

BLACK REALITY CAPTURED

Mtshali simply masterful

A WOMAN IN WAITING, an original one-woman drama, starring Thembi Mtshali and directed by Yael Farber, is now on at the Nico Arena. **RYAN FORTUNE** reviews.

WHILE schoolkids were revolting against the apartheid state in the mid-1970s, Thembi Mtshali was dancing and singing up a storm in the hit musical *Ipi Tombi*. The mainly-white audiences ate it up. Here were the jolly natives doing their on-so-African thing, and those schoolkids were just destructive little brats who didn't appreciate good education. The show was a roaring success, touring internationally for years.

Now, nearly three decades later and in a free South Africa, Mtshali is to be seen in *A Woman in Waiting*, a one-woman tour de force inspired by, amongst others, the mothers of schoolkids who were murdered or went missing in the struggle for liberation.

Based largely on her own personal history, the play sees Mtshali employ her no less than awe-inspiring skills to take the audience on a searing journey into what it *really* meant to be black, and a woman to boot, in pre-Rainbow

Nation South Africa.

One-person plays are notoriously demanding on both actor and audience, and this one, being 90 minutes long, was at great risk of succumbing to the boredom factor.

Under Yael Farber's excellent direction, however, Mtshali draws the audience into her life with a flawlessly-timed combination of song, dance and superb acting. With minimal props, she masterfully evokes the wide-eyed naïveté of a childhood in rural KwaZulu-Natal, the fear and anxiety of moving to the bustling urban nightmare of Durban and the anger of witnessing her mother's humiliation at the hands of her white employer.

The play poses some hard questions, among them the absurdity of white South Africans' general acceptance of apartheid when most of them had been brought up by black nannies. Today well-adjusted white citizens of a "liberal democratic" bent complain loudly of the crime



SCINTILLATING: Thembi Mtshali delivers a powerful performance in *A Woman in Waiting*.

situation, totally forgetting that their nannies' children were once deprived of mother love.

While some parts of the play tread the fine line between pathos and pathetic, such as the Mother's Dress and the domestic servant's song, Mtshali always falls on the side of excellence, the result, one must conclude, of her passion for telling the hard truths about her life and country. Tickets for tonight and tomorrow are going at two for the price of one. Doh't miss it.