

LISTINGS



The Afrikaaps production that boasts impressive performances from a roll-call of Cape Flats hip-hop heroes.

Photo: Aryan Kaganof

Evolution of Afrikaans

Anyone seeking an answer to what might've fuelled white English rappers Die Antwoord's "zef" appropriation of Cape Flats Afrikaans hip-hop culture should find **Afrikaaps** an edifying experience. Conceived by South African-born, Netherlands-based director Catherine Henegan and playwright Aryan Kaganof, the "cutting-edge hiphopera" highlights Cape Flats Afrikaans ("Afrikaaps") as an outsider language, disenfranchised, marginalised and largely written out of history and contemporary discourse. But although Waddy Jones appropriates the language as a handy vehicle to explore his own outsider, alienated identity, *Afrikaaps* has another agenda. Rather, it seeks to rewrite the norms through which Afrikaans identity is imagined and constructed, reclaiming the indigenous cultural heritage of Cape Flats Afrikaans as a language for all who speak it by tracing the roots and evolution of Afrikaans from the 1600s to the present day.

Central to this challenge is the development of a new format, a practice of theatre that both gives form to and speaks from within a Cape Flats tradition. Set in a shape-shifting digital landscape, the multimedia show includes storytelling, poetry, music and video, employing hip-hop glitches, scratches, beats and rhymes to time travel through history, while celebrating traditional Cape musical idioms including goema, Kaapse Klopse and jazz. Much like the Cape Afrikaans language itself, the production is an uneasy marriage. Part potent Brechtian didactic musical theatre, part unapologetic revisionist hip-hop history lesson and part situation comedy, it's also 100% high school musical.

The production boasts impressive performances from a rollcall of Cape Flats' hip-hop heroes including *Argitekbeke* (MCs) Jitsvinger, Emile Jansen, Moenier Adams, Bliksemstraal and Blaq Pearl. Their ghetto-fabulous rap carnival is augmented by an impressionistic collage of goema groove deconstructions and minimalist re-imaginings of Afrikaans *volksliedjies* and Muslim calls to prayer, courtesy of Sama-nominated jazz pianist Kyle Shepherd and hot young bassist Shane Cooper.

The meta-narrative is less successful. Besides the occasionally humorous history lessons, the tendency is towards simplistic sloganeering, rather than any more radical Situationist intervention. Playing to the largely Cape Flats audience *ingesmokkel* into the Baxter, the danger here is one of preaching to the converted. But then again, *Afrikaaps* doesn't purport to speak any "high art" sales pitch. As a Creole language born in the back rooms of generations of taboo master-slave liaisons, Cape Afrikaans has pretty much been written out of official history, erased from South Africa's collective consciousness and left to germinate in ghetto culture. And it's this culture that *Afrikaaps* celebrates. As video-producer Dylan Valley reminds us: "We need to recognise Afrikaans as part of the heritage of all South Africans, and not only of one particular racial group. Together we can make Afrikaans a language of liberation!" Starts at 8pm. Admission is R50 to R120. Book at Computicket. — Miles Keylock

At the Baxter Theatre until April 23