

ARTS

Bhopa!: powerful theatre wasted on audience

By JAMES DAROY

By now, many reviews have been written, and read, about *Bhopa!*, the Earth Players production which opened on May 19 at Toronto Workshop Productions Theatre. The play, written by Percy Mtwa and the cast, reflects Mtwa's own experiences in the South African police force, and exposes the dilemmas, contradictions, and struggles felt, not only by the black victims, but by the black oppressors: the police who must persecute their own people. In *Bhopa!*, this internal persecution is taken a step further when an officer must take action against his own family.

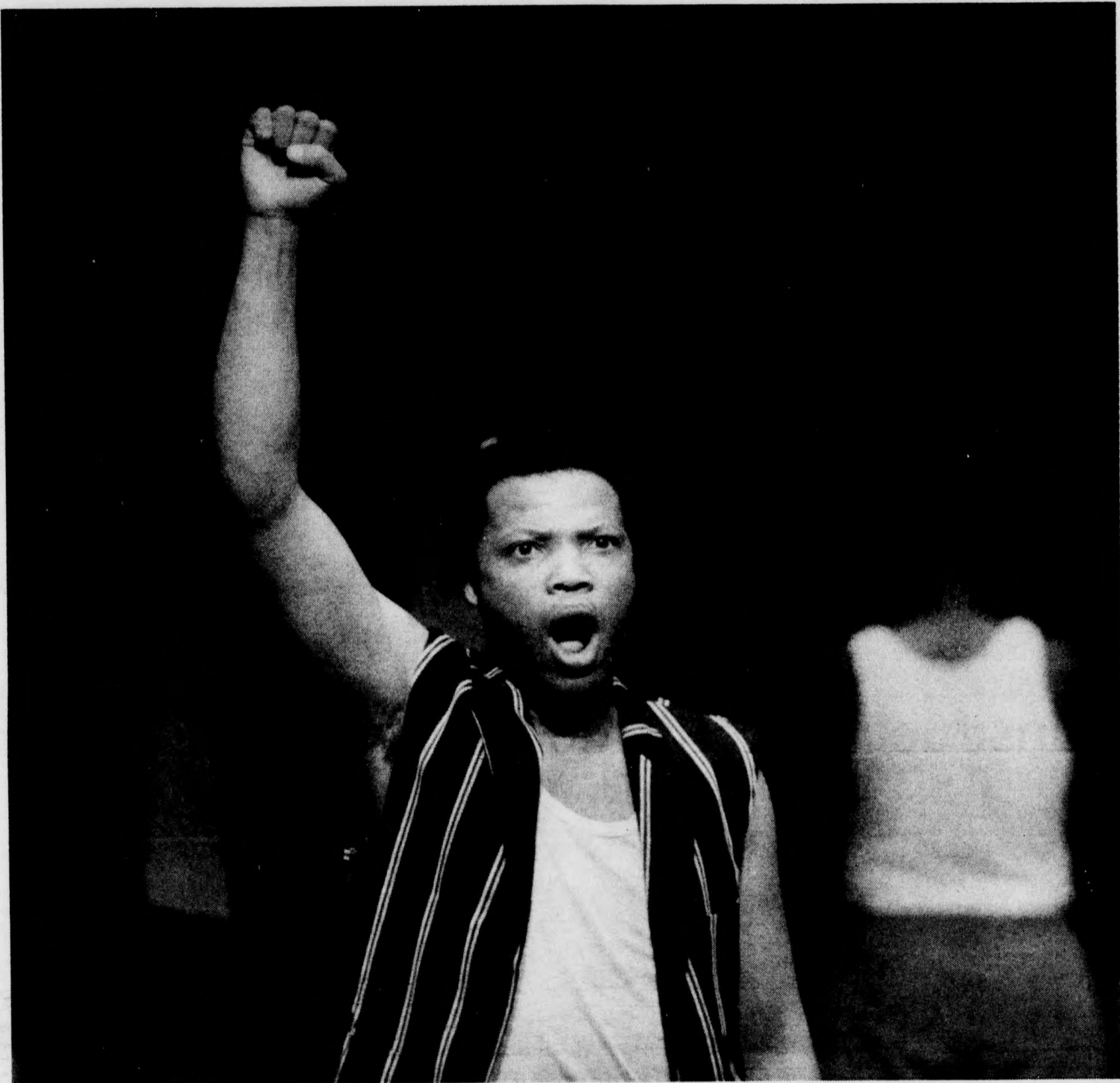
Peppered by a well-executed combination of song, dance and humour, *Bhopa!*'s message becomes cloaked behind its entertainment value. All three performers displayed a rare vitality and energy and the performance itself was tightly and expertly presented. The talent of the actors was apparent in the format of the play, which demanded each performer to play numerous roles, often in the same scene. All of these ingredients combined to create a truly entertaining and innovative piece of theatre.

