



Peter Townshend
Review

- **PLAY:** A Woman in Waiting
- **CAST:** Thembi Mtshali
- **DIRECTOR:** Yael Farber
- **WHERE:** Market Theatre
- **WHEN:** Until July 1

On Thursday night I was happy to be in Africa. Happy to be exposed to African culture and African perspective, and even happier to be a part of the African experience.

A strange result, having just watched a piece of theatre that riddled me with guilt and left me ashamed to be white.

But what theatre! *A Woman In Waiting* is Thembi Mtshali's story, and while it is neither a particularly unique story, nor one filled with high adventure, it is a real one.

It's a story about life; life filled with hardship and despair brought about by poverty and political oppression and life filled with joy.

Rags to ...
Thembi
Mtshali
moves from
childhood to
adulthood in
under an hour
in *Woman in
Waiting*



Wait on Mtshali

The joy of healing wounds, being a mother, being a daughter and having the time to wait and reflect.

Yes, it is a political play. And yes, it is a story we have heard – often. But it is a story retold not by an actress acting but by a South African

woman reliving, re-empathising, and re-experiencing emotions that moulded her life and that will undoubtedly change yours.

Although Mtshali's experiences are cast so severely by apartheid, the lingering memories

and remaining messages of her story are ones of the greatness of motherhood, the significance of roots, the difficulty of reconciliation, the peculiarity of time, the oppression of women and above all the importance of communication.

It is indeed her final comment – “We must speak, or our hearts will burst” – that solidifies her feelings of alienation, her bitterness, willingness to forgive and dedication to healing.

The play uses various tactics to draw the audience into its falling and rising heart – most successfully, humour and music.

It is with touching deftness that Mtshali intertwines her emotional tale with a light and delicate jocularly together with music and singing that reflect the scars and blossoms of her tumultuous soul.

What is, perhaps, worth more reflection is Mtshali's lunar-dominated, momentum-increasing grasp of time.

Time. How we blame it for our ills, expect it to

heal and try so hard to fill it meaningfully, yet mostly, all we do is wait. From waiting to live as a child to waiting to die as an adult. With the moments in between filled with the waiting for that which will briefly allow us to find happiness and see our soul.

TS Elliot wrote: “Time present and time past are both in time future. And time future continues in time past.”

It is this concept of

time, that Mtshali so cleverly plays with.

Mtshali, together with some clever props fills the stage with ardour and at time vehemence, with a clinical cynicism running throughout – from childhood through to politics and even her successful days in plays like *Ipi Tombi*.

It is a cynicism that reminds us of her suffering, and highlights the fact that Mtshali is telling her story –

regardless of the resulting pain.

While I left the theatre without any sense of having been forgiven and feeling an uncontrollable guilt, I left with sense of peace that only a confession can bring, regardless that it was not mine.

A band of Welsh rockers ask: “Hurry up and wait. But what's worth waiting for?”

Mtshali will show you.