

third world bunfight

presents

INTOMBI 'NYAMA and THE NATIVES

in

ipi zombi?

written, designed and directed by Brett Bailey

SEE Stark African realism... a fully authentic township saga...
savage dancing... primitive ceremonies... schoolboys track
down vicious killer witches in wildest terrain... all from the
comfort of your theatre seat!

YOU MUST BELIEVE YOUR EYES... INCREDIBLE AS IT MAY SEEM!

"Theatre, like the plague... unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potentials, and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of plague or of theatre, but of life."

[Antonin Artaud, 'Theatre and the Plague']

"If you let the devil take your hand you'll never get to Halleluiah Land!"

[Doris Day, 'Love me or leave me']

PREMIERED AT STANDARD BANK NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL, 1998

CAST:

'THE NATIVES' are presented as a troupe of 14 roving performers from the hills of rural South Africa, with VIVA, their powerful leader, the narrator of the story. Many of the Natives play several roles in the drama with the help of larger-than-life costumes, which they pull over their hessian shorts and bras. They sing, dance, act and play music. All are covered from head to toe in white clay - an indicator of sacred people amongst the amaXhosa.

INTOMBI 'NYAMA is styled as a special guest star from the Johannesburg metropolis - a diminutive, gaudy, endearing black transvestite.

MUSIC:

Most of the music comes from sacred *sangoma* ceremonies in the rural hills of the Eastern Cape Province, though the lyrics have sometimes been adapted to fit the context, as have those of the hymns. One of the songs – “Boys in the Cupboard” – played on the marimba, is based on a 1960’s tune from Mali, West Africa. The cast plays several drums, marimbas, rattles, kudu horns, etc.

SET:

IPI ZOMBI? is played in three-quarter round, the way many African ceremonies would be performed: the audience sits all around the action. The floor is covered in dry cow dung, and surrounded by grass mats on which the performers sit, sing, play music etc. Several drums, other instruments and crates containing props and costumes share these mats. The space is lit mainly by candles. At the back is a three-tiered stack of rostra, brightly painted and decorated with bones, crucifixes, animal heads, live chickens in a cage, and other paraphernalia. On top of this stack stands a huge old pink cupboard spangled with fragments of mirror. This structure brings to mind a vast ‘voodoo’ altar, and is used extensively as an acting platform.

A fire in a sawn-off drum burns centre stage, though this is later moved off.

TEXT:

(The audience enters into a mysterious ritualistic environment: the performers are wrapped in blankets, sitting in a ring around the perimeter of the arena on the grass mats, facing inwards, heads down, singing softly 'Zitshothina, sifela ethongweni' - we die in our dreams. The fragrant smoke of smouldering herbs clouds the room. Two drummers beat a slow, ponderous rhythm on giant bass drums, and two figures – schoolboys in their uniforms – sit unmoving on the rostra like altar figures. A tall white box stands just in front of the 'altar' containing one of the performers (INTOMBI 'NYAMA) covered in a sheet to be revealed later. VIVA, tall and vigorously sexy in his skirt of monkey tails and his feathered crown, tends the fire. Then he speaks to the audience.)

VIVA: Hey we are the pride of the Eastern Cape, we are the pride of this place - we The Natives, we entertainers, we who are telling you this story, this IPI ZOMBI, *sitshothina*, a story of this country; we who are travelling from village to village, from town to town, while others are afraid, locked up in their houses, believing their televisions, and outside the wild spirits of the forests are possessing the people, killing each and everybody in the streets, in the taverns, even in their beds. Hey this country is struggling. These are the hungry times: the rich are eating the poor, the dead are eating the living, even the roads are eating the children... My friends we bring wonderful stories to you in these strange times in this land of ours, we tell you the stories from the heart of the country, we The Natives, we the Real Live Blacks! Ja! *(singing)Balele, balele, balele...*

(Cast soars into the amamPondo sangoma song: 'Zitshothina, sifela ethongweni')

People, bantu, tonight we are telling you a terrible story, the most hungry story, a story of something bigger than all of us, a story about something worse than you can imagine, about something that eats people bones and everything, and what is making it even more terrible is that it is a true story - ja - from Bhongweni Township, not even six hours drive from where we are tonight, not even three years ago from this night. A taxi crashed and twelve boys were killed, and this hungry thing came out of the forests that night and into the town to eat. For two months it grew fat there, turning the people against each other, making children to kill their own mothers, and eating the people of that town. This is a story of these times, this is a story of this province: IPI ZOMBI?

