion-laden voice of Monox and the in-your-face spunkiness of Blaq Pearl.

Shepherd, a composer and pianist, also deserves much credit for his musical direction (the music



DARING: Blaq Pearl, Jitsvinger and Kyle Shepherd appear in *Afrikaaps*, at the Baxter until April 23.

incorporates a range of styles, from hip hop to jazz to ghoema). The role of music is particularly important in *Afrikaaps*, as there is no conventional narrative structure.

Yet it all holds together: The video material, for which Dylan Valley was responsible, also plays a key role in this regard, and provides a rich yet non-intrusive social and geographical context.

Those spaces that could, inevitably, not be reached by music and visual imagery were filled by illuminating interviews with language expert Professor Neville Alexander and Cape slavery historian Patric Tariq Mellet.

The result is an important

contribution to revealing how Afrikaans has developed during the past three or four centuries, and an acknowledgement of those whose role in that process is usually downplayed or even ignored.

All good and well. However, there were some elements in *Afrikaaps* that left a mild sense of disquiet. An ethnic chauvinism appeared to rear its head every now and again (for instance, in the song *Kom, Khoisan, kry terug jou land*).

There also appeared to be a call for official recognition of the localised version of Afrikaans.

This may sound appealing, but it can, in fact, be counterproductive and even divisive.

Surely the main function of language is to enable communication between as many people as possible?

But that is a debate for another day. *Afrikaaps* succeeds admirably in its main intention – to acknowledge the role of those usually overlooked in conventional accounts of the history of Afrikaans, and to celebrate the diverse influences that helped to shape it.

This is serious stuff. Yet *Afrikaaps* is not crudely propagandistic. Even though it takes on a weighty subject, it does so with a lightness of touch.

Besides the music and the performances, much thought obviously also went into technical aspects of

the production such as lighting and stage design.

In this regard, Jantje Geldof's contribution is outstanding, and adds considerably to the emotive power of the production.

Director Catherine Henegan is the invisible hand behind it all. Not only was the production her idea, but she also did much of the spade-work such as fundraising and assembling the team that put together *Afrikaaps*.

The result is a fitting tribute to her courage and vision.

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