

# Language of the oppressor

**T**he master narrative would have us believe that Afrikaans is the evolutionary linguistic product of the Dutch settlers. Certainly, the academic understanding of Afrikaans, the official language taught not only in South Africa but also abroad, is the codified — many will argue also nationalist — project of the white Afrikaner.

A wedge was driven between the language and the identity of the majority of its speakers. There were school boycotts in the 1970s against Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor; in certain circles, it is still believed to be under threat thanks to that stain.

As David Kramer and Taliep Petersen's musical *Ghoema* some years ago set out to reclaim a Cape musical heritage largely written out of

authorised history during apartheid, **Afrikaaps** is a new theatrical edutainment fighting for the recognition of how Afrikaans developed as a Dutch creolised language among coloured speakers outside of this white hegemony.

The first written Afrikaans was as phonetic Arabic script translations of the Qur'an over 200 years ago.

The Bible was only translated into today's official Afrikaans in 1933.

The extremely talented young cast under the direction of Catherine Henegan seeking to set the record straight are hip-hop poet Jitsvinger, singer, actor and dancer Moenier Adams, singer and poet Blaq Pearl, hip-hop artist and activist Emile Jansen, rapper and break-dancer Bliksemstraal, accompanied by composer, pianist and jazz prodigy Kyle Shep-

herd and musician Shane Cooper. They make a superb ensemble.

Employing music, poetry, dance, skits, documentary and interview video footage, they get their message across in a clear and humorous way.

Henegan has dressed the show well, but the shape is problematic, without a coherent trajectory.

Ironically, although dealing with *gamtaal* and street talk, it feels oddly cerebral and emotionally disinvested.

Perhaps it's because the very good-looking cast, personable but strangely aloof, are all male, except for Pearl.

But without a doubt this show is full of rewards and should be seen. So: "Aweh my bru! Koppel die lyne" (Hey! Spread the word).

— Brent Meersman

**At the Baxter Theatre until April 23**



**Hip-hop poet Jitsvinger in a scene from Afrikaaps under the direction of Catherine Henegan. Photo: Aryan Kagano**