

'Boesman and Lena' exposes intimate violence of apartheid

By Randy Gerald Vestal and Lucy Gray

What he does not understand he beats. Boesman, tortured by endless oppression, explodes into blind rage and mindless violence in Athol Fugard's drama, "Boesman and Lena," N. C. Central's first drama production of the spring semester.

It hurtled the audience into apartheid South Africa and presented an intimate look at the private life of a "colored" (the Afrikaner's term for mulatto) couple living under the oppressive rule of apartheid.

Despite some minor problems, the cast met the challenge of "Boesman and Lena."

Dr. Johnny B. Alston, an assistant professor of drama, masterfully portrayed Boesman, a poor "colored" South African who has been emasculated by its rigid and inequitable apartheid policies. He comments, "We are the white man's rubbish, he throws it away, we pick it up, we wear it, we eat it, we become it, we are it. That's why the white man hates us so, because we are his rubbish and he can't get rid of it."

His concerns are only the basic needs of life: food, water, shelter and wine, his only means to escape the repression.

Unfortunately, Boesman often misdirects his anger by abusing his strong-willed wife Lena, excellently played by Isme McClinton-Rose, a drama student from Capetown, South Africa. Lena displays her defiant thoughts and feelings against the government and against Boesman.

When she grows tired of talking with herself, Lena adopts a sick and helpless old African, a black Kaffa, to converse with. The old African, well played by Thomas McDonald, an drama student from Rockingham, speaks not a word of English but only his tribal language. Although neither Lena nor the old African can communicate with each other, they are able to convey their pain and suffering.

Finally, while Boesman rants drunkenly at his wife, the old African dies quietly in Lena's arms. Fearful of the official questions about the old man's death, Boesman becomes enraged and mindlessly begins to beat the lifeless body. He seems to blame the old man for dying, for the old man's death has now become the tool of apartheid oppression.

After the old African dies, Boesman and Lena gather their meager possessions and continue on their seemingly unending trek across South Africa, searching for a place where the white man will leave them alone.

The entire action of the play takes place in a sheet metal shop in the mud flats of the Swartkops River in South Africa. Alston, who designed the set as well as playing the starring role, created the bleak sheet metal shop with only a few props and a splash of paint.

The drama department chose to present the play not in the modern, comfortable and well-equipped drama auditorium but in the bleak scene shop in the basement of the Communications Building. Risers filled with folding chairs were placed about three sides of the stage area, situated the audience

only a few feet from the performers. The constant eye-to-eye contact with the actors involved them more intimately and emotionally with the characters than they would have been sitting in the large auditorium. The shared experience might have been lost in the modern auditorium.

The only problems with the production were the mad scurry for extra chairs before some performances because of accidental over-bookings and some dissatisfaction with the crowded and uncomfortable seating.

Some New York theatre critics have referred to "Boesman and Lena" as a "plotless" play; well, it may be "plotless," but its production on the NCCU campus was not "pointless." The play served not only to entertain but to inform its audiences of the conditions of blacks in South Africa.

Directed by Karen Dacons, an instructor in the drama department, "Boesman and Lena" closed on Sunday after having a full or near-full house for every performance.

Apartheid horrors

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"The white government operates on a 'divide and rule' concept," explained Jacobs. "They begin the process at birth when they divide us by tribe, location, and skin color...like animals. Then they give those of the lighter hues (Asians, Indians, and coloureds) more privileges than the darker people. By doing this the government hopes to create a hostility between the groups, in order to decrease the chance of a unified uprising against its white administration. Therefore, by dividing us, it hopes to continue ruling us," he added.

Even though lighter skinned people enjoy more privileges than the darker Africans, they are far from reaching the political, social, and economic status of whites.

"Coloureds may work the same job as a white person, in an area restricted for coloureds of course," said Jacobs. "But they will receive only half the pay. Blacks receive on-

ly one-fourth the pay for working the same job. The white government will use any tactic necessary to humiliate and break the spirit of its non-white people. By keeping the non-whites down at the bottom, the whites can enjoy the top positions on the economic ladder," explained Jacobs.

A walk down the streets of Cape Town will reveal one of the most beautifully designed cities in the world. But as you walk, you will soon see "white only" signs plastered on the walls of white businesses. Walk farther and you will see signs stating "non-whites," and eventually you will run into some stamped "for animals and Africans."

This is the kind of humiliation the non-white people must endure every day.

