

# Musical theatre that is true to life

Review: *Masote's Dream*  
Siphokazi Zama  
Cue student reporter

**T**his show is good: but don't trust me, trust the man himself. Shortly after the South African premier of *Masote's Dream*, Matlhaela Michael Masote, on whose life this musical is based, wept, saying the play reminded him of how far he – and we as a nation – had come.

*Masote's Dream* is based on the life story of Masote, a world-acclaimed violinist who under the apartheid government was refused entry into any higher education institutions. He went into exile, studied music in London, and later returned to found the first South African black youth orchestra – the Soweto Youth Orchestra, now the Soweto Symphony Orchestra.

The musical theatre piece starts with a family having their evening meal with their son sitting on the floor. They make a simple musical melody using just their cutlery and beautiful voices. From the moment you first hear University of the Free State student Boitumelo Ntantiso's voice, you know you're in for a treat: she's a pure, strong soprano that doesn't falter no matter how high the notes.

The first five sets are devoid of dialogue, dominated by peaceful emotive music. Dagmar Slagmolen, the writer and director of *Masote's Dream* says she did this on purpose. "I wanted the audience

to get into the music. Besides, music tells you so much more than words can. It's a lot more nuanced and you can feel it."

When the music stops, all you hear is the sound of destruction and walls falling. A newsreader tells us this is the moment when people were forced out of their homes in Sophiatown, where Masote originally lived with his family.

Enter the enormous policeman George, displacing the rest of the characters by his sheer size and oppressive presence on stage. The policeman makes for an apt depiction of the manner in which the apartheid regime dominated all aspects of daily life, show by constantly searching Masote's violin case or forcing him to play *Sarie Marais* for the white cops.

The quality of the music is evident of the hard work put in by musical director Kutlwano Masote. Each scene relies on a unique score. The chorus in the final scene does justice to Masote's translation of the *Messiah*.

This Dutch co-production skilfully portrays the nuances of life under apartheid without shoving it in your face. For example, the use of boards reading "white person" to indicate the white characters and the categorisation of people according to race under apartheid.

The complete creative control given to Slagmolen does this celebration of Masote's life justice.

*Transnet Great Hall,  
today, 2pm and 8pm*