(VIVA removes the sheet from the tall box and reveals the black-painted head and shoulders of INTOMBI 'NYAMA, resembling an African carving standing on a pedestal. Moving only its lips the statue speaks slowly into the silence, as if entranced.)

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: The day the birds came it started.
I watched them and I knew it was coming.
They came over from the forest in flocks,

Flock after flock after flock,
Black birds like I'd never seen before,
Flying so quietly and blocking the stars...
The old man was in his yard, and he was shaking his head,
Shaking his head at the small boys:
"Yoh, yoh, yoh!
When we were boys those birds wouldn't dare to do a thing like this -
Passing above us like that,
And we boys just sitting there and not even beating them!
What kind of boys are there these days? If only I could be a boy again..."
They came from the forest, all night they came - flying, flying...
The old man said there would be great feasting,
But me - I knew it was the end of the world...

(She exits. The sickening thud of huge cow-hide drum, and three women – the singers – rise up on their knees wailing a traditional sangoma chant.)

ABAZALI BAM BAYALILA (My parents are crying...)

SINGERS: *Abazali bam, abazali bam, bayalila, bayalila...*

(STEVE and KROTCH, the two bloodied schoolboys in white shirts, red ties and long red socks, sitting on the altar, tell the audience their story. STEVE is quite a bit brighter than the groggy KROTCH. The three singers are arranged in a group to one side wrapped in blankets; they move with a mechanical weeping action as they sing.)

STEVE: Ja, you know, it was late and we were coming back from Durban - fifteen boys.

KROTCH: At that time I was almost dreaming, then I heard a big noise and we just fell.

STEVE: I tried to scream: "*Imoto iyawe!*" and the taxi bounced on the ground and then it went down the hill and everybody was screaming.

KROTCH: When I awoke up I just saw the taxi going round and round, I don't know what happened, then I woke up in the hospital. It's all because the driver was fast asleep.

STEVE: No, the driver was not fast asleep, the driver was drunk.

KROTCH: *Hayi*, he was tired.

STEVE: No,no,no-

KROTCH: He was tired.

STEVE: No,no,no, I was sitting next to him. He was drunk. I don't know how I survived, but somehow got out of the taxi.

KROTCH: Who is the one who pulled me out?

STEVE: It was me.

KROTCH: Ja, *ne*?

STEVE: Ja, actually I don't know how I pulled him out, it was so dark - I pulled him by his feet.

KROTCH: Hey thanks man thanks, 'cos I was confused.

STEVE: Ja you know, I was so scared. The *kombi* was upside down - upside down! I crawled to the dashboard to try and pull another body out. The other guys were all dead then.

KROTCH: Where was I at that time? Was I sleeping?

STEVE: You were unconscious at that time.

KROTCH: *Yoh!*

STEVE: Ja now I'm remembering... as we went off the road I saw fifty females in front of the taxi, just watching, with no clothes on, naked, undressed -

KROTCH: *Yoh!* How did you know there were fifty?

STEVE: Because I'm brilliant... I managed to count them - actually it was plus-minus fifty.

KROTCH: And tell me why you didn't shout to warn us, so we could see those witches?

STEVE: It all happened so quickly, you see. I shouted internally - inside myself. I was fascinated at that picture of the fifty women, and then the taxi went over the edge and I went out of my mind!

KROTCH: Even there in Durban my friend Xolani said his mother was wanting to kill him.

