

Andrew Buckland gets his teeth into politics presenting a medley of *The Ugly Noo Noo*, *Between the Teeth*, *Feedback* and *Water Juggler*.

pic: Tessa Anne Comrie/Cue photographer

# Andrew Buckland's rare, tragic hilarity

Review - Backbytes  
By Anton Krueger  
Cue guest writer

The show was off to a slightly awkward start. The hall was filled with yelling kids who, when the performance was delayed, began to clap. Andrew Buckland duly emerged and told everyone off. A lone soul dared to boo at this. In a flash, Buckland was back on stage, encouraging him to boo louder. He only left once he'd managed to raise a resounding roar. An odd approach, maybe, but it seems as if Buckland encourages many different forms of expression.

*Backbytes* consists of a medley of previous hits from the Buckland mime oeuvre, such as *The Ugly Noo Noo*, *Feedback*, *Water Juggler* and

*Between the Teeth*.

There is something rare about Buckland's style of comedy. When I first saw him performing a few years ago, he depicted an old man crossing a football sized space and coughing at intervals with increasing urgency and exaggeration. Each cough drew more and more laughter, as the audience felt this would certainly be the last cough. This went on and on, until a few audience members were crying with laughter.

And then the old man had a heart attack and died. A horrified silence followed. Suddenly, it seemed to strike everyone that they'd just been laughing at a dying man.

And this is what Buckland does best: traversing the fine line between hilarity and tragedy. In *Backbytes* there are numerous occasions for

these strange moments: a man trapped under an ice floe; another dying of dehydration, and an insect losing a leg. This lends a strange quality to Buckland's comedy.

Underlying the completely absurd situations on which much of his work is based, he seems to be always grappling with larger issues. There is something about his presence which conveys a strong sense of his humanity.

The show is a great introduction to Buckland's inimitable style every South African theatre-goer should have at least a rough knowledge of.

Buckland has to be experienced on stage. With his enormous physical discipline, his extraordinary expressions and voice, Buckland remains South Africa's most consummate clown.

# Mapping out the future

Review - Green Man Flashing  
By Anton Krueger  
Guest Reviewer

**A** standing ovation by a packed house greeted this premiere of Mike Van Graan's much-awaited new play. *Green Man Flashing* took the jury Award for best script at last year's PANSAs Festival of New Writing, and lives up to its promise of being an adventurous work that maps out a future of political engagement in post-apartheid writing.

Van Graan employs the same acerbic wit and sharp insight that have distinguished him as one of the country's foremost cultural activists, and he leaves no stone unturned

in this fast-paced, engaging drama about the new(ish) South Africa.

The advertising campaign for *Green Man Flashing* consists of nothing more than quotations from theatre luminaries, and gives away little of the content of the play itself, so I am reluctant to reveal too much of the puzzle presented by the plot. Suffice to say that the piece includes a murder mystery, crooked politicians, and a philosophical debate on the status of the individual versus the state.

It also includes crime, horror, rape, murder, love, betrayal, humour and all the bitter-sweet poignancy that goes with living in South Africa today.

Using the microcosm of an inter-

racial relationship, Van Graan portrays the state of the nation from its birth pangs to some of the uneasy realities that have to be faced today. After 10 years of democracy, Van Graan takes no quarter in examining the intrigues and corruption that inevitably seem to follow in the wake of power.

The sinister Luthando Nyaka, played by Sechaba Morojele, is the Minister of Damage Control and depicts all the arrogance of certain members of a political party (some of whom are helpfully pointed out in newspaper clippings in the programme) which, at times, considers itself above the law.

Under the taut direction of Clare Stopford, a Brechtian style

is employed in historicising the problems dealt with on stage, and yet the piece also managed to tap into a deeply underlying vein of troubled emotions.

Stopford's stark set demands an absolute commitment from the actors, since there is little to distract from the raw power of the text itself. This allows the two leads, played by Jennifer Steyn and Vusi Kunene, to display their proficiency. Steyn has the most difficult of tasks on stage, having to work through a wide spectrum of intensely emotional roles, from mother, to lover, to friend, to victim; and she achieves these transitions with a delicate pathos, offset by occasional comic touches.

