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'THE CORRECT RESPONSE IS TO LAUGH'

The preposterous stereotypes persist

THE MODERN AFRICAN. Written by, and starring Thoko Masikini. At the Alexander Upstairs Theatre, Monday to Saturday at 8pm from August 18 to 23. STEYN **DU TOIT** reviews.

WHICH came first, the chicken or the African? Secondly, why did the African decide to cross the road when he could clearly see that the pedestrian light was red? And finally, while leisurely strolling across that road - completely ignoring the enraged BMW driver already late for her spa facial waiting for him to pass - why didn't the African stop to fix all the potholes he clearly must have spotted along the way?

Asking these and other stereotypical questions is *The Modern* African, a one-man satire starring Thoko Masikini. In it he plays Professor Wilbert Xaba, esteemed Anglophile scholar and author of the best-selling book How Black Is Too Black? Performed as a lecture given by this ostentatious academic, the viewer is presented with what the Zambezi Times (according to Prof Xaba) purportedly called "a thorough investigation into the post-colonial identity crisis of the 21st century African".

Artificial hair integrations (weaves) involving the sewing of tracks of hair into a woman's scalp, dialects involving the swopping of "Rs" with "Ls" - Robert becomes Lobert, for instance, and showing a blatant disregard for other people's personal spaces by talking at the top of their voices in taxis, everything is fair game in Prof Xaba's book. A

modern version of a medieval court the University of Pretoria's blackjester, he's able to make several sobering observations about our society through his comedic misdirection.

While white audience members might find themselves unsure how to respond to hearing a black performer joke of how Africans like fried chicken, sport large derrieres or struggle with the concept of democracy, be assured that the correct response here is to laugh. Both at the preposterous stereotypes regarding Africans that continues to persist in our society as well as over recognising those stereotypical views you yourself might be guilty of at times.

Describing *The Modern African* as a "TED talk dunked in a glass of Chardonnay and mixed in with a really strong Vicodin", Masikini further breaks down the fourth wall by not dimming the house lights for the first part of the performance. Appearing on stage clutching a glass of wine, he begins by directly engaging with viewers through referencing current events - such as

People are so comfortable with illusions that the truth has somehow lost its appeal

face incident or The Rocky Horror Show's return to Cape Town - in order to dispel the notion that this is a traditional theatrical experience. No one sits in the dark and there is no separation between viewer and performer. Everyone is part of the show.

"I wanted to make fun of the perceptions people have had about me over the years. Perceptions like I'm elitist. I'm a coconut. Or that my parents are billionaires in Malawi,' savs the Malawian-born Masikini when asked what inspired the production. A former UCT graduate who previously made notable appearances in The Colonel Bird and An Absolute Turkey under the direction of Chris Weare, he adds that The Modern African is about asking questions. "I think people are so comfortable with illusions that the truth somehow has lost its appeal and has become something boring. Frightening. A source of conflict."

He is a delightful, witty young actor. From the way he pours himself a cup of tea to the way he shouts, "Catherine, next slide!" each time his character moves on to a new topic, there is an intelligence and controlled campness to his performance that has him win over viewers from the moment he steps on to stage. With Prof Xaba Masikini has created a character with longevity and with the potential to reach beyond traditional theatre's boundaries. I can easily see him appearing as one of the acts at the next Cape Town Comedy Festival, for instance, or even



FUNNY: Thoko Masikini as Professor Wilbert Xaba in The Modern African.

presenting a more focused version of the show as part of an actual TED talk event.

As a resourceful writer with a knack for social observation, it would be great to also hear in future what Masikini has to say about the other elephants in the South

African room. White privilege. Structural apartheid. Cultural misappropriation.

This could be the beginning of a very successful (and necessary) theatre franchise revolving around Prof Xaba's "research".

An exaggerated, tongue-in-cheek

and thoroughly entertaining prowork that awaits.

• Tickets are R80 to R90. To book, see www.alexanderbar.co.za or call 021 300 1652

duction, it's inspiring to see The Modern African end off by rolling up its sleeves in preparation for the

TURNING THE KEYS: Pianist Bokani Dyer will be the guest at the next Jazz in the Native Yards gig.

Concert gets it right, jazzy in our backyards

Arts writer

THANKS to the growing popularity of the Jazz in the Native Yards concert series, NY Arts has now added for jazz lovers.

At 3pm this Sunday, the young trumpeter Mandla Mlangeni with his TRC (Tune Recreation Committee) - Keenan Ahrends on guitar, Nicholas Williams on bass guitar, Clement Benny on drums and guest artist Bokani Dyer on piano – will kick off the first Sunday jazz chill at the SKY Lounge 6, Ny 6 Gugulethu

Formed last year, Jazz in the economic reasons. *Native Yards* is an initiative of Native Yard Arts (NY Arts), a township-based arts organisation that offers an underground scene for live music in the welcoming ambience of township bars, taverns, restaurants and even backyards.

