

THE CHANGE IS IN YOUR POCKET

# THE BIG ISSUE

WIN Baxter  
Theatre  
tickets

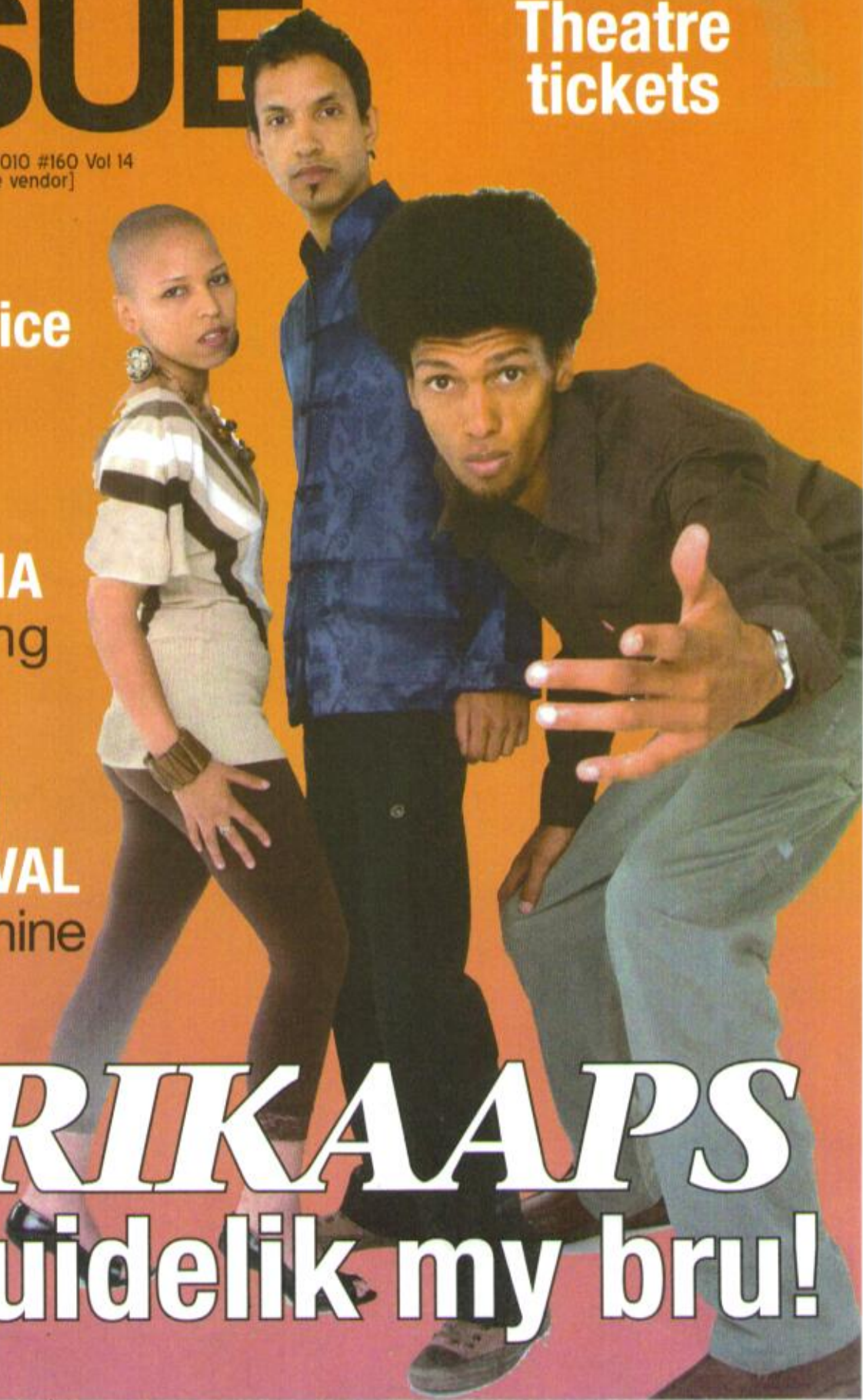
SOUTH AFRICA 19 Mar – 9 Apr 2010 #160 Vol 14  
Only R14 [R7 goes to the vendor]

Meet the voice  
behind ZA  
News

HOMOPHOBIA  
Africa's rising  
shame

CAPE TOWN  
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Local acts shine

**AFRIKAAPS**  
dis duidelik my bru!



# AFRIKAAPS — IS JA!

Bliksemstraat

Emile Jansen

Moener Adams

Tannemangam



By Yazeed Kamaldien

**T**he strangest misrepresentations sometimes appear in newspapers. A recent case study happened on the pages of a respectable national weekly lament. An article about Afrikaans hip-hop music portrayed only newbie white guys as the face of this sub-genre that has existed in Cape Town since the 1980s. Coloured artists who have been doing Afrikaans hip-hop since then only got a forgettable one-line mention.