STEVE: Who?

KROTCH: Xolani. He said it. His mother is a witch.

Hey, Xolani. Xolani! Where is Xolani?

STEVE: Xolani is dead.

KROTCH: Oh, how could these mothers kill so many?

SINGERS: *Abazali bam, abazali bam, bayalila, bayalila...*

(Enter GOGO and FAZI, elderly pantomime women in Xhosa traditional dress - long orange shirts, plastic turbans, huge strap-on gourd breasts - played by men in drag. They join their sons on the altar.)

GOGO: *Yoh, wena*, what's wrong with you, huh?

STEVE: We had a crash grandmother.

GOGO: A crash, where?

FAZI: Oh my boy! Where does it hurt, where does it hurt? *Thixo wam*, my son is alive!

GOGO: Tell us Steve, tell us what happened!

STEVE: You could just hear bones breaking - the others are all dead: twelve of them.

(Enter MAMBAMBA, hideously ugly and dressed in black drag and spectacles.)

MAMBAMBA: Where is my son Xolani? Have you seen my son Xolani?

STEVE & KROTCH: Xolani is dead!

MAMBAMBA: Oh my son, my son...

SINGERS: *Abazali bam, abazali bam, bayalila, bayalila...*

(The three mothers prance around the arena to the song and then rejoin the boys.)

GOGO: Tell me what happened. Tell me everything.

KROTCH: It was so dark and the driver was sleeping.

FAZI: Sleeping! Driving the car asleep?

STEVE: No, no, no, he was not sleeping, he was drunk.

FAZI: The driver was drunk?

KROTCH: *Hayi* he was tired, my *bhuti*.

FAZI: Drunk? Tired? What is happening here?

SINGERS: *Abazali bam, abazali bam, bayalila, bayalila...*

(The three mothers prance around the arena again. Enter a fiendish-looking DOCTOR in a white coat and big spectacles; he gathers bones that are lying on stage into his bag.)

GOGO: Doctor. Doctor! Our sons have had a terrible crash!

DOCTOR: Ja, actually I was the first one there after the ambulance, and the bodies were all there on the side of the road covered in these blankets, but there was no blood - twelve dead boys and no blood - and then I felt the pulse of one but he was dead, but when I lifted up the blanket the face it was shaking like this... shaking like this...

ALL: Shaking like this... shaking like this...

GOGO & FAZI: *Hawu 'madodo!*

STEVE: It must be these witches.

GOGO & FAZI: *Amagqwira!*

STEVE: Yes, I saw fifty witches standing at the side of the road.

MAMBAMBA: Oh let's go and kill them, let's go and kill them!

KROTCH: I was so dizzy at that time. Steve saw everything.

GOGO: Tell me my boy, what did they say to you?

STEVE: They just smiled at me. All of them just smiled.

DOCTOR: *Thyini*, it seems to me you were all drunk.

STEVE & KROTCH: No,no,no -

FAZI: Hey, *wena*, my son does not drink!

DOCTOR: You don't know the children of today!

KROTCH: And one of them cried: "Xolani! Xolani! I want to kill you!"

MAMBAMBA: Oh my son, my son.

KROTCH: It's her! She was there at the crash. She is a witch.

MAMBAMBA: I'm not a witch, I'm not a witch.

FAZI: *Hamba Satan!*

MAMBAMBA: I'm not a witch, oh I'm not.

KROTCH: He was my best friend.

MAMBAMBA: Oh my God!

GOGO: Hey, why did you do this to our children?

FAZI: Why are you blackmailing us?

MAMBAMBA: Nobody likes me, where must I go, what must I do? Oh!

GOGO: I'm going to phone the police and tell them Mambamba was there - she is a witch.

MAMBAMBA: I'm not a witch, oh I'm not.

GOGO: Hey *thula wena*, shut-up, shut-up, I'm trying to phone. (*into cell phone*) 9-1-1.

