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# Festival lemons and laurels

SOMEONE worked out that to see all the events (about 200) the Grahamstown festival-goer would have had to sit through about 23 productions a day. Looking back, there are a few which stand out and some which were so bad they should have been "strangled at birth", as one colleague remarked.

General gripes were the low standard of technical facilities at several venues for dance, fringe and student productions, the closely packed programme and the price of tickets for student productions (R8).

Although the small town was bursting with activity and has now established itself as the venue for the National Arts Festival, attendance figures were down on last year. In 1985 about 9 500 people attended compared with 7 500 this year. This drop was attributed to economic and political pressures.

A few bombshells dropped, the most talked about being prize-winning author and lecturer Menan du Plessis's announcement that she would be giving the R4 000 "blood-soaked" Sanlam literary award money for her novel, *A State of Fear*, to the UDF. The other controversy was Pierre Pletzen's resignation from his position as manager/director of Pacofs after his new play, *The Perfect Vehicle*, written for the festival, was withdrawn by the Pacofs committee because it "lacked artistic merit".

Minutes before the opening of Napac's production of Tom Stoppard's adaptation of Slawomir Mrozek's absurdist play, *Tango*, cast members discovered that all the men's costumes had been stolen. Frantic borrowing and scratching in personal suitcases saved the night.

Commenting on the low standard of some of the fringe productions, the organizers said there was no way

## focus



● Below: Mime artist Christopher Goetsch, who played to full houses at the Grahamstown Festival fringe.

they could or would vet events in the future.

"If someone wants to stand on a street corner and sing for their supper we have no way of stopping them," one of the organizers said.

For the first time, all four performing arts councils participated and their entries were well received. Highlights of the main theatre programme were *Wild Honey* (Pact), *Zelda* (Capab), *Tales From the Pleasure Palace* (Napac Loft), *Nijinski* (Andrew Buckland) and *Somewhere on the Border* (Octagon Group — members of Pacofs).

Student productions well received were *Hello South Africa/Hello Suid-Afrika* (Stellenbosch University), *The*

*Card Index* (UCT), *The Man Who Turned to Stick* (University of Natal) and *Langs 'n Spoorweg* (University of Potchefstroom).

UCT drama students under the direction of Rudy Nadler Nir, assisted by Gideon de Wet, staged 10 one-hour playlets which proved a popular fringe attraction.

Most notable were the double bill *Woman Alone* and *One The Blue Train*, Andrew Buckland's, *Still Born*, *The Dogs*, *Lewens*, *Mud in Your Eye Mac* and *Valesa*. Some of these productions are to be staged in Cape Town.

Other fringe events which played to full houses were, *The Good Soldier Svejk* (Capab), *Beyond the Rubicon*,

Pieter-Dirk Uys, *Spoilt Papers*, Guy Willoughby and *Hamba Kahle* (Loft).

Main and fringe dance events also attracted large audiences. Napac Dance Company provided a grand opening to the festival with the South African premières of three ballets, Balanchine's *Apollo*, Crancko's *Brouillards* and Carter's, *Cage of God*. (These Napac Ballet productions are being brought to the Baxter Theatre early next month by Pieter Toerien.) The Pretoria Technikon School for Performing Arts Ballet Department also performed five well-executed works.

Fringe dance which attracted a lot of attention were the Community Arts Project's contemporary dance programme, *Exhibition*, the Cape Town workshopped dance routine by Abamanyani and *Mime Matters II* by Christopher Goetsch.

*Exhibition* featured five short works with excellent choreography by Marlene Blom, Alfred Hinkel, Sonja Mayo, Gillian Mitchell and Sharon Friedman. Each piece had a distinctive style and examined various social issues.

A disappointment was the UCT Opera Company's, *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay with ballads arranged by Peter Klatzow.

The set by Bruno Santini was impressive but the standard of the singing by most of the cast left much to be desired. Words were garbled and the singers struggled to be heard above the orchestra.

After being bombarded with culture for 10 days, most festival goers wearily left the town with their brains feeling like wonder loaves. Standard Bank announced that they would continue to sponsor the festival. A theme for next year has not yet been decided on.

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