

Nanzikambe storms BT with new play

by Our Reporter

After taking its premiere show *African Hamlet* to the Central Region last week, Nanzikambe is at it again this Sunday afternoon, but this time it's a new play *Chilly-heart* in Blantyre.

But this is not all, the group has also teamed up with the Solomon Peacocks who will present their play *Two-Thirty pm* at the same French Cultural Centre where Nanzikambe's second production will be performed for the first time.

The Solomon Peacocks play has already been a hit in Blantyre. It was written by Louis Thembachako Masamba and directed by Arthur Matukuta.

"It is going to be an afternoon of spectacular entertainment, a theatrical venture, never seen in Malawi before," said Nanzikambe's director Kate Stafford.



Actors rehearsing *Chilly-heart*. — Pic: Courtesy of Nanzikambe

Chilly-heart— which pulls together different local talents— was directed and written by Melissa Eveleigh. It features Wongani Munthali, Thlupego Chisiza, Zondwayo Juwa and Harvey Soko.

"Martial artist Charles Nembela will dazzle the audience

with his physical skill and fighting powers. Fraternal DJ (Raymond Sekeni) will surprise the audience with his comic timing," said Stafford.

The play also features gospel artist George Mkandawire who provides the music.

Chilly-heart is a comic tale

of confusion and trickery. The story is about a straightforward and honest man, Mr Law and Order, who gets caught up in a complex world of greed and bullying; and when his daughter falls in love with one of his enemies, he makes a fatal move that threatens his life.

DAILY TIMES, Thursday, October 2, 2003

ENTERTAINMENT 17

Nanzikambe to launch new play

Starring martial artist Nembela, musician Nyundo, alongside Shakespeare's Hamlet

BY DUNCAN MLANJI

NANZIKAMBE Theatre Company, who injected a new breath of life into Malawi's theatre circles by performing great Scottish playwright William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, will on October 26 launch a new play at French Cultural Centre, starring Wakhumbata's Wongani Munthali, phenomenal martial artist Charles Nembela and Malawi's budding reggae star Sally Nyundo.

Written and directed by Melissa Eveleigh, Nanzikambe's development director and writer, the play is vibrant, visually exciting and would surely surprise Malawian drama enthusiasts with its combination of humour, satire and music.

Musical plays are rarely performed in the country but musical dramas. Only few high schools like Kamuzu Academy and St. Andrews have successfully performed musical plays internally, and this new play, definitely will force patrons to appreciate a new breath of life.

Hamlet, successfully launched last May in Lilongwe, its second edition has been reworked to fuse Shakespeare's culture into that of Malawi and it promises to

take one's breath away.

Artistic director Kate Stafford has revived *Hamlet* with a fully Malawian interpretation in which Village Cultural Troupe will provide traditional songs, dance and drumming for the production.

"The result is spectacular," said Stafford.

"Collaborating with the traditional dancers has made the show even more entertaining.

"It is Shakespeare as it was originally intended, easy to understand, colourful and full of humour, music and dance," she said.

Kamuzu Academy students have performed *Macbeth* and *Tempest* before in the early 90s using African performers and the productions were labelled successful because of the hard poetic old world English.

The production is supported by the British Council and is set to tour the country, starting in Lilongwe on October 18th.

It has star actors like Twaya Sanudi, Samuel Koseka, Emmanuel Maliro, who performed with Malawi great playwright late Dandaza Chisiza. Late Du's son Tupego Chisiza is also in the cast.

Eveleigh said Nanzikambe's aim is to help develop theatre in Malawi and

the company is dedicated to providing employment, experience and training for the horde of acting talent in the country.

"At Jack Mwanje's recent poetry reading at the French Cultural Centre, Vice-President Justin Malewezi complained that theatre in Malawi has been declining in recent years," said Eveleigh.

"We are rising to the challenge of turning this trend around by presenting high quality theatre using Malawi's top performers.

"It's not just about what we can bring from Europe to Malawi, but we are working alongside the foremost artists in the country.

