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# Festival

## Woman as child

A woman in a maid's uniform pegged to a washing line. This is just one searing image in Thembi Mtshali and Yael Farber's spell-binding *A Woman in Waiting*. It is a succinct title for a solo performance packed with emotion and history.

Performer Mtshali and director Farber scripted this autobiographical portrait that is being developed at the Public Theatre in New York, with funding from the Ford Foundation and Africa Exchange.

Debut performances in Grahamstown, on the Fringe and at the Schools Festival, present a commanding work. It is storytelling from the heart and soul which is an eyelash away from a sound structure.

This is Thembi Heavy Gale Mtshali's own heartrending yet enchanting story. Known on stage and TV for 30 years, since the original *Ipi Tombi*, this is a personal account of her childhood in rural KwaZulu Natal. She lived with her

grandparents while her parents earned meagre wages in Durban. Once a year they visited and brought her shoes that never fitted.

This bittersweet tale draws one into an African child's life of deprivation at the hands of the white madams and masters. The day her

little butt was too black for the white baas' toilet was a turning point for the little girl whose degraded domestic worker mother shrank before her eyes.

Farber's direction is creative and inventive, providing a frame for a majestic performance that blows away the cobwebs of apartheid history. No caricature, it provides the flesh and blood answer to

what terrible wrongs were done to men, women and children who were denied (some still are) basic rights.

*A Woman in Waiting*, which is blisteringly frank, is Thembi Mtshali's painful yet joyous journey towards herself. And she takes a whole nation with her.



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