ALL: Tring-tring... tring-tring... TRING-TRING!

COP: (*A dim-witted old clown; waking up and speaking into an old red telephone receiver*) Eh...hello!

GOGO: Hello, is that the police station?

COP: Eh, yes, this is Sergeant Ndindwe speaking.

GOGO: Okay, we have a big problem here - some witches have killed our sons.

COP: What? I do not understand what you are saying to me. Explain it carefully.

GOGO: Explain *yonke into ngendlela?*

COP: *Ewe.*

GOGO: They were coming from... what? Where? Where?

FAZI, STEVE, KROTCH: *eThekweni.*

GOGO: (*urgently*) Durban! Durban, they were coming from Durban, and as they reached that, that, that sharp curve, the kombi just fell, and they saw Mambamba flying on a loaf of bread with the other witches - fifty of them!

COP: *Yoh, yoh, yoh!* Where are the boys now?

GOGO: There are only five left, the others are all dead. Please you must come now and catch these witches, we need justice!

COP: Okay, I'm coming! Bee-bah bee-bah, bee-bah, bee-bah -

SINGERS: *Abazali bam, abazali bam, bayalila, bayalila...*

(Together COP, GOGO and FAZI form a little train - the police car - and chase MAMBAMBA about the stage and then off. Enter SENTI – the student leader, in school uniform. He mounts an up-turned crate, centre, stops the singing and addresses the audience.)

SENTI: Brothers and sisters. Students of Carl Malcolmess, we are shocked today because of what has happened to our friends, our comrades, our brothers in arms. This news is a shock to me. They were young, they were innocent, they were promising students. As your student leader I promise you we are going to do something about this. We have allowed these things to happen for too long. We are going to come together. We are going to finish this thing!

ALL: bee-bah bee bah...

(Exit SENTI. Re-enter the witch-hunters; they seize MAMBAMBA.)

COP: We've got her!

FAZI: She is a witch.

MAMBAMBA: I'm not a witch! I'm not a witch!

GOGO & FAZI: You are!

MAMBAMBA: I'm not... *She is a witch!* (*pointing into audience*)

ALL: Huh! (*all peer into audience in dread*)

MAMBAMBA: And that one!

ALL: Huh!

MAMBAMBA: And even that one!

GOGO: Oh, this place is infested - call the doctors! Call the doctors!

INTLOMBE (divining ceremony)

(As the witch-hunters back slowly away, three sangomas dressed in their distinctive white attire with rattles, beads, sticks etc. rise up. They dance slowly in a tight ring around the central fire, leading the cast in the chant 'Zilila ngantoni izinyanya zam?' - 'Why are the Spirits crying?' - which calls their spirit up inside them, enabling them to divine and to perceive sources of evil. Footstamping, drums and whistles. At the climax of the dance one of them, on her knees, calls her prayers to her ancestors while another dives amongst the audience and retrieves an evil charm – a goat skull bristling with pins. They rush it to centre and doctor it with potions and smoking herbs. Then VIVA takes the charms from them and ends the ceremony.)

VIVA: *(punctuated by chants of agreement from The Natives)*

My friends, now of course we can not say that witches were not involved in this thing - in our communities there are many women using witchcraft: maybe they want power or they have jealousy for your money or your family or your good luck. White people and even many blacks laugh at us, they think we are superstitious, but there are many things they do not know with their science, and also there are many things they do not know that they do not know. Sometimes a woman is putting some poison there at your gate, and this thing will burn you when you are walking past every day. Then your feet are swelling until you cannot walk, and no doctor can help you, even the *sangoma* or the prophet is helpless. Or the witch is sending these, these, these short men to poison you while you sleep, and the doctors say: “*Thyini!* Look at these crystals we are finding in your stomach,” and nobody knows how they were getting there.

The *sangomas* found many of these things (*indicating the charm found by the sangomas*) hidden in people's houses in Bhongweni Township. These things have power for our people, whether you believe it or not.