The article also took a stance that Afrikaans hip-hop was experiencing some new wave of cool protagonists—and they're all white and from Cape Town's northern suburbs, or at least pretend to be (think internet sensation *Die Antwoord* and Jack Parow's rapper persona Zander Tyler). It had that "boerewors curtain" vibe which is so overplayed that you'd imagine Bellville was a superbly spectacular suburb on another planet. And this portrayal reinforced, albeit indirectly, the idea that Afrikaans is supposedly the

language of whites only.

It's these public distortions that experimental theatre-piece *Afrikaaps* wants to counter. This show features a strong cast of young but established Cape Town musicians, poets, dancers and composers, who want to highlight and take pride in the fact that Afrikaans is also the mother tongue of people who are not white.

Of course, the title's geographical connotation is a play on words referring to the unique way in which Cape Town's coloured residents express themselves in a language that merges Afrikaans with English and colloquialisms from all over. It's Afrikaans as it's only spoken *innie Kaap*. And, while formal or "hoë Afrikaans" is widely viewed as a stagnant language, "gam taal" or "kombuis Afrikaans", as it is called, is a constantly evolving dialect that has no boundaries.

*Afrikaaps* director Catherine Henegan says she and her ensemble (calling themselves "Die Argitekbeke" meaning "architect mouths") are tackling the story of a contested

language—without politically correct pretence.

"This production will deconstruct the Afrikaans identity. When we realise that Afrikaans is spoken by a lot of different people it will become a unifying language," says Henegan.

In creating *Afrikaaps*, Henegan worked with academics to trace the history of the language back to the mid-1600s when it was formed as a verbal bridge between Khoi-San locals, slaves imported from Java—now part of modern-day Indonesia—and Dutch colonial settlers.

"Afrikaans is a Creole language that evolved in the first years of colonialism," says Henegan. "The first written Afrikaans can be traced to the 1700s. It was passages from the Qur'an transcribed in phonetic Afrikaans. It's written in Arabic script but it's Afrikaans."

She adds that the first school established where Afrikaans was taught was at 37 Dorp Street, Bo-Kaap—a telling address: "It was a madressa. Islamic scholars (mainly from Java and also Turkey) were able to read and write

Blaq Pearl



Jitsvinger



kyle Sheperd



and their language was Afrikaans."

So when did Afrikaans become, well, so white?

"By 1875 it had already existed for 200 years and there was an establishment of white Dutch descendants who wanted to take this language to establish themselves as the white 'volk' in South Africa," explains Henegan.

"Some of them resisted this idea because they saw Afrikaans as a language for the lower classes. They wanted to use Dutch as they had been doing in churches and official writing. But in the early 1900s the Dutch settlers made Afrikaans their official language of governance."

Fast forward to the 1960s when Afrikaans had become the language and symbol of oppression by the apartheid government, which wanted to enforce it as the medium of education in all public schools. Protests ensued in townships. Police murdered black students. The bloodstained language would remain

tainted as one to resist.

But Henegan and her musical ensemble want to debunk that negative connotation too, a feat they aim to pull off by laying claim to Afrikaans and embracing it as their mother tongue.

**"Afrikaans belongs to all who speak it."  
— Jitsvinger.**

The *Afrikaaps* musicians all speak the hybrid "Afrikaaps" which, they told *The Big Issue*, doesn't always go down well in some spaces.

These explorations have all been included in the script, which Henegan chose not to write herself. Her basic premise was simply to "work with poets, musicians and new media" in a theatre and let them create the script. The result is live performances of original fusion music merged with video and storytelling.

It's also new ground for the performers, who have interrogated their historical links to the *taal* to create this unique production.

"We're all still burdened with thinking that Afrikaans is a white man's language but it's not. We're setting out to prove this," says Henegan.

"Old white 'tannies' mustn't stay away from this show because they also need to understand Afrikaans better," she adds. "It's also their language."

