

SPLENDID SHOWCASE OF THREE PLAYS IN ONE NIGHT

From 'The Star' - April 09, 2015, 8:00 am - by NDUTA WAWERU

The Theatre Company portrayed its prowess in acting with three interesting plays in one night — Miss Brown, Berur and Long Live the Queen. The playwrights picked three different issues and explored them to the amusement and understanding of the audience. In Miss Brown, the indigenisation of top jobs in the country after independence is explored. Miss Brown is the headmistress of an all girls'-school and is busy with her work in her office when a former student and a current teacher at the school walks in to discuss her lessons. In the process she reveals a letter that will turn the fortunes of the two in unimaginable ways. Acting as Miss Brown, Silvia Cassini takes to her role like a glove. She is able to move through the different emotions — anger, denial and reluctant acceptance of how things have become. For Frida Muhindi, her character reveals a lot not only about the setting but also the general feeling of a person moving from a substitute teacher to a head of a school. It is quite insightful and hilarious to see the “perceived” fall from grace by Miss Brown as she tries to figure out what she needs to do and as she sees the transformation of her once gentle and sweet-tempered former student into an assertive no-nonsense adult.

In Berur, the aspect of female genital mutilation is explored. It is the story of Berur, a young girl who wants to be cut because that's what makes her a part of the community. Her parents do not want her to go through it, making her the butt of every joke in the community. The play also gets into the intricacies of her background by exploring her parents courtship and marriage as well as the complicated relationship between her father and her maternal grandmother. The integration of culture in the play sets it apart, and one would wish to see the whole of it as it is a work in progress. The actors, — Chebet Beryl, John Wesonga and Muhindi — donned different capes to portray different characters.

The final and central play of the night was Long Live the Queen. Set in 1953 in Karen, Nairobi, the play looked at the plight of a cook, Olando Otieno, and a farmhand, Crispin Kamau, after the death of Sir Richard Barrow's favourite and award-winning horse Long Live the Queen, which is set to earn the horse dealer, Leslie Callaghan, a good fortune. The play becomes a cat and mouse game as the cook and farmhand try to keep the secret away from Sir Barrow. Written by Jedida Oneko, the play seems simple on the surface but looks into different issues like the colonialists perception of Africans as portrayed in Leslie's (Played by Cassini) outright hatred of Africans, who she considers too subordinate to even get a greeting from her. The cast was splendid in the display of their characters. Sir Barrow (played by Nick Moon) comes off as proud, condescending, and removed from reality, characteristics Moon captures very well. For Olando (Wesonga), his loyalty to his boss, his love for his country and the promise of scholarship for his son confuses him a lot but in the end we get to see his choice, as the play ends in an interesting twist. For Crispin (Muhindi), even though he was the cause of all the fracas — he was ordered by the Mau Mau to murder the horse after an oath — he is not as visible in the play. This works as it heightens the tension that sets everyone off and at the edge of their seats.

The three productions were presented at Casual Bites café as part of the regular art series.