They say that many years ago when they were chasing witches from that town the witches took things like this and buried them there, at the gate of the town, so the community would be cursed forever. And people are still dying like flies there!

But now, the trouble really started one week after the crash when a small girl, only eleven years, told some things to her friends. People, please welcome our special star to act this character ... INTOMBI

'NYAMA! *(A moment of panic as she doesn't appear)* Iphi Intombi Nyama?

WOMEN: *(sitting in a row on the rostra in gaily coloured plastic skirts, call)* Intombi Nyama!

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: Hi!

(She is played as an urban superstar in drag: pearls in her dreadlocks, plastic ball gown, diamante jewellery etc. She greets everybody, introduces herself in isiXhosa, explains that she plays the role of the young girl, Thandeka, who first started the zombie rumours. Then she mounts an old big bass drum, centre-stage to take the part, and speaks in dreamy tones.)

BOYS IN THE CUPBOARD

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: You know, when my friends were killed it took my breath away.

WOMEN: Aaah...

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: When my friends were killed it took my breath away.

WOMEN: Aaah...

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: My God, it was silent.

As silent as the stars.

Have you ever lost a friend?

It was the quietest time of all.

And I wondered to myself, who would do such a thing?

And then I wondered, who would kill so many?

I remember my friends,

I remember their eyes.

Why? Why did she close their eyes?

I wondered all these things in that silence...

(A clatter of drums, marimbas, percussion, and the women bounce into funky West African song and dance around the arena.)

WOMEN: If you are afraid of the dark, if you hear a bump in the night,
You'd better be staying inside if you wanna be staying alive.
They will catch you in your pyjamas, they will eat you for their supper.
Zombies looking for food. Ipi zombi up to no good.

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: And then I dreamed of a big *mielie* field,
and all those long green leaves waving,
waving in the wind -

WOMEN: waving in the wind -

INTOMBI NYAMA: A strange dream for a small girl, a small girl like me -
waving in the wind like long green tongues,
and whispering

WOMEN: whispering -

INTOMBI NYAMA: words to me

WOMEN: words to me -

INTOMBI NYAMA: telling me secrets,
calling my name... *mtla mla mla, mla mla mla*
I feel the wind, I feel the wind

MEN: (*chanting*) Boys in the cupboard calling her name, boys in the cupboard calling her name.

INTOMBI NYAMA: And then a bird says to me:

WOMEN: “*Yiza sisi, yiza* - I'll show you everything.” (*they flutter their hands like birdwings*)

INTOMBI NYAMA: A little bird, so I go... (*she chases and imaginary bird around the arena*)

MEN: Boys in the cupboard calling her name, boys in the cupboard calling her name.

INTOMBI NYAMA: And the snake by the river is eating his children,
eating his children with his big snake mouth,
eating his children with his big snake mouth,
eating his children with his big snake mouth...
mtla, mla, mla...
Huh! It's coming from my grandmother's cupboard!
Oh, it's coming from the cupboard of *makhulu!* (*she dashes up the stairs of the altar to the cupboard*)

WOMEN: If you are afraid of the dark, if you hear a bump in the night,
You'd better be saying your prayers, or you'll be crying the tears.
They will take you home to their mother, she will make you into their brother.
It makes the tears run out of my eyes, makes the tears run out of my eyes.

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: Ssh. (*listening at the cupboard doors*)

Oh - human voices...

Ewe, ewe... Oh - they are hungry grandmother, the boys are hungry...

Oh, they are thirsty grandmother, crying for water...

Oh they say "why, grandmother, why are we here?"

Why, grandmother, we want to come out,

We want to come out, we want to come out,

Oh we see snakes, grandmother, snakes and frogs,

It's cold in here, cold and dark,

Oh I'm hungry, open the door,

Where's my mama, open the door..."

MEN: (*chanting*) Boys in the cupboard calling her name, boys in the cupboard calling her name.

