

## SLOW DOWN, MY TEACHER

## A controversial old song turns into an exciting new play

Musician Joseph Kamaru's 1970s Kikuyu hit single, *Ndari ya Mwalimu (The Teacher's Girlfriend)*, angered many teachers countrywide, and now, it has inspired a new original play.

JPR Ochieng'-Odera's *Slow Down My Teacher, You've Gone Too Far*, opens today at the French Cultural and Cooperation Centre auditorium, Nairobi. Directed by the highly respected Jacob Otieno, it features Doreen Rukaria, Zippy Kimundu and Rayana Githae, who play alongside "teacher" Gilbert Lukalia as his girlfriends. Others on the cast are Awino Okech and Rebecca Balongo. The production fuses the energies of JPR's ProPerArt and Otieno's Tufani Arts Ensemble.

"We are planning to pool a whole variety of theatrical skills ranging from mime, song and dance to audio-visual techniques," Otieno says.

The play tackles a number of culturally sensitive issues on youth and sexuality, and how they relate to the larger concerns, such as making responsible choices.

The story traces the development of a girl who undergoes several personality shifts — the price of blossoming while still in primary school. Exposed to destructive forces in her adolescent years, she develops into early womanhood in college, all the while healing and learning how to survive in a very inequitable world.

Elsewhere, the Kenyatta University Cultural Week starts today at the campus sports ground. There will be daily performances expected to attract more than 10,000 people.

The opening ceremony will be held on Tuesday at the Cultural Village from 1 pm. The Grand Finale is to be held at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre on September 22.

— ANTHONY NJAGI



Photo/Anthony Njagi

Gilbert Lukalia (Teacher) and Rayana Githae (Young Juliet) in *Slow Down My Teacher, You've Gone Too Far*

George Chomba | Artistic Space

## Singing the songs of other people

Last week, Nancy Ngina asserted that true art comes from the heart. I would agree with this bit of her argument and proceed to add that this "true art" must of necessity come from home. The artist's experiences or the experiences of others from the society he or she comes from should guide the creation of art.

At a workshop on defining a path towards professionalism in Kenyan theatre last month, facilitators who had toured Israel shared their experiences using the writings of Israeli writer Hanoch Levin, as a pillar around which the discussion was tethered. There were video shows and performances of his poems and extracts from his plays such as *Murder, You and Me and the Next War*, and *The Foundation Stone*. In the evening, there was a local production of Levin's play, *The Labour of Living*.

The author tackled thematic concerns on Israel and Palestine, and the conflict between the peoples of the two nations. Their relationships, prejudices, attitudes, fears, dreams and hopes are some of the obvious themes in his works. The dramatic effect in both content and form is quite effective. There can be no doubt that Hanoch Levin talks to his people through his work.

Back home, there is no clear understanding of what exactly is Kenyan theatre. Is it simply theatrical pieces performed by Kenyan artistes or Kenyan theatrical pieces performed by Kenyan artistes? When groups put up plays by foreign writers as a policy, can they be said to be contributing towards building Kenyan theatre?

These questions arose in this workshop aimed at the directors of various city theatre groups. The directors' response was that man must eat. That local scripts will hardly give you a sizeable audience and that the audiences who patronise their shows are unwilling to accept any other diet on the menu. Furthermore, they added, local scripts have huge casts that cripple their ability to make profit. That the only local scripts likely to earn you a decent income are the ones sponsored by NGOs which go under the banner of community theatre.

I could not disagree more. There are groups that have put up locally produced plays and their artistes make a decent living out of it.

That a performing artiste in Kenya cannot earn a living with performing works by local writers is pure bunkum, a lazy and colonial attitude.

Those who keenly followed Theatre Workshop Productions' Okoth K'Obonyo playwriting competition will bear witness to the fact that the hundreds of entries from young writers were a clear display of the bountiful talent in this nation.

We shall recall the apartheid times when we cried with South Africa and Kenyan theatres were alive with plays by Athol Fugard.

Maybe it is time now we cried for ourselves.

## Regional band moves west with the night

By AMOS NGAIRA

Members of the Nairobi-based La Fekonya International Band play at the Kimwa Grand Hotel for two shows in the lake side town.

It will be the first time the group — with members from Tanzania, Congo and Kenya — will be performing outside Nairobi. It has been predominantly a studio band, recognised for its debut CD, *Omba Mola*.

Meanwhile singer Albert Gacheru is set to revive live performances with a cassette launch at the Roasters Inn, Thika Road, next Thursday.

Gacheru, who says he last performed in 1995, will be launching his new cassette, *Mariru Mix*, and re-launch his group, Wamaitu Stars.

## Where to catch the action this weekend

**NAIROBI** — Caesars Club, Kagostar Plaza, Off Langata Road: Lots of entertainment this weekend. Panafric Hotel, Kenyatta Avenue: Presents *Golden Oldies* with Them Mushrooms on Saturday Night. Hotel Ambassador: 'Retired General' Wilson Kimama performs at 6 pm and 2 pm every Thursday and Saturday, respectively. Ribs Inn, Likoni Road. Great music and Nyama Choma all weekend. Dream Village Restaurant: Lesasa Joker and Bilenge Musica Du Congo to rock you all weekend. Club Biggie, Umoja: Adwera Okello and Heka Heka International on stage all weekend. Steps the Pub, Tom Mboya Street-Accra Road Junction: Presents the best of Soul and Lingala tonight. Roasters Inn, Thika Road: One man guitarist Wamuthoni, Bana Roasters Original, Aluta dancers and Forvics band on stage throughout the

weekend. Spiders Pub, Tom Mboya Street: Its Jam Party tonight with the best of hip-hop and Lingala.

**KISUMU** — Hillbrow Centre: Benga group Orch Victoria All Stars of the late Ochieng Nelly on stage this week. Junction Inn: Tom Kodiyo's Metro Dumbé Dumbé 200 (Ngoma Kubwa) on stage this weekend with new and golden hits. Apoc Complex, Nyamasaria: Orch Apoc Super Stars on stage with *Zilizopendwa*, Kiswahili and Lingala. Donna Club, Kondele: Orch Super Heka Heka of the *Malo Malo* hit song on stage all weekend.

**MOMBASA** — Salambo Night Club: Dance to the best of disco music all weekend.

**KITENGELA** — Pinto Dream Club: Full Moon Sound to rock you all weekend. Bayete Africa on Sunday.

**ELDORET** — Kutana Club: Sammy Kibushi with Bana Kutana Orchestra to rock you.

**AWENDO** — Skyways Motel: Benga maestro Osito Kalle of *Asembo Piny Maber* fame performs tonight.

**NYERI** — Central Hotel: Tonight enjoy the Sensational *Zilizopendwa*, Kikuyu and English lyrics by one man-guitar Ras Kinyua. Family shows on Sunday.

**MIGORI** — The Hotel Millennium 2000: Watch Nyamolo traditional dancers live tonight and Saturday. Famous Victoria 'B' Kings of the late Collela Mazee performs on Sunday and Monday. Gilly Hotel: Hosts a Boogie Night with *Zilizopendwa*, Benga and Lingala music.

**KERICHO** — Midwest Hotel (Club 175): DJ Kibu to rock you with the best of disco music.

**SIAYA** — Alifrose Bar and Restaurant: Extra Solar Africa band on stage all weekend.

**Any reason to delay getting home**

If you're out there on the road with the main man Robert Warobl on the Rush Hour, from 4pm to 7pm weekdays. Non stop funk and facts so you might as well go on driving till you get your fill of the Sound of the City.

96.4 THE SOUND OF THE CITY