*Afrikaaps* debuts at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK) in Oudtshoorn in early April. It then runs at the Baxter Theatre in Rondebosch from April 7 to 23. **THE**

## WIN!

Five lucky *Big Issue* readers will each win a pair of tickets for *Afrikaaps* on April 7th. All you have to do to win is email the name of the director of *Afrikaaps* to [magazine@bigissue.org.za](mailto:magazine@bigissue.org.za) with "Afrikaaps reader giveaway" in the subject line. Please include your full name and contact number in the entry.

# TAKING BACK THE TAAL

The motley crew making up “Die Argitekbeke” had to delve deep into their history and personal experiences to create *Afrikaaps*. The Big Issue went backstage to get their take on the production and what it means to them:

**Quintin Goliath aka “Jitsvinger”: hip-hop poet and performer**

“We won’t be able to tell the whole story (of Afrikaans) and it’s not a romanticised version. It’s part of a bigger story. We’re just giving more insight into who we are and what our identity is... There are facts that alienate white Afrikaners from the language and that’s the challenge. But you can’t argue with the facts. Afrikaans belongs to all who speak it. This idea takes us out of the boxes and makes us one. We are a mixed people and we are here.”

**Kyle Shepherd: musical director**

“We’re all solo artists who know how music-making works. We’re carving a script from a blank canvas. We’re creating different angles through text, music and video to tell this story. We’re emancipating a language from what has enslaved it. Anyone who speaks Afrikaans should perhaps speak it with a new pride.”

**Shane Cooper: composer**

“We’ll have samples of the Khoi-San mouth-bow and field recordings. The music has taken shape in an organic way. The artists are doing research and we’re looking at how we can write a song about it. This is an eye-opener that’s breaking stereotypes. We’re going to break the mould of a very misunderstood language.”

**Emile Jansen: hip-hop MC and founder of Black Noise**

“Many kids on the Cape Flats feel disenfranchised by language. They dream and their future is in ‘gam-taal’. But this is scoffed at. It’s never taken seriously. This made me realise that people treat coloureds like they are of less value because of the way that they speak. They’re asked to speak English when this is their language. That makes the kids feel inferior. They don’t leave the Cape Flats because they feel this language doesn’t make them feel good somewhere else. Yet it should be everywhere.”

**Jethro Louw aka “Tannemangam”: Khoi-San poet**

“I am from Beaufort West and am part of the Afrikaans of the Cape. This is the first production of such a revolutionary nature. We can express ourselves. We can all talk together as one tongue. We are part of Afrikaans. We share in the energy of it and add to it.”

**Janine van Rooy aka “Blaq Pearl”: singer and poet**

“This show isn’t just about the way we speak but also how we feel about how we speak. If the stereotype is that when we speak this way then it’s a joke, then that’s how people will feel. We need to rise above

that stereotype. You get a superior Afrikaans that’s on the news. I’m saying recognise that my Afrikaans is also here. It’s time for people to stand up and be proud of what they are.”