"We are learning a huge amount about African performance culture, which will have an impact on all our future work," said Eveleigh.

In December, Nanzikambe actors will perform in a production with a company of disabled actors as part of a special function for Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (Fedoma), according to Stafford.

"In the new year, we will also direct another Shakespeare play with music by a popular recording artist and funded by the British Council," she said.



EVELEIGH—The brains behind the play

Nanzikambe takes theatre to another level

by James Mphande

Patrons who thronged the French Cultural Centre open air theatre Sunday afternoon were taken to another level of theatrical experience when Nanzikambe staged their second play *Chilly Heart*.

The patronage itself showed clear signs of the high expectation people had from the group that is directed by two white ladies Kate Stafford and Melissa Eveleigh.

For a change there were top officials in government and private sector gracing the show with their families. Probably the peaceful atmosphere at drama shows is giving people respite from the volatile environment at football matches and secular music shows.

Coming back to *Chilly Heart*, the play received mixed reactions. While some appreciated and were obviously amused with it, others found it boring and not exciting. No wonder one patron shouted "koma ltha? (Is it going to end?)"

"The problem is that people want straight forward plays punctuated by jokes throughout. But this is a narrow understanding of theatre," said Hope Chisanu, a DJ with MBC Radio 2 FM who watched the play.

He said the play was for serious minds because it was more academic than what the local audience has been exposed to.

"As far as I am concerned, it was a very serious, powerful and mature play. It was very en-

tertaining to those who were able to follow the storyline. I know the plot was complicated and I can imagine the effort the director applied to come up with this mature piece," said Chisanu.

A patron — a playwright and student at Chancellor College — who declined to be mentioned, said much as she appreciated the relevance of the subject matter to the local setup, there were some areas which need polishing.

"For example, where actions are mimicked, artists have to make sure that the actions are started and finished properly. The problem I noticed was that cups and pots were seen dropping and crashing into people's heads. This is carelessness," she said.

She also pointed out that the play was long and dragged too much.

"On the incorporation of some elements like music, martial arts and others, I don't see any problem with it. In fact, this is what theatre is all about and it is high time Malawian artists emulated this," said the upcoming writer.

Chilly Heart is a political play — at least if the story line was to be fitted into the local political landscape — where the righteous have no room to survive. One had to side with the powers that be — irrespective of the moral assessment of the situation — to survive.

The action takes place on Figurehead street in Chilly Heart, "a country in the coolest part of Southern Africa". The country's leader Top Dog is so

corrupt that he ropes into his camp a leader of an opposition party, Lowdown Lap Dog.

The relationship between the two only goes as far as plundering the national resources but they are a different lot in principles, although on the surface Lowdown Lap Dog is a mere parrot of his master.

With the opposition weakened, the two manipulate the press, represented by Mark Mogul, Media Machine; the defence and security machinery, represented by Mr Law and Order; the judiciary, rep-

resented by Justice, the son; and other organs which provide checks and balances to government.

In one instance, the government sells off food, leaving the country's grain reserves empty. The money from the sold food is used to buy guns which the leader wants for his personal agenda but because he has no moral justification, he asks Mr Law and Order to make a statement that the guns are for national security.

When the top security officer refuses and exposes the leader,

he lands himself in problems. People believe the leader's version of the story because it has come through the media which people take for gospel truth.

He faces a revolt with some close friends betraying him by aligning with the ruling clique in exchange of some favours. Mr Law and Order is later found shot dead, but because people cannot establish the motive behind the death, it is difficult to pin down the culprit.

In short, *Chilly Heart* is a play that speaks volumes about social and political evils. How-

ever, it is difficult to narrow down the play to Malawi because of some elements that do not fit into the local political setup. But this could just be part of the drama.

Before *Chilly Heart*, another local theatre group, the Solomonian Peacocks, performed *Two Thirty Pm* which was a marvel to watch too, at least going by the response from the patrons.

However, their main disadvantage was that the play performed before a smaller audience.