

# The day the Civic Theatre succumbed ...

**GLYNIS O'HARA**  
Toyi-toyi in the Civic Theatre?

People have been jailed for much less in the past.

But this weekend the Civic succumbed to a delirious crowd that chanted "Siyaya", toyi-toyed like crazy and gave ANC president Nelson Mandela an emotional escort as he left the theatre.

It has to be said — it was a historic day. The first time the portals of the one-time snob theatre of Johannesburg had resonated to freedom songs and ululations and widely representative culture had been presented.

The occasion was the

opening day of the ANC's Culture and Development Conference, running for the rest of this week in the theatre during the day, while Mbongeni Ngema's *Magic At 4 am* takes to the boards at night.

Yellow, green and black drapes adorned the flagpoles outside.

Inside, huge colourful banners unfurled from the ceilings, proclaiming such messages as: "There shall be peace and friendship" and "The land shall be shared among those who work it". A banner sporting a butterfly took pride of place in the upper foyer.

In his opening address,

given courtly treatment by an enthusiastic praise poet, Mandela said: "The ANC does not own culture. Creativity has no fences, expression is free."

He added that culture should bridge chasms, be inclusive, and build dignity and pride and that freedom of expression would help create a non-racist, non-sexist, civil society.

His speech commenced with a one-minute silence for National Chairman Oliver Tambo, who died on Saturday morning.

Mandela also said South Africans had to move from protest, defiance and resistance to re-



Culture vulture ... Nelson Mandela and praise poet at the opening of the ANC's Culture and Development Conference. Hundreds of guests watched a varied programme on the opening day. The conference continues all week. (Picture: Motlalefi Mahlabe)

construction, from slogans and rhetoric to constructive programmes.

And he paid tribute to the work of artists: "During the worst years of oppression it was the arts that articulated the plight and democratic aspirations of our people."

Mandela was accompanied by one of the international guests to the conference, a member of the Minorities Commission of India and former Minister of Culture for India, Mr S Varadarajan, a dignified, greying man wearing white.

Delegates included cultural workers and leading arts personalities from around the country.

The first half of the day consisted of a rich and rewarding programme, showing just how good we can be in diversity. Entertainment ranged from poet Willie Kgotitsile to the Pact Dance Company. The musicians were Vusi Mahlasela, Johannes Kerkorrel (both great hits), Muse Afrika Muse (a Soweto chamber music ensemble). The ANC's en-

tertainment troupe the Amandla Cultural Ensemble performed a selection of traditional dance forms.

Stand-up comic Japan Pohlwana kept the flag flying for vernacular comedy and the audience loved it.

After interval, more dance took the stage, with beautifully elegant dances from the Transvaal Chinese Association and the Sangeeta Nataka Academy with Indian classical dance before the Pact Dance Company presented Susan Abraham's *Bloodsport* danced by Candice Johnstone and Melody Putu, accompanied by Andre Abrahamse (bass) and Reuben Samuels (drums).

The Johannesburg Dance Foundation performed extracts from their Outreach programme and Soweto's Rishile Dancers, a mix of impi and gumboot styles, had the audience hugely entertained. They were followed by the Amampondo traditional dancers, a solidly rural, traditional

outfit.

In the lunch-break, the transcendent voices of Imilonji kaNtu, the choir who couldn't make their stage appearance, filled the foyer of the Civic.

Yesterday, ANC Secretary-General Cyril Ramaphosa and Head Of International Affairs Thabo Mbeki were due to give addresses, as were Barbara Masekela and Wally Serote, head of the Department of Arts and Culture. Professor G T Sirayi was to present the findings of the Museums, Monuments, Archives and Heraldry Commission — one of the many hot potatoes on the agenda.

Today sees a presentation on the Language Commission, and a presentation on arts and education from the Centre for Education Policy Development.

Tomorrow, there is to be a televised debate on Performing Arts Councils, and working groups are to be convened, while on Thursday there'll be a presenta-

tion on the Development and Support of Community Arts.

Friday is to see the presentation of reports from working groups. These will cover areas like film and broadcasting, language, literacy, dance, music theatre and the visual arts.

Saturday sees a presentation by Wally Serote on State and Culture and the introduction of the Board of Trustees. The latter is seen as a board that will keep the work of the conference going. Members thus far include: author Nadine Gordimer; Professor S Bhengu, rector of the University of Fort Hare; Frank Meintjies, writer and director of community based development; Gail Mloketi, Community Relations, Eskom; Welcome Mthimkulu, deputy chairman of Cosatu in North Natal; and Professor J Gerwel, rector of the University of the Western Cape.



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