Casting pebbles at Old and New SA phenomena

THE DOGS MUST BE CRAZY

Writer-director: Mike van Graan
Music: Basil Snyers
Cast: Bo Petersen, Thabi Sithole, Patrick Mofokeng, Cheryl Braaf
Venue: Community Arts Project, Woodstock (until June 2).

PHANTS!, slogans! Phants! Down with slogans!

This must have been the last slogan to pass through Community Arts Project (CAP) director Mike van Graan's mind as he mapped out this cartoon-style, satirical patchwork reflecting what he calls the vagaries of human existence in South Africa.

While there are more than a few instances where repetition and obscurity breed contempt, the general success of *The Dogs Must Be Crazy* is based on CAP and Van Graan's inherent commitment to ideological independence and creative experimentation.

At a result, this first full-length production for the CAP Theatre Company features eight players in seven major sketches that mischievously but intelligently cast pebbles at social and political violence and corruption, gender-based abuse, the foggy cultural boycott, sport embargoes, and another Old and New South Africa phenomena.

From their vantage on the newly constructed seating ramps in the CAP hall, Jaap Marais and Chris Hani would be equally discomforted by the swapping of Van Graan's poise characters (hence the title) at their heels.

The *The Congress Of Cultural Bulldogs* (CCB) sketch where a mob of cultural hit men, dangerously resembling exiled performers, assume local stages after mowing down everything and everyone set up by the overwhelming mass of non-exiles.

Throughout the production 90 percent of the action is non-verbal, with Basil Snyers' vaudeville-like piano accompaniment providing an aura of satirical continuity even when Van Graan introduces more sombre visual elements.

*Dogs* is a company venture that rarely lets the emphasis rest on individual players, though Bo Petersen, Patrick Mofokeng, Sipho Masha and Cheryl Braaf seem most at home with their mixed comedy.

The clarity of the mime is enhanced by designer Rajen Govender's decision to dress his "poodles" in tracksuits and to make them work with the slightest of props and a simply effective stage layout.