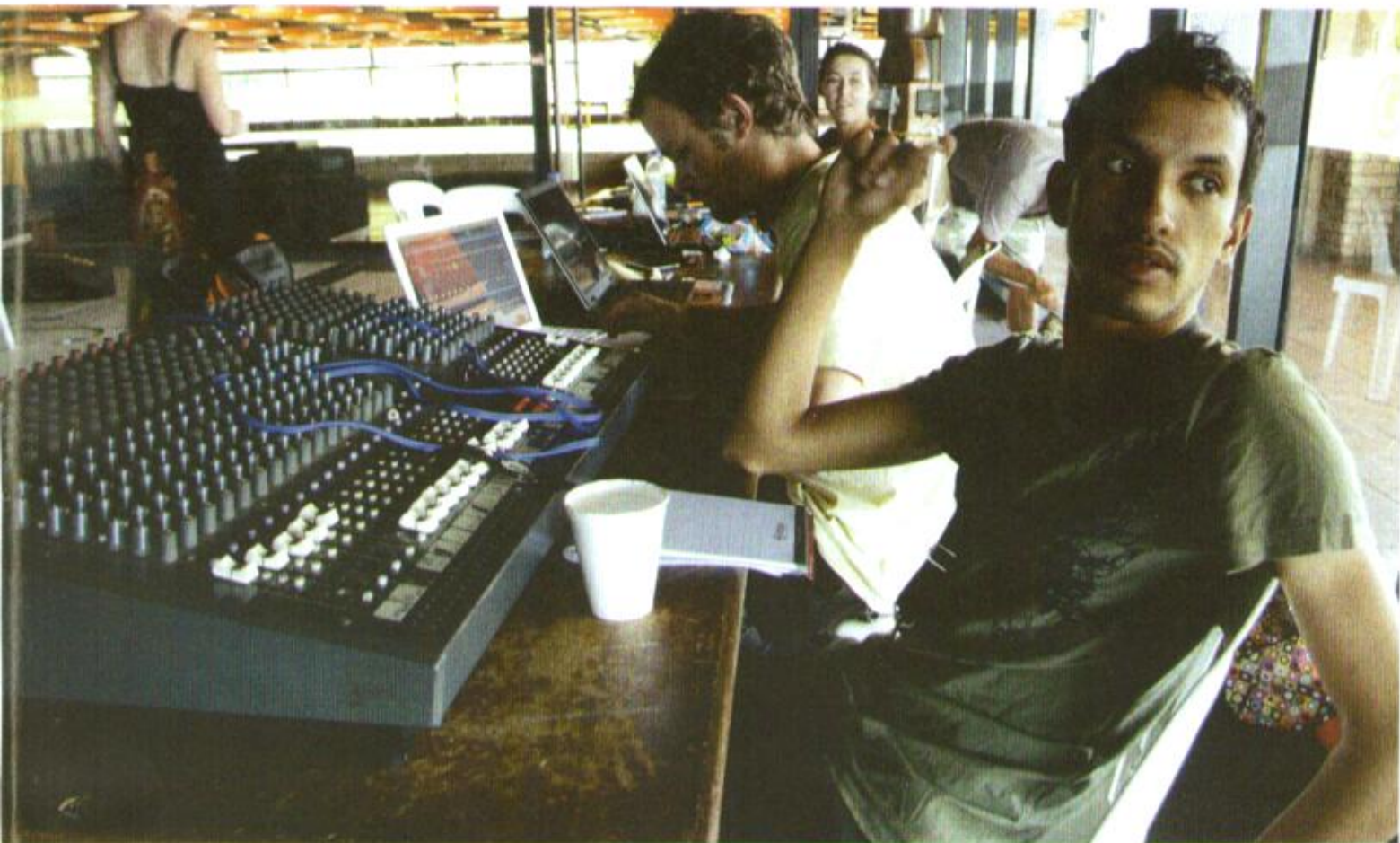
**Moenier Adams: Cape Malay Choir singer and composer**

“The highlight was tracing back the ‘ghoema’ songs to the facts. The songs that we’re singing are a history that carries stories. There’s a whole lot of information and events that we’re finding out about and how it all contributed to Afrikaans. To tell this story to other young people who are scared of talking the way they do is liberating... I was born in Mitchell’s Plain and grew up there. I’ve always wanted to speak my Afrikaans. But people look at you like you’re a *skollie* if you speak this way. People on the Cape Flats are shy of speaking ‘gam-taal’ but it’s part of Afrikaans. In this show we’re using music as a symbol for how Afrikaans was fused.”

**Charl van der Westhuizen aka “Bliksemstraal”: Rastafarian B-Boy and singer**

“I’m one of the Khoi-San and we must be acknowledged for the role we played in forming Afrikaans. Language has a spiritual side to it because it comes from our ancestors. This language evolves everyday. We could have a conversation and create words, sentences and ways of talking right now.”

YOU



Hard at work (above) musical director Kyle Sheperd and (right) Jitsvinger and Blaq Pearl  
Photographs by Yazeed Kamaldien

## AFRIKAAPS/ENGLISH DICTIONARY:

**Is ook so ja:** It's like that

**Sjambok bekke:** Mouths that can beat you/  
cut you down

**Kap aan:** Keep going

**Wild op skuld:** Bragging with your goods  
bought on credit

**Koppel die lyne:** Spread the word

**Raak wys:** Take note

**Duidelik:** It's all good / OK

**Aweh my bru:** Hey man

**Is ja:** I agree

## SPECIAL READER OFFER

The Big Issue is selling 200 Afrikaaps tickets for the discounted price of R85 per ticket (normal ticket prices are up to R120). The tickets are valid for the April 8th show only. To book your ticket, email: [marketing@bigissue.org.za](mailto:marketing@bigissue.org.za)

Hurry, tickets are selling fast!