The supporting cast, from the fast-talking lawyer, expertly played by Charlotte Butler, to the self-deprecating of Andre Samuels, lend the piece its lighter moments; and here too, the acting is flawless. Ever-defiant, Van Graan is set to lead a new brand of politically active theatre in South Africa. This is a work destined to ruffle feathers, step on toes, and generally annoy most people vaguely affiliated to the powers that be. It will undoubtedly emerge as one of the finest plays of this year's fringe. The show is sure to sell out, so if you want to see it, be sure to book. Today.  
Green Man Flashing is at the Gymnasium at 19:30 today.

Friday 1 July 2004 Cue 11

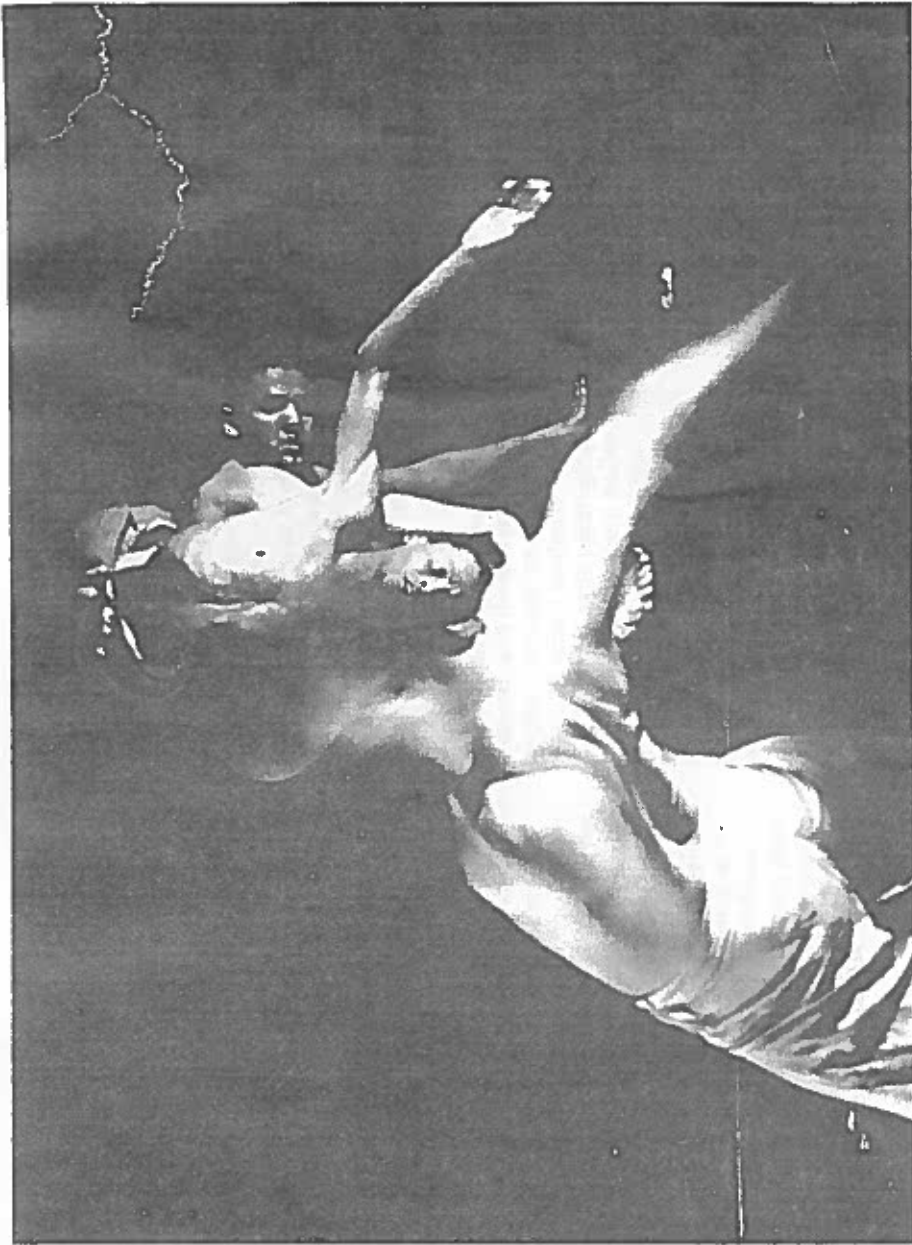
# Astonishing and transporting

Fringe Review - Expeditions  
by Anton Kreuger  
Cue Guest Reviewer

It is really possible to write about dance at all? The paucity of words, and the limitations of the intellect become apparent when confronted by this most visceral of experiences, which connects so directly with one's emotions, memories and sensations. Perhaps what I'm trying to say is that this astonishing performance by the First Physical Theatre Company left me speechless.

