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# Neal McKenna

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## *A Spoof Full of Sugar*

BY: Neal McKenna, December 6, 2009

*"A Spoof Full of Sugar"* is many things – a dollop of broad humor, a pinch of murder mystery plus lots of song and dance we now call "old fashioned musical theatre." To be sure, no sacred cows are spared in this swipe at the South African entertainment industry. The flying fickle finger of fate is jabbed at celebrities, models, TV presenters, socialites, sports jocks, critics (gulp), large-scale musicals, sex shows, the tabloid press, the SABC – and a whole lot more!

"No one is safe from the eagle-eye of the Spoof team," says director, *Malcolm Terrey*. "If they're famous and they're in the public eye, they'll make it into the show. Some of the South African celebrities written into our script are *Noeleen Maholwana-Sangqu*, *Barry Ronge*, *Nicky Greenwall*, *Debra Patta*, *Steve Hofmeyr*, *Gwen Gill*, *Joost van der Westhuizen*, *Jeanne Dee*, *Michael Moll* and let's not forget all those *FHM Models*. ...So, with our crème de la crème cast, I think we have a totally irreverent satirical musical revue where familiar show tunes blend with outrageous comedy. It's a tongue-in-cheek look at South African Show Business and its celebrities. – And Lord knows, like our politicians, they provide us with so much material!"

Terrey is quite correct; he does have a strong team. The cast includes **Brandon Auret** (*District 9*, *Isidingo*, *Hansie – The Movie*) who has returned to the musical stage after a seriously long hiatus. **Dianne Simpson** (*Sound of Music*, *My Fair Lady*, *Generations*) brings her incredible vocal talents to



**Bosch Botha**

the show – review night really was her night to shine – as do **Pieter Bosch Botha** (*Noises off*, *Dames en Here*, *Villa Rosa*) and little miss dynamite, **Ntsepa Pitjeng** (*Top 10 Idols finalist*, *Muvhango*, *Madiba Magic*). And to top it off, the musical director is **Dawid Boverhoff** (*Footloose*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Madiba Magic*) who is the production's amazing one-man band.

The show follows the British musical revue format which is not quite pantomime, not quite farce and not quite song & dance variety show. Instead, it's a combination of all these elements which, if done well, melds into sophisticated black-out sketch comedy. Happily, Terrey and his crew hit the mark pretty-much bang-on. The show is really more nice

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than naughty in the way it gives “the mickey” to the local glitterati. No doubt these parodies have got to sting for those who are pilloried but the barbs are really quite gentle and never malicious. There are no surprise revelations about those singled out. “To reveal anything more than what is already common knowledge,” says Terrey, “would be vicious and cruel. That’s not funny and we only do funny.”

Speaking of funny, I have to admit there is a bit of a back story here. First of all, I want to assure everyone, I’m usually quite organised and rarely show up for a function on the wrong night. The operative word here is “rarely.” I don’t know how or why it happened. Maybe I was ultra-keen to take in this show, I honestly don’t know. Anyway, I arrived on “Spoof’s” preview night – three nights before the revue performance was scheduled.

Not yet realising my error, I found it quite odd that no tickets were reserved for me and no information packet was anywhere to be seen. The young lady in the box office booth seemed quite befuddled as she searched for my tickets and asked again for my name. What the H-E-double hockey sticks is going on? I thought to myself. The Old Mutual Theatre staff is usually so on top of these things. I was about to pull on my cranky face when co-producer, **Lyll Ramsden** came trundling up the stairs into the box office area...

“Neal!” He said with a very surprised look on his face. “What are you doing here?” Well, obviously, I was there to review the show and his reply was: “But not tonight! Tonight is a preview night. It’s a brand-new show. We’re still fine tuning. Didn’t your invitation say Sunday at 6:00?” And this is when my house of cards collapsed. There I was – all dressed up with nowhere to go! “Look, let’s grab a cup of coffee,” he quickly suggested. “I’ll call

Malcolm and we can have a chat.” So that’s how I didn’t get to see “A Spoof Full of Sugar” on Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup>. However, the ‘chat’ at a nearby outdoor café in Mandela Square did prove to be genuinely useful. Really, how often does a guy get to pick the brains of a show’s top brass right before the curtain is about to go up on the third performance? Anyway, it went like this...

“Musical revue is a tricky animal,” Malcolm Terrey explained over a ‘weak cappuccino.’ “The cast have to work together as a team both on stage and off. The show is fast-moving with thirty-odd wig and costume changes, so everyone has to be disciplined and organised while still maintaining a sense of fun that will be infectious to an audience. It’s not easy...”

“We’ve taken the revue format and made it classier,” Terrey continued, “– glamourised it with lots of costumes and paraphernalia. When the script calls for an accurate physical representation of a celebrity, we go for it. For example, with Barry Ronge, we went into a lot of detail with the beard and the wig and the padding in the overcoat to make our actor really look like him. The same goes for Top Billing’s Jeanne Dee. She’s dressed in a glam sort of way because her image is all showbiz glamorous. Of course, there are several other characters who are far less over the top and some are even quite ordinary, so it’s a mix.”

Co-producer, Lyll Ramsden, who is better known as an actor, commented on his current behind the scenes role. “I have to admit there’s a whole lot more pressure doing a show from the other side. Actors are under pressure to perform to the best of their ability but management is under pressure for everything about the show – financing, promotion, the director, the cast, costumes, the venue – you name it! This is where the buck stops. If the show’s

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a flop, it's ultimately the producer's fault. It's not all sitting back, waiting for the profits to roll in, believe me! Like everything else that appears to be easy, it's horrendously hard work. Still, now that I'm doing it, I love being a producer and I'm confident we have a winner. "Spoof" is the kind of show that has very broad appeal and I'm sure our audiences will get it and love it." – Now that I've finally seen the show, I have to wholeheartedly agree with him.

Just as we were winding things up, **Andrew Ross**, the other co-producer, made a surprise appearance. Still bleary-eyed from just stepping off a flight from America, he had stopped by the theatre to "see how things were going." Gulping down a double espresso for fortitude, he was happy to discuss the show. "I truly am excited to be involved in this production," he said sleepily. "I may not seem very excited right now, but I am. I believe South Africans are finally ready to laugh at themselves. Christmas is an excellent time for audiences to enjoy an evening of poking fun at those in the public eye – celebrities we know and love – and even more-so, the ones we love to hate.

I know we have something for just about everyone. Of course, due to some adult content and a bit of risqué language, under-16s won't be admitted." He grins. "Now, doesn't that make you want come and see it even more?"

At that point, I had to take him at his word when it came to the show's raunchiness. Now that I've seen it, there is very little in it that's terribly untoward. Maybe you wouldn't want to bring a 12-year-old, but you could certainly take your Gran and not worry about the content. Although seeing Brandon Auret and Pieter Bosch Botha decked out in merry widows and leather thongs during the "Rock Horror" send-up is a little disturbing – but well worth the price of admission. My advice is that you catch this one as soon as possible because it has a very limited run. You don't want to be the one who has to say "I missed it!"

A Spoof Full of Sugar plays at The Old Mutual Theatre on the Square in Sandton through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009.