WOMEN: If you are afraid of the dark, if you hear a bump in the night,
You'd better be staying in bed or you'll be losing your head.
She'll cut off your tongue with a knife, you'll be dead the rest of your life.
Zombies looking for food, ipi zombi up to no good.

(The women dance around in a ring singing all the verses of the song at the audience with their heads thrown back and hands up-raised. INTOMBI 'NYAMA, entranced, wonders down into the centre of the ring clutching her head.)

VIVA: (*leaping into the arena*) Intombi Nyama and the Natives, everybody!

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: (*curtseying*) Oh, you make me feel so special!

(A cheer and all exeunt except VIVA and INTOMBI 'NYAMA. The stage is set for the funeral)

INTOMBI 'NYAMA: My friends, hey we are proud to have you here to come and enjoy our performance, to listen to this terrible story - you make us very strong. And we have worked very hard to make this drama great for you - we even went to the mountains for two weeks to find the Spirit of this play. You think there is no Spirit, you think we are not working with the Spirit. You think the Spirit of Africa is dead because everybody is wanting the hungry Spirit of America inside them? *We* are making the spirit strong, *we* are bringing it to you. So you are not coming here by accident - something, maybe even your ancestors, brought us all together tonight. Also to our sponsors: we thank you very much that you helped us to do this work in these hard times. *Enkosi bhuti.*

VIVA: (*addressing the audience*) Now, I hope you are following this story? It is 15 October 1995, and we are on the sports field of Carl Malcolmess with five thousand people and twelve coffins...

(A sexy she-DEVIL with a long red fork rises up through a trapdoor in the altar, creeps on and stabs VIVA in the bottom, he flees. DEVIL begins the falsetto introduction to the song “Nkosi sihlangene” in angelic tones, summoning up PRIESTS with a pitch of her fork.)

THE FUNERAL

PRIESTS: We are gathered here today to bury our sons, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

(The choir sweeps into hymn - Nkosi sihlangene - there's a great flourishing of white robes. The two PRIESTS don bright gowns under a vast umbrella, and the solemn choir all in white and sunglasses bear a coffin on high. An angel – played by INTOMBI NYAMA – lights altar candles. Priests take up position on the grand old big bass drum – after chasing DEVIL from it – with the umbrella towering above them. DEVIL crouches malevolently on the coffin. Choir gathers in pyramid formation on the altar.)

PRIESTS: *Masevaleni amehlo.* Let us pray.

(All pray simultaneously in loud lamenting Xhosa)

PRIEST 1: *(PRIEST 2 gives Xhosa translations after each phrase)* Brothers and sisters, today we are sad, we grieve for the sons we will bury today; but listen to me, do not weep, do not weep: for God has come for our boys. He has come for our sons. He shouted their names and they answered His call. Be proud of your sons. They were handpicked by God. They were called by the Lord. He said:

PRIEST 2: “Come to me. Come to me. I need you. I have work for you. I have a job for you in Heaven.”

PRIEST 1: “Yes Father, yes Father, yes we are coming to Jerusalem, Father, we will come when ever you call us.”
And they went! Yes, they went. They gave up their lives to work for the Lord. Be proud of your sons. Their spirits are alive, alive in Jerusalem!

(Three women break into a hymn - Hosanna – and move forward with framed portraits of their deceased sons, kneel at the coffin where they place the portraits and then return to join the choir who sing the chorus)

WOMEN: Oh no my son, now you've left your mother
You go to heaven and your mother weeps
Yes a mother suffers, yes a mothers crying
For the boy is killed and what can I do?

Hosanna - hosanna...

CHOIR: Halleluiah, halleluiah...

WOMEN: Oh no my son, your mother's crying,
Now you live with God and what can I do?
All my dreams are dying, mother suffers,
And my heart is dead and what can I do?
Hosanna...

CHOIR: Halleluiah, halleluiah...

PRIEST 1: But, let us learn from this lesson.

PRIEST 2: Let us learn from this lesson.

