

# No man is an island but Women are the rock

By Ellen Reynolds

*Hey Botha, hey Botha, man  
What are you trying to do  
When you strike the woman,  
You strike the woman  
You strike the rock.*

In 1956, 20,000 women from all over South Africa marched on Pretoria singing these words in protest to the legislation forcing black women to carry passes. This protest song provided the title to the play, *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock: A Tale of Three Women*, put on by the Vusisizwe Players from Johannesburg, South Africa.

The play, based on the lives of the three-woman cast, described life under the triple oppression in South Africa — being black, poor and a woman.

With humour, song and dance, the women presented a series of vignettes about life hawking chickens in a township on the outskirts of Capetown. Occasionally breaking into the musically clicking Xhosa dialect, the women told of how "everything (in South Africa) is upsidedown". In the African tradition, mothers take pride in their responsibility to rear the children using all their strength and resources to ensure a decent life for their families. Restricted by the government to "homelands" without arable land or resources, parents have been forced to leave their children and find work in the cities to feed their families.

With a simple black back drop and several props, Poppy Tsira, Thobeka Maqutyana and Nomvula Qosha made full use of facial expressions and vocal sound effects to set a variety of scenes.



The Vusisizwe Players from Johannesburg, South Africa.

Photo courtesy Dal Arts Centre

On the bus to Capetown when Mamele (Tsira) changed her squealing baby's "shitty nappie" and Mampopo's (Maqutyana) face went into wild contortions, the audience was in tears with laughter. The sensitive interaction between Tsira and Maqutyana when Mamele's daughter pleads for her mother's forgiveness reveals a closeness to the dialogue which could only come from experience.

The women joked about how Botha controls people with passes and that soon they would need a "shit license" to go to the toilet. And the foreboding helicopters sent the women into a frenzy, praying that the trouble which accompanies "those birds" would pass them by this time.

Mamele's and Sdula's husbands are not much support. In Mamele's case, he merely drinks away what she earns selling chickens on the side of the road. She gets a good price for her chickens and for allowing customers to fondle more than the produce.

These women work as domestic servants, hawkers of food or prostitutes and are subject to racial and sexual degradation daily but with their unfailing energy and strength they always find hope despite the oppression.

In the words of one; "The sun will rise for all the working women of the world". With this strength and hope it's easy to see why, if you strike the woman, you strike the rock.

## foul call

Continued from page 4

ing their bargaining team undermined." It is this law which the DFA claims the Board of Governors ignored by publishing and distributing the reports.

By filing the complaint with the Labour Board, the DFA hopes "the Board of Governors will desist from sending communications to DFA members directly."

The complaint has not yet been received by the Labour Board.

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# IMAGES

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Admission: \$6 students - \$8 non-students

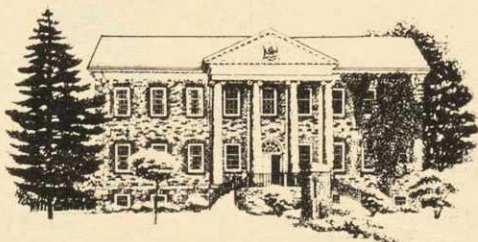
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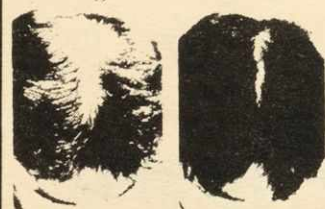
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