

# A free woman's journey

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**T**HEY say everyone has got a story. But some have better stories than others and certainly Thembi Mtshali has a corker.

As a black baby in white-ruled South Africa, she was not going to make too much of a mark in the world.

But, in the event, she did, make it – literally – on to the world stage and was alive to appreciate it when South African freedom finally came.

It is one of those remarkable stories which might have been forgotten except that Ms Mtshali is also a tremendous writer and actress.

Together with her director, Yael Farber, she created a one-woman show

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## THEATRE

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### A Woman In Waiting

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### Liverpool Everyman

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which detailed her life and which last night proved a moving and unique piece of theatre at the Everyman.

After all, how many biographical tales are actually displayed on stage by the very person involved?

Thembi Mtshali has a physical presence which allows her to act the innocent child as well as the well-worn woman.

Above all, she has a voice, and a

singing voice at that, which has the ability to shake and move an audience.

In her autobiographical *A Woman In Waiting*, she uses it to huge advantage.

The drama opens with her in a box, a large wooden box which remains on stage for much of the time and which makes its own point.

Singing in her own native tongue, she is able to play both child and mother, born in an era when the political situation forced parents to be away from their children.

In this play, it is just the start of the waiting. As she explains in drama, monologue and song, she became a mother herself and had to work away from home, leaving her own child waiting.

Apart from herself at various ages, she takes on other characters, from the

hard men who came knocking at her door to the innocents who enjoyed the music and dance of the time.

There are moments of violence but Mtshali curiously tells her tale without too much bitterness, with tears rather than anger.

It's a story she relates with lots of pace and vibrancy and not a little humour. There is not a moment when the drama droops or the music fails: this one-woman show just steams along.

Throughout, she displays a powerful singing voice – song, both traditional and self-penned, is very much part of the show – and an ability to transcend a stage performance to deliver a personal and illuminating message.

**Philip Key**