"The Native Yards is a situation that South African communities find themselves in after almost 70 years of separate development.

(behind the Gugulethu Mall). In In 20 years of democracy, many who keeping with the spirit of the have been brought up and schooled month, the gig will pay tribute to in the townships haven't been able to get out, mainly because of the

> "The prospects for formances encourage confidence, focus and purposefulness through art," says Koko "Cokes" Kalashe, one of the co-founders.

While live music is the initial platform, says co-founder Luvuyo Phillip Kakaza, NY Arts also incorporates other artistic genres such as visual arts, theatre and dance,

with mini-festivals planned for later in the year that will showcase all artistic expressions

Apart from performance and exhibitions, workshops in stage craft sound engineering and lighting are planned. NY Arts believes that the arts offer a leverage for economic growth in disadvantaged communities.

• Tickets for Sunday's gig are R50. There is a return park-and-ride service from Observatory. To book a ride, SMS 078 986 7344. For more information, follow Jazz in the Native Yards

on Facebook.

what's on

Jeou Ma Se Comedy

Gareth Woods will headline at Jou Ma Se Comedy Club at the V&A Waterfront today, tomorrow and Saturday. He'll be joined on stage by Carl Webber, Khanyiso Kenga, Mel Jones, Kurt Schoonraad and Stuart Cairns. Jou Ma Se Comedy Vibes on Sunday will feature Jarrad and the Pedestrians. Comedy tickets are R95, Vibes tickets are R120. Call 021 418 8880.

Songwriters' finals

The 19th annual Barleycorn Songwriters' Competition Finals will be held on Monday, 8pm at Villager FC in Lansdowne Road, with Prizes in excess of R 24 000. Finalists include Kathryn Swain, Michelle Coetzee, Andrew Janisch, Karyn Stuart, Alicia Kotze, Amber Liadan-Parr, Otto Bam, Jenny Eaves, Jono Tait and Tova Luck. Seats are unreserved, so arrive early. See www.barleycorn.org.za for more.

Electro swing party

Don't miss the next Bootleggers Electro Swing Party at The River Club in Observatory on August 23 at 8pm. DJs Silver and Django will play electro swing, vintage big band, jazz, swing, 50s rock 'n' roll, rockabilly, nu' swing, ghetto funk, Balkan and gypsy swing. There will be prizes for best dressed. Tickets are R40 presold, or R60 at the door, See www.nomadtickets.co.za to book.

Welsh folk

The Cape Welsh Choir will hold a fund-raising performance at Pinelands Presbyterian Church in St Stephen's Road on August 29 at 7.30pm. The choir's repertoire ranges from traditional Welsh folk to contemporary pieces. Tickets are R65 and include refreshments. To book, call 021 531 8408.

Rock with Day

Singer and songwriter Louise Day will perform her blend of folk and rock at Villa Pascal in Durbanville on September 19 at 7.30pm. After a long stint in the US, she is back in South Africa and recording her third album. Tickets are R100. See www.villapascal.co.za or call 021 975 2566.

'Persephone's Garden'

A solo exhibition of oil paintings by Judy Woodborne Persephone's Garden will show at The Cape Gallery until September 27. The exhibition is an extension of a series of paintings inspired by the elements earth, fire, air and water. To Woodborne the paintings represent a visual meditation. Call 021 423 5309.

'No Fixed Abode'

An exhibition of work curated by Candice Allison, No Fixed Abode, will show at The New Church Museum until November 1. It features work by Igshaan Adams, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Haroon Gunn-Salie, Moshekwa Langa, Athi-Patra Ruga and Sue Williamson. See www.thenewchurch.co.for.more



DUE to overwhelming demand the Fugard Theatre has announced five additional performances of The Shadow of The Hummingbird, that stars Athol Fugard himself and introduces Marviantos Baker, from August 27 to 30.

Arts writer

Fugard takes on the role of Oupa, a retired South African teacher living in self-imposed exile in Southern California, and is joined onstage by Baker, playing his grandson, Boba. During the course of one afternoon spent together, Oupa and Boba leap across a generational divide to teach and be taught.

Inspired by Fugard's relationship with his own grandson, Gavyn, this intimate play has deep autobiographical

"People have begun to ask in the past couple of years whether my storytelling has shifted from the political to the personal," Fugard mused. "My answer has always been - once you reach 80, the time has arrived for a little bit of housecleaning. After all, as Oupa says at the start of the play, 'The final landscape is within.'"

• Tickets are R110 to R150, Call 021 461 4554.



CALEDON ST, CNR BUITENKANT ST. DISTRICT 6

