

# entertainment

## Mummenschanz stars create a magical universe

WHEN previewing this presentation a few weeks ago on this page, I suggested that Port Elizabeth showgoers were possibly in for the most unique and original performance yet staged in the Friendly City.

Well, I wasn't wrong. Although there are few shows one could label as unique, as far as this city is concerned, this is definitely one such unusual theatrical animal.

A quartet of barefoot performers, clad only in black velvet unitards, for two hours create a magical theatrical universe in which a great deal of the time patrons are never quite aware how many such performers are involved in bringing their weird and wonderful creatures to life.

At others, solo moments can lead to hilarious interplay with the audience – this is one show where I would not recommend you sit in the front row or you can suddenly find yourself part of the show!

It's a universe populated by an incredible range of characters who follow each other on-stage in lightning succession, so the audience is constantly delightfully surprised and amazed by the sheer inventiveness and physical dexterity of the performers, whose faces are only revealed at the curtain call.

Items that go way beyond the usual definition of the word "mask" don't only hide the faces but often entire bodies of the cast. "Slinky" is an example – towering up while playing with a big red balloon (back and forth into the audience too) into an increasing incredible giant, while accomplishing unbelievable bodily contortions, costumed in what appears to be accordion-pleated material.

By far the most amazing use of the mask is a sequence, in a lengthy programme, of a duo, each with an outlandish face, who then proceed to mould the clay of which the faces are

made into a bewildering sequence of animal, bird and other human countenances – without looking in mirrors to do so!

Another excellent moment comes when a boy/ girl duo, their faces made up of toilet rolls for ears and mouths (blue for him, pink for her) proceed to unroll, tear and combine these sheets to create both comic and emotional moments.

One magical item in a programme, far too impact-packed to deal with every segment, is the two long jointed pieces of wood that manipulated by the cast, inter-act to become a boy meets girl romance, then an argument and fight, then reunion. Another is a shimmering sheet that also

ends up producing facial expressions – something that happens constantly with other everyday materials throughout the show.

And just when you thought you had seen it all, there is the climactic huge amorphous lump of cloth that envelops the front rows in part of itself before exiting up-stage for a really surprise finish.

Throughout this entire programme not one human head or face is visible. To make this kind of magic happen on-stage outstanding mood lighting is required. Technical director Jan Maria Lukas is just as important a complement of the presentation as the cast of Floriana Fassetto and Bernie Shhurch (who founded the group in 1971) plus Raffaella Mattioli and Pietro Montandon, who fully deserved the acclaim with which they were greeted at show's end.

Even if you are not a regular theatregoer, this is one hit show you should see this year – and take the family along for this is five-star all ages fare.



**in the spotlight**

**BOB EVELEIGH**