

The year's best on stage

PETER TROMP

YEAR-END lists are usually a tricky business. Some or other favourite is bound to be overlooked, so no list can be complete. Here are some of the most engaging and entertaining productions that have been staged throughout the year.

What is beyond doubt is that 2007 was an interesting year for local theatre. The diversity in productions has been astonishing.

This is especially significant if one takes into account how local arts still struggle with funding. This shows once again that local theatre is as vibrant as ever

SHIRLEY GOODNESS AND MERCY

Director Janice Honeyman and her vibrant cast created a great popular treasure that is likely to have struck a chord with just about every thinking/feeling person's pleasure centre.

Furnished with an almost inexhaustible quirky reservoir, the play used the comedic talents of its infinitely likeable cast to the maximum and to marvellous effect.

OLD FRIENDS

Ambitious and slightly crazy in their vision for a Simon and Garfunkel tribute show, A-list theatre stars Quanita Adams, Anton Luitingh and Jenny Stead managed to have their cake and eat it with this thematically complex tribute show.

Luitingh and Stead re-imagined Simon and Garfunkel songs from the ground up to suit their particular musical identities and, in doing so, they succeeded in paying genuine tribute to the defunct pop duo's compositions.

IVIRGIN BOY

Peter Krummeck's play was starkly lucid theatre that was also



SOULFUL: Chuma Sopotela and Bongile Mantsai as they appeared in *Karoo Moose* at the Baxter's Sanlam Studio.

deeply challenging, in certain essences even disturbing, and that explored uncompromisingly many of the elements that perplex us about our country's moral landscape.

The director never sacrificed his trademark subtle humour throughout, and that lent what could have been oppressively maudlin material in lesser hands a welcome palatable touch, without undercutting the deadly seriousness of it.

KISSED BY BREL

Geoffrey Hyland transformed the stage into the kind of environment where one's imagination could take flight, and in which dreams were easily facilitated with this show.

Along with Claire Watling, who provided a virtuoso and deeply moving performance, they paid glorious tribute to Belgian songsmith Jacques Brel.

TRUTH IN TRANSLATION

New York-based director Michael Lessac and a truly remarkable South African cast delivered a fascinating, flawed and heartfelt production that never failed to entertain, despite the heady subject matter. It also managed to show respect for and pay tribute to the true victims of the real events their artistic enterprise was based upon.

OTHELLO

Not too many artists these days are capable of balancing a love of style with true substance, but Geoffrey Hyland accomplished that again with this student production that was nothing short of a triumph. It was his best production for UCT yet, and better than most professional plays this year. Deeply enveloping and accessible, Hyland didn't skimp on the pleasures in the text, even throwing in a couple of healthy action scenes.

DIE VROU WAT HAAR MAN GEKOOK HET

Lara Bye shares with only a couple of local directors the talent of transforming the stage into a one-of-a-kind magical place. With this satire, she maintained the heightened tone of the production so expertly throughout that it put more earnest productions throughout the year to shame.

IN BRIEFS: A QUEER LITTLE MUSICAL

From the creative duo of Fred Abrahamse and Marcel Meyer, *In Briefs* is a satisfying and intricate look into the lives of several gay characters struggling with very modern issues. The play does a sterling job in depicting the characters as complex individuals, and the music is fun and memorable, too. Still showing at the Little Theatre until January 6.

KAROO MOOSE

As generous and soulful a piece of theatre as one is likely to find in any year, this is Lara Foot Newton's best work. The play never sacrificed its charm and humour, even when addressing unpleasant things about South African society.

EURAFRICA

Sarah Jane Scott and Lucy Heavens were so attuned to one another on stage that nothing in this thrill-a-minute, quirky show felt like a put-on.

It was a chaotically frenetic, yet coherent investigation into English white South African identity.

STERIEL

This powerful production challenged the apathetic state that our society has fallen into. Gideon van Eeden's play left one with plenty to ponder as it deftly sashayed between hope and outright misery.