PRIEST 1: I say to you -

PRIEST 2: I ask of you -

PRIEST 1: Are you prepared?

PRIEST 2: Are you ready?

PRIEST 1: For your time will come!

PRIEST 2: Yes your time will come too!

PRIEST 1: What are you hiding there in your closet?

PRIEST 2: What are you doing there in the corner?

PRIEST 1: No! It's no good -

PRIEST 2: It's no good...

PRIEST 1: For the Father knows!

(Enter three BOYS: SENTI, ZOL, FIRE. They confer at the coffin.)

PRIEST 2: And the Father sees!

PRIEST 1: He knows what you are doing.

PRIEST 2: He sees what you are hiding.

PRIEST 1: And He does not approve!

PRIEST 2: He will punish you!

PRIEST 1: Repent!

PRIEST 2: I say repent!

PRIEST 1: Before it is too late.

PRIEST 2: There is no escape!

(Choir explodes into rousing hymn: “iNceba iyavela!” – “Mercy is coming”. The BOYS invade the funeral with a stomping “train dance”, whistles blasting.)

PRIEST1: Brothers and sisters...

SENTI: *(imploring)* People, listen to me. This is not true. The spirits of our brothers are not alive and in Heaven. Their spirits were stolen before they could even reach Heaven. Stolen and made into slaves by our own mothers. Stolen and locked up in the dark.

(A drumbeat starts ominously, and choir erupts into panicky shifting dance)

PRIEST 1: Oh! Beware of Satan.

PRIEST 2: Beware of Satan.

PRIEST 1: For he is alive.

PRIEST 2: He is alive amongst us.

PRIEST 1: He comes when we are weak with grief.

PRIEST 2: He takes us when we are sad and angry.

PRIEST 1: He comes up like a snake through the floors of our houses.

PRIEST 2: He comes into our hearts and turns us against one another.

PRIEST 1: Beware of Satan. Trust in the Lord.

PRIEST 2: Pray to God now!

SENTI: And did the witches pray to God when they killed our brothers? Where was Jesus that night on the side of the road, and where is God now when our brothers are made into zombies?

FIRE: Open up these coffins *'bafundisi* and show us the meat - the meat they want us to bury!

(The choir screams, slowly raising black umbrellas.)

PRIESTS: Oh the demons are in the house of the Lord!

FIRE: You can't bury this meat *'bafundisi*. We the *abafana* must first find out who is responsible for this thing. We will save our comrades. And if you try, if you try to bury this meat we will burn this town. *Sizakuyitshisa!*

(Choir begins rhythmically opening and closing umbrellas in synch, hooting with horror - the umbrellas make the eerie sound of big wings beating, to the delight of dancing DEVIL. The priests are driven from their citadel, which is quickly taken by SENTI. FIRE and ZOL open the coffin - inside, a shrouded human form, animal bones and feathers. Choir screams and umbrellas burst open as a shield against the evil. Kudu horns wail. SENTI speaks in emotionless, hypnotic tones over the steady pulse of the drum. As he speaks the choir cranes forward to gasp and ogle in horror at the contents of the coffin.)

SENTI: *Yiza, jonga*, this is what they have done to our brothers. Look, these were your sons - now there is just meat. Come and see the meat. Come, look. These are not boys. Look, now they have beards. Have you ever seen boys with beards before? Look at their grey faces. Look at their long nails. Don't be angry with us, we want your sons to rest in peace. She has stolen their souls and cut off their tongues, and put bones in their heads to make them her slaves. And you Christians say, "do not question the ways of God." Is this the ways of God? Must I sit here and wait for my turn?

WOMEN: *(into Hosanna hymn again)* Oh no my son, listen to your mother,
Your brothers work in the house of God
A mother suffers, yes a mothers crying
Let your brothers sleep six foot underground.
Hosanna - hosanna...

CHOIR: Six foot under the ground, six foot under the ground...

