



A DIFFERENT kind of scene...the Nairobi University Free Travelling Theatre performing the shairi, "Wimbo wa Uchungu".

Theatre travelling in new directions

AFTER a month-long countrywide tour treating wananchi to some juicy theatrical action, the Nairobi University Free Travelling Theatre is back in Nairobi, this time devoting the week to the city's students. And there are new happenings on offer too.

For apart from the usual plays, there is an extra one in Kiswahili, *Mkaguzi Mkuu wa Serikali* (The Government Inspector, by Nikolai Gogol) and a whole lot of *Mashairi* (poetry) translated from Margaret Dickinson's *When Bullets Begin to Flower*.

I had a chance to see them in action when they performed *The Chief's Bride* by Desmond Pairi, an enlightening commentary on the clash between the old and new.

While the Travelling Theatre might not so much be a venue where critics should be exercising their wits, yet I feel obliged to mention the outstanding performance of two of the main characters in this play. Lillyanne Wanjira as Tamara the young village girl who has been promised as a wife to the chief (Osaak Olumwullah) and Achieng Nyongo as Khetiwe the young village wife who would bring women's liberation right to the chief's door-step, upsetting the calm routine and even influencing Tamara to run away from her husband.

Wanjira and Achieng make a fine pair acting opposite each other, and while Wanjira's best asset happens to be her quick reactions coupled with snappy facial expressions, Achieng's is her voice, without which I feel most of her acting might be rather blurred.

Mathangani wa Muya as Langa the headman's chief aid deserves mention for turning a rather small role into something to reckon with, throughout the play.

But as I said, the FTT is not an excuse for critics to have a ball.

What is most striking is the team spirit of the group that, even though they number only 15, they manage to act plays written for bigger casts without betraying themselves like all competent actors, to the fact.

Their best however, and which draws the longest and loudest of applause is the *Mashairi* from the revolutionary *When Bullets Begin to Flower*. Set to music, choreographed and recited in solos and chorus by the entire cast as well as accompanied with a guitar and drums, the *Mashairi* (I listened and watched *Barua ya Kibarua* and *Wimbo wa Uchungu*) are very titillating both to the ear and the eye.

Director Waigwa Wachira has done a good job setting these to music and no doubt it contributes a lot to the warm reception they

By Miriam Kahiga

get from the audience.

A new discovery, says FTT director of Waigwa Wachira, is that henceforth the programme will have to consider and include primary schools in their tours. This means that they will have to include scripts especially suitable for the primary schools.

This discovery came as a result of a "first" performance at Muguga Primary School where "the response was so good, even with the English plays," says

Waigwa, adding:

"What we got from that school we knew to be genuine. Children do not applaud for the sake of it and we knew they were following whatever was going on on stage."

Other productions on their programme are the well-tested *Juno and the Paycock* by Sean O'Casey, *The Leader* by Joseph White, *The Grand Race* by Kivutha Kibwana and *Fire and Ashes* by Waigwa Wachira.