In addition, there is a law that requires all coloureds and Asians to obtain a "book of life" at the age of 16. This book contains their picture, height, weight, and tribe. It must be presented to conduct any type of business or for permission to travel.

Blacks are forced to obtain a passbook. This book resembles the "book of life" in content, but blacks must have it in their possession at all times.

Jacobs has seen blacks dragged from their homes by police and arrested for not having the passbook on their persons. Several thousands are arrested for passbook violations annually.

South Africa leads the world in prison statistics. Jailed persons become non-existent. They cannot be quoted or named in the media.

"Some are placed in small rooms lined with mirrors that are used for psychological torture," Jacobs commented.

Long term political prisoners are sent to Robben Island and sentenced to hard labor. "They usually die there...like Steve Biko. Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, members of the African Nationalist Congress, the oldest resistance group in South Africa, were prisoners there also. When the prisoners are executed, the white police will claim it as suicide and nothing will be done about it, even though it's murder," said Jacobs.

The average weekly income of a non-white person in South Africa is \$10. Those, whom the government grants a job in the mines, average \$20 per week. Collapses in these mines occur daily and hundreds of people have been killed. "Yet, as long as they are non-whites, the government will do nothing. We are cheap labor for them and expendable. If they can't get rid of us one way, there are others," said Jacobs.

Jacobs also revealed that the South African government has proposed a "Homeland Policy Act," by which they will attempt to place the non-white people, 80 percent of the population, on 13 percent of the most, arid, dry, and worthless land in South Africa. A large amount of Africans already live on similar reservations, where they eventually die of starvation.

Jacobs paints a grim picture of South African poverty. "They have only ragged clothing to protect them from the wind. Sometimes, food consists of whatever garbage can be found. Others, who have jobs in the cities, have slightly better diets. One out of three children die of starva-

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tion. It is common to see some parents digging graves for babies before they are even born," he said.

These are the conditions that the African National Congress is fighting to destroy. The philosophy of the black consciousness is to sabotage and crumble the government's theory of "divide and rule." This party is working to unify the three groups of non-white people under one organization.

"Apartheid brands us as uncivilized, savages," said Jacobs. "It conditions our minds to want to be

like whites. The government wants us to think that only whiteness is of value. I am not interested in the straightening of my hair, but in finding my African culture. I believe under a unified movement, change will come. The government will some day be unable to diffuse the resistance of the African people."

International pressure on South Africa to change its apartheid policies continues to mount. Yet, the country shows very little signs of changing.

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Eagle Spins



Grover Washington, Jr. : Come Morning
Elektra/Asylum records
Producer: Grover Washington, Jr.
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

Well, Grover has done it again! This album is another gem in a series of Washington treasures. Every cut on the album is done with precision and perfection.

Grover's saxophone and the string arrangements are beautiful. There are really no stand-outs, but "Be Mine Tonight" is a dynamite cut with Grady Tate on lead vocals.

I recommend this album for studying or just "coolin' out."

Cheryl Roberts

George Duke: Dream On
Epic records
Producer: George Duke
Rating: ★ ★ ★

George Duke has been putting out quality music for quite some time. Dream On is no exception. George started out in jazz, then he moved to rhythm and blues. This album is a pleasant mixture of both.

The stand out cuts are "Ride On," "Son of Reach For It," and "I Will Always Be Your Friend."

Buy the album and "Dream ON."

Cheryl Roberts

Sister Sledge: The Sisters
Cotillion/Atlantic records
Producers: Sister Sledge
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

Sister Sledge is one of my favorite groups. They are noted for their past singles "He's The Greatest Dancer" and "We Are Family."

The new album is very impressive in its arrangements and style. I found the album to be one of Sister Sledge's best.

The standout cuts are; "Super Bad Lady," "My Girl," and "Jackie's Theme: There's No Stopping Us."

If you like Sister Sledge then buy the album. If you don't like them buy it anyway. Try it! You'll like it.

Kerry Johnson

Irene Cara: Anyone Can See
Network/Elektra/Asylum records
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

Irene Cara is moving up in the music world. Already and established actress, her unique vocal quality is making her a respected singer as well.

I enjoyed the album overall. The background vocal really do a lot for the album especially on "Anyone Can See" and "Don't Throw Your Love Away." Some other nice cuts are: "Slow Down" and "True Love."

If you like easy listening music then this album is for you.

Kerry Johnson

Kerry Johnson is Senior Class president and a frequent columnist to the Echo. Cheryl Roberts is a junior from Washington D.C. and a very crazy lady!