SENTI: Where are our friends? You cannot hide them forever. We will bring the witchdoctors from the mountains, they will bring our brothers back to life, they will show us who you are and then you will pay. We want a clean society.

FIRE: *(shouting)* Asheshe... asheshe... asheshe... shona!

ALL: *Ziphi izitshixo? Ziphi izitshixo? (Where are the keys?)*

(They strip off their gowns, throwing them down the trapdoor, and advance onto stage. Women run screaming, pursued by the DEVIL)

THE FEAR

(A brief burst of percussive song “Bulala abathakhati” – “Kill the witches” - and five BOYS in school uniforms muster in agitation)

ZOL: Kubo! Kubo! I am the son of Blood and the son of Anger. Hey, *bafana* - do you hear me? - I ask you young men - What is going on in our town of Bhongweni?

BOYS: What are you saying? What are you saying?

ZOL: Our brothers are in her grandmother's cupboard. She said it: - her grandmother - that Mrs Magudu - she's keeping our brothers in her cupboard.

BOYS: Even us too - we saw them - washing her taxies - our dead brothers.

ZOL: Where?

BOYS: There - at her house - washing the taxies - our dead brothers.

ZOL: When?

BOYS: Last night - and when we called them - they ran away.

ZOL: Oh! That Mrs Magudu - that Mrs Magudu! Why does she hate us?

BOYS: She hates us because we are young - and she is too old - and we love her daughter!

ZOL: Oh! That Mrs Magudu - that Mrs Magudu! Why does she hate us?

BOYS: It's the jealousy. The jealousy. The reason of the jealousy.

ZOL: Oh! Kubo! Kubo!

(A percussive leap into “bulala 'bathakathi”. MRS MAGUDU runs onto arena and is barked at by savage boy-dogs.)

ALL: *Bulala - bulala 'bathakathi! Bulala - bulala 'bathakathi!*

SENTI: Comrades, order! This is a very serious matter. We must do things in a proper manner. I will take control as usual.

BOYS: We must take action - before it's too late - these evil zombies - are walking the streets!

SENTI: Comrades, this thing is very painful to us, I know, but let us do things in a systematic way.

BOYS: Yes let us kill them - systematically: - five witches - every night.

SENTI: When?

BOYS: Tonight - we will kill them - Tonight - we must go!

KROTCH: Is anyone taking minutes? Is anyone taking minutes?

BOYS: No need for minutes! No need for minutes!

SENTI: Who?

BOYS: That thin ugly black one – there, on the corner.

SENTI: Why?

BOYS: She lives alone in a big house!

SENTI: Who?

BOYS: That fatty fatty.

SENTI: Why?

STEVE: She has a big cat, a big cat, a big black cat!

BOYS: Kill all the suspects. Let's kill all the suspects!

SENTI: Oh! Kubo! Kubo!

(A percussive leap into “bulala 'bathakathi”. Another woman dashes into circle and is stoned)

ALL: *Bulala - bulala 'bathakathi! Bulala - bulala 'bathakathi!*

FIRE: Comrades! Young men of Bhongweni! These cruel mothers are out of control! Who is the first one? Who is the first one?

BOYS: That Mrs Magudu - she is the first one - she's keeping our brothers - to be her slaves.

FIRE: *Hawu!*

BOYS: She has *uhili* - a dwarf - *utikoloshe!*

FIRE: *Hawu!*

BOYS: She rides a baboon at night - *borhum! borhum!*

FIRE: Dammit, the Christians are witches too.

KROTCH: We need evidence, where's the evidence?

BOYS: No need for evidence! No need for evidence!

KROTCH: What about the law! What about the law!

BOYS: We are the law! We are the law!

SENTI: Comrades, let us kill these criminals without delay.

FIRE: Viva the spirit of killing the witches - Viva! Viva!

BOYS: Viva! *Kubo! Kubo! Kubo!*

(A percussive leap into "bulala 'bathakathi". A third woman dashes into circle and is stoned.)

ALL: *Bulala - bulala 'bathakathi