

THE INDEPENDENT  
18 AUGUST 2000

## THEATRE



### A WOMAN IN WAITING

Assembly Rooms, Venue 3  
(0131-226 2428)

18-21 & 23-28 Aug, 14.30 (15.50)

"WE MUST speak, or our hearts will burst". Thembi Mtshali's autobiographical monologue describes growing up in apartheid South Africa. A commanding performer, Mtshali recounts her hasty progress from childhood – separated from her parents, wage slaves to white families in Durban – to motherhood.

Her show's strongest sequence evokes the pain she feels when, attending to her inheritance of "dirty dishes and other people's children", she all but misses her own daughter's childhood. It's a potent testimony to apartheid's subtler devastations. Mtshali describes, singing to a white audience "May God protect my children from you" in one of her show's several powerful musical moments.

Apartheid's dramatic credit is lower than once it was, that battle having been won, and *A Woman in Waiting* is in danger of erring towards self-congratulation. Its focus widens rather clumsily, too, when, after homing in on her roles as daughter then mum, Mtshali suddenly trips through 25 years of her stage career and the march of South African politics. Her estimable strengths as a performer, however, vouchsafe the show's quality – warm company and a mesmerising singer, Mtshali brings gutsiness and sympathy to a tale that domesticates the horrors of South Africa's mercifully *ancien régime*.

BRIAN LOGAN