Nevertheless, for what words are worth, *Expeditions* is a wonderful programme of two new pieces which were commissioned for the 2004 FNB Dance Umbrella, separated by a short, lyrical interlude. The City Hall, with its vast pressed ceiling, is the ideal space in which to experience these moving studies in nostalgia. It's a pity the music had to be so loud in order to drown out the free music concert next door. Fortunately, the music was completely mesmerising - including work by the Kronos Quartet, Gabriel Yared and Iggy Pop - and one soon forgot about everything which might have been happening in the world off-stage.

In the first piece, *She Had a Sinking Feeling*, the lovely Penny Ho Hin transports the audience into an intimate dreamscape of loss and longing. The second piece, *One Long Breath*, is reminiscent of Staniewski's exercises. Set to one of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, it provides a welcome relief from the intensity of the two other works.



Foot up: Mongi Mthombi displays power and grace as he is held upside-down in Juanita Finestone-Praeg's *Journey to Fez*, one of the pieces in *Expeditions*.

pic: Mark Jackson-Moss/Cuepix

The last piece *The Journey to Fez* was, for me, the finest of the three. It embodies a haunting dream vision of the expulsion of the Moors from Europe in 1492, after the fall of Granada, along the themes of desire and the persistence of memory. The work charts expeditions into sub-conscious spaces where words

disappear, and Zeno's logical paradoxes are used to highlight the limitations of the mind, and the difficulties of recuperating meaning within liminal spaces.

*Expeditions* is a celebration of the body's possibilities. Styled in an innovative mixture of contemporary dance, yoga, Pilates, ballet and other,

entirely original forms of movement, it is a hypnotic experience, and an appreciative audience seemed as inspired by it as I was. If you leave a venue with more energy than when you walked in, it has to be a good thing. It seems the First Physical Theatre Company can't put a foot wrong.

# Brutal take on a 'verkramppte' upbringing

Review - *Boesman, My Seun*  
By Anton Krueger  
Cue Guest Writer

**D**eon Opperman once said that he writes plays "for prosperity, not posterity". Charging the highest ticket price seen on the Fringe and not offering any media comps might have been one way to make more money out of this show, though he might have spent a little more on posters, since only a small audience were to be found clustered together for warmth in the icy cold of St Andrew's Hall.

*Boesman, My Seun* charts the unhappy reunion between a prodigal son and his father, after the death of his mother. He is in search of his milk teeth and his lost childhood. Be warned that this is a brutal piece, with many vicious scenes depicting a typical Calvinistic Afrikaans upbringing. It traces the course of a

man's life through his "verkramppte" childhood, violent army experiences, and fascist university education; before he finally breaks free from the stranglehold of his father. It is a harsh work, aggressively depicting some of the worst extremities associated with Apartheid Afrikaanerdom, including obsessions with racism, rugby and religion. It is not entirely without humour, however, and there were occasional laughs of recognition from audience members who'd no doubt suffered a similarly traumatic upbringing.

The directing by Hanli Rolfe-Opperman is assured, and the transitions between flashbacks is astutely realised by means of nuanced lighting, saving only one abstract effect for the climax. Both Opperman and Eric Nobbs give convincing performances and, in particular, Nobbs's transformations between the sickeningly sweet,

passive mother and the bullying father are entirely convincing. There is a ring of truth about the play, but it is not a pleasant truth; and I felt ill equipped by the time the play had ended to muster much by way of sentimental emotion for the predictable reconciliation.

*Boesman, My Seun* has won a number of awards, including the Critics' Choice at the Klein Karoo Kunstfees. The audiences in Grahamstown, however, are very different, as Helena Hietema discovered after selling out on the Main Festival at the KKNK-only to have a disappointing opening here for her superb cabaret. Fortunately for him, Opperman's show *G-Strings*, and *Nipple Caps* was sold out this week at the new Innubos festival in Nelspruit, so it is unlikely that he'll be hitching home.

*Boesman, My Seun* is at St Andrew's Hall today at 12:00.



An emotionally intense moment in *Boesman, My Seun*, featuring Deon Opperman and Eric Nobbs.

pic: Montique Peiser/Cue Photo Editor