

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Cape theatre festival may be held in drive to boost audiences

Cape Town drama groups keen to revitalise SA theatre

FLORENCE SHORT

A CAPE theatre festival may be organised for next year as part of a drive by Cape Town drama groups to get bigger audiences.

This proposal and others aimed at revitalising South African theatre to make it more interesting and relevant to ordinary people in a changing South Africa are to be investigated by a committee elected at a theatre seminar organised by Community Arts Project (CAP).

Seminar participants were concerned about upholding entertainment and aesthetic standards in the process of aiming at wider audiences.

The committee consists of Johan Esterhuizen, a former assistant drama director at Capab now lecturing at Stellenbosch University; Mavis Taylor, head of the University of Cape Town Drama Department; Jay Pather, a former lecturer at the University of Zululand and now a lecturer and performer in dance drama in Cape Town; Mpume

Maluleka, of the Young People's Theatre Trust; Dumile Magodla, of the New Africa Theatre Project; Violet Plaatjies, of the Domestic Workers' Union; Mike Cloete of Capab, actress Bo Petersen and Anita Carelse, a UCT drama student.

The weekend seminar, which was well attended by representatives of professional and community theatre companies and theatre education groups, was arranged by CAP to discuss controversial issues raised during a debate on community theatre at a CAP event a few weeks ago.

They agreed on the need for organising specific events, such as a theatre festival and special education projects, to achieve liaison among theatre groups in the south-west Cape and that the time of merely talking about such an aim was over.

In opening the seminar, Barbara Masekela, head of the ANC Department of Arts and Culture, emphasised that South African theatre should concentrate on creating a new spirit of reconciliation — that theatre could become a therapeutic medium to

heal the psychological damage of the years of violence. Other speakers, both in open sessions and in small group discussions, agreed that this theme could be incorporated. They also urged that the scope of theatre-in-education projects should be broadened at grassroots levels so that philosophical ideas as well as practical education in specific subjects reached adults and children in rural and urban areas.

Strong feelings were expressed about the need for a fairer, more widespread distribution of funding from taxation and about the need for drives aimed at encouraging an interest in theatre among people who, for various reasons, had not acquired a taste for live performances.

There was support for suggestions that theatre groups should cultivate closer links, at local levels, with other organisations and societies to get their members to help in local theatre projects, particularly in propagating information about events and in getting involved in administration and fund raising.