But what of content? How can this jovial setting do justice to the subject matter? Well, that's part of the point. As one of the actors explained, the purpose behind the use of these distracting devices is two-fold: it allowed for the play to be performed in South Africa, where politics without entertainment is labelled subversive; and it functions to educate Canadian audiences about the South African issue without scaring them away . . . between chuckles, maybe they'd learn something.

Unfortunately, they didn't. It was obvious that the cheers and cat-calls coming from the audience when the officer resigned at the end of the play arose as an expression of appreciation for a high-energy performance, and the comfort of a happy ending. (In fact, the jubilant applause was lit up by the probably-South-African-mined diamonds embellishing clapping hands.)

But if the glib banality of the audience can be forgiven in the name of ignorance, what about the insularity of the reviewers — from *Metropolis* to Robert Crue — who consistently spoke of the play in terms of its exhilarating theatrical distractions . . . and missed the point entirely. Point being — the officer's resignation came only after his son was arrested, his house petrol-bombed, and rioters were outside his door demanding his announcement to resign.

Black on black violence, a much debated factor in the South African situation, is expressed here as a necessity when certain blacks have



TAXII Sydney Khumalo is seen here in a dramatic moment in Percy Mtwa's play *Bhopa!* The play reflects Mtwa's own experiences in the South African police force.

been forced to participate in the upkeep of the apartheid machine; the result of such a message is the recognition of the sad and brutal reality of the nature of revolutionary change.

That the point was lost on both audience and mainstream media (*Metropolis* included), was no fault of the playwrights', only an unfortunate result of theatre-goers' expectations — to be entertained. Period. Sadly, the professional theatre-goer is apparently no different.

'Secret' gallery up for Grads

By LEN CLER—CUNNINGHAM

The opening of D Gallery in September '87 is perhaps one of the best kept secrets in the York Fine Arts department. During a period when artist run centres are in a decline, supply outstrips demand, the current plurality in style and trends speaks more of fashion than art, Jack Dale's initiative displays a commitment to the development of talent in contemporary art, but most especially to students at York.

Jack Dale is a chain-smoking coffee dedicatee, who has taught at York since 1972. Sixteen years have passed and Jack Dale has yet to fall victim to the 'professorial syndrome,' the symptoms of which are a penchant for administrative duties over teaching ignorant students, and sloppy scholarship in lectures.

The best news is that D Gallery, at 589 Markham, is dedicated to showing the works of York graduates.

"We started slowly, but now over 100 people are attending openings," Dale said. "The artist gets feedback, peer-support, and a resume. Many artists begin with great expectations

and their work is not their best, but it is safe. This process is very educational for them."

Tucked away in Mirvish Village, the gallery is sometimes the first real show that many young artists have.

"What basically happens is that openings present a lot of fear, but people say you gave me an opportunity. They gain enough confidence in themselves and their work to go on to phase two, or phase three," Dale continued. "It proves to them that they don't have to show in restaurants and cocktail bars where their works are just decoration."

Jack Dale is an admitted member of the "lost generation" of artists well-known in Canada, and abroad, during the '60s and '70s who slowly petered away.

Their anarchic commitment to cooperative principles and corresponding belief in the progress and emancipatory ability of Modernism, is juxtaposed against the artists of our generation's equally firm commitment, not to ethical principles, but to the principles of marketing and commodity production.

The bearded figure of Jack Dale

embodies the idealism of the '60s with the realities of the '80s.

"Surviving is important," Dale states. "If a student is working as a waiter and then has to come home to do work, which doesn't pay, it gets hard."

Dale is not entirely sympathetic to the plight of young artists, some of which is of their own making. His involvement in the '60s and its accompanying morality has led him into the role of a casual observer, where he has a slight scorn for the competitive, success-oriented attitude of today's young artists.

"When they talk about their art it's in dollars and cents, and their prices are often as high as those of established artists," observes Dale.

Despite any misgivings he may have, Jack Dale has displayed a firm commitment to the development of artistic talent at York. This commitment does not end after lectures or, perhaps more importantly, after graduation. If York is to establish itself as a primary force in the development of Canadian contemporary art it will be due to the efforts of people like Jack Dale.



THE COMPANY OF SIRENS: Catherine Glen and Alisa Palmer depict the pervasive nature of sexual harassment