

TODAY'S dance



Born to be in a tutu ... Ballet Theatre Afrikan's Lorna Maseko radiates elegance and technical finesse in *Paquita*.

PICTURE: SUZY BERNSTEIN

BY ADRIENNE SICHEL

- **WHAT:** A Season of Dance
- **WHO:** Ballet Theatre Afrikan
- **WHERE:** Nelson Mandela Auditorium at The Civic
- **WHEN:** Tonight at 8pm, tomorrow at 2.30pm and 8pm. Ends Sunday at 2.30pm

The evening opens with cute beginners taking tentative basic ballet steps from way back of the main stage to Ravel's *Bolero*, followed by their teachers, Martin Schonberg and Paula Kelly.

Two hours later a generation of older dancers finish their testimony of 11 years of tutelage with a convincing, classy rendition of a demanding classic — artistic director Schonberg's staging of *Paquita* after Petipa. In their official debut as a professional company, there's no question that the classics are the forté of these young trailblazers.

They bring a freshness and sparkle to a 19th-century art form that is as accessible to a first timer as it is to a seasoned balletomane.

To see Yolandi Olckers and Thoriso Mangongwa as the *Paquita* principal couple is to see a new wave of ballet royalty in the making. This finesse is distinctively epitomised in the solo variations by Jade Coughlan, Kristin Wilson and Lorna Maseko.

*A Season of Dance* brims with revelations and warning signals. Kitty Phetla's interpretation of Fokine's *Dying Swan* scores on rippling arms but falls on jerky arabesques and lack of emotional maturity. In her *Paquita*, Phetla was curiously not in the form she was as Queen of the Wilis in South African Ballet Theatre's *Giselle*. But here's a dancer with an electric stage presence and a dazzling stylistic versatility that is at the heart of BTA.

Phetla shines (pardon the pun) in Schonberg's lyrical neo-classical *Sunshine Suite* steeped in dappled light and a Bach cello concerto, and provides a glimpse of her jazzy attitude, a la Josephine Baker, in Adele Blank's pop-art-inspired solo *Sheer Magic*, partly performed in high heels.

It is in *Clearly Linked* that Phetla and co come into their own in expressing their choreographic identity as South African dancers exploring their body dynamics and developing a vocabulary.

The wake-up call is Alfred Hinkel's *Umoya WoMzansi*, which has regressed into a prettied-up party piece, robbing this major South African work of its signature weight, energy and meaning.

Nonetheless, as this company comes of age it has a lot to offer. As it finds its professional feet and clarifies its aesthetic persona, it could revitalise South African ballet and