



Sandra Prinsloo in *Oscar and the Pink Lady*

PICTURE: PIETER LOMBAARD Godfrey Johnson in *Vaslav*

PICTURE: DEX GOODMAN

**T**HE BEAUTY, cruelty and ephemerality in the business we call life are observed in two plays currently on in Cape Town. *Oscar and the Pink Lady* and *Vaslav* are both directed by Lara Bye, staged at the Baxter and Kalk Bay theatres, respectively. The plays also star two of the industry's most consummate performers.

In *Oscar and the Pink Lady*, Bye directs Sandra Prinsloo in the role of Oscar, a terminally ill 10-year-old cancer patient. Finding him writing a series of letters to God at the beginning of the play, we learn that he only has 12 days left to live. In his first written dispatch he observes that grown-ups have developed a strange tendency to go deaf whenever he asks them about dying, and that even his parents avoid coming to visit him in the hospital because they are too emotional.

Surrounded by a cast of kids nicknamed after their various afflictions – among them Braaivleis (a burn victim), Einstein (water on the brain), Blue Betty and Popcorn – the only adult willing to be open with Oscar is Granny Rose, an elderly volunteer who visits the hospital daily.

Also played by Prinsloo (along with the rest of the characters), she then undertakes his emotional journey of dying with Oscar. By proposing that they should pretend each of his remaining 12 days represent

*Steyn du Toit reviews two plays in Cape Town, both directed by Lara Bye, on at the Baxter and Kalk Bay theatres. Oscar and the Pink Lady is a moving production sketching a life barely lived, starring Sandra Prinsloo, while Vaslav, featuring Godfrey Johnson, outlines the life of ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky and his lifelong battle with paranoid schizophrenia*

10 years, she explains that he will therefore be a 120-year-old by the time of his death.

Based on a 2002 novel by Belgian author Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, the production was first presented locally in 2012 after being translated from French into Afrikaans by Naömi Morgan. It has since enjoyed several acclaimed stagings across the country – scooping up a best actress award at 2012's Aardklop as well as the best theatre production, best director and best actress nods at last year's Klein Karoo National Arts Festival. The current run at the Baxter Golden Arrow Studio marks its Cape Town debut and, due to public demand, will also offer five performances in Afrikaans (August 5-9).

Supplemented by a single bench on stage, Pieter-Jan Kap's gentle lighting cues and Braam du Toit's tender background music, *Oscar and the Pink Lady* is a moving production that sees Prinsloo sketching a stirring composition of a life

never lived. Guided by Bye's direction, she succeeds in avoiding cheap tactics and sentiment to deliver a production of substance and of big ideas. Leaving the viewer pondering issues of mortality and existentialism, few eyes were left dry at the end of opening night's performance.

Prinsloo is pure magic on stage. One of the industry's most venerable figures, not only has she enjoyed a distinguished career in theatre, film and television spanning several decades, but her recent efforts show there's plenty more where that came from.

Aside from the intercontinental hit that was *The Sewing Machine*, the past few years also saw her reuniting with Marius Weyers (after nearly 30 years) in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Tom Holloway's *And No More Shall We Part*.

We are very lucky to still see her perform so often locally.

From hospital wards where chil-

dren have to cram entire lifetimes into a tenth of the usual time, to institutions filled with mental illness and broken people, *Vaslav* revolves around Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky's 30-year battle with paranoid schizophrenia. On at the Kalk Bay Theatre and starring Godfrey Johnson as the artist often referred to as "The God of the Dance", the script was compiled from Nijinsky's diaries and journal entries.

Presented by way of a fragmented narrative, this brave production sees Bye and Johnson shift through the shards that was Nijinsky the man, the artist and the cultural observer. Against a backdrop of archive video footage, movement co-ordination by Fiona du Plooy as well as period music played by Johnson on piano, what emerges is a portrait of a gifted individual who continues to have an impact on our world nearly 100 years after he danced for the last time.

Judging by all the detail and nuance, a staggering amount of research into their subject's life and cultural and historical context has been done by Bye, Johnson and Karen Jeynes (who wrote the script with them). It speaks of a creative team not simply interested in piecing together something to lure fans of Nijinsky, but rather a group of dedicated, passionate theatre-makers throwing themselves wholeheartedly into the process of presenting something of substance, honesty and respect.

The production is further elevated by the presence that is Johnson on stage.

Anyone familiar with his past work – whether it's giving a Fleur du Cap-winning performance in *Kissed by Brel* or playing the piano for Evita Bezuidenhout – would be able to attest to his distinct energy and command of his craft.

Pushing himself even further with *Vaslav*, watching Johnson so consumed by his character – notice the mad glint in his eyes, the foam gathering around the corners of his mouth or the look of bliss on his face when hunched over the piano, for instance – make for an intensely memorable, moving piece of theatre.

For more information, or to book tickets for *Oscar and the Pink Lady* (on until August 23), see [www.baxter.co.za](http://www.baxter.co.za); and for *Vaslav* (until August 9) see [www.kalkbaytheatre.co.za](http://www.kalkbaytheatre.co.za).

## KayDee produces musical waves that are 'So High'

**BUHLE MBONAMBI**

WHEN I first heard *So High*, I had just landed at OR Tambo International and had tuned into 5fm. The song was playing and I thought it was Kendrick Lamar's new single. I was bopping my head, but as the song neared the end, I heard Zulu lyrics. I remember going, "Huh?!" and then writing down the name of the artist after Sureshnie Rider announced it, excitedly.

*So High* has peaked at number three on the 5fm top 40 chart and has been play listed on Metro FM and other commercial radio stations. It's a success that KayDee, real name Mfundo Mkhize, from Pietermaritzburg cannot believe.

"Honestly, I slept (slang for underestimated) on *So High*. When I came out with *Primetime Life* last

year, I didn't expect it to be *So High* that will blow up."

I called him in Joburg, where he is recording his debut album.

**The production on *So High* is so good. Who did you work with?**

I do my own production. I'm a rapper and producer and I'm a perfectionist, hence preferring to produce my own work.

**Production-wise, who are your influences?**

I'm influenced by different music. I love music. I listen to as much music as I can. I'm also a huge fan of Dr. Dre, Timbaland, Pharrell Williams and Kanye West.

**And in the rap game, who are your icons?**

He's pushed hip hop to another level. Zola is another icon of mine. He got me into this whole rap thing. I know he did kwaito, but



KayDee is the new kid on the block carving a route to stardom

the way he did it inspired me to stay true to what I know and rap about it. I use my experiences in life to tell my story through music.

Internationally I appreciate Drake and this new rapper named Euroz. Kendrick Lamar is up there, as is vintage T.I.

**Describe your sound and what separates you from other rappers.**

It's old school. There are elements of some new hip hop influences, but it's still old school.

**Most local rappers are going the vernacular route. Why rap in English?**

We have 11 official languages and that means I'm free to rap in whatever language I want. I don't think everyone should be a vernacular rapper. What about the people who don't understand the language, but want to support local hip hop?

**You sound very American in your songs.**

I just feel like there's no need for me to only appeal to the South African market.

**Charting *So High* on the charts and being play listed by influential radio stations, what does it mean for you and your career?**

It means so much, man. It's tough for local music to get play listed on local radio stations, especially hip hop. Kwesta even wrote an open letter asking why 5FM wasn't playing his music. So for me it's huge and that I peaked so high is an even bigger achievement.

**So when can we expect a full album from you?**

Latest November. I'm busy in the studio right now and lining up people I want to work with. I promise it's going to be one hot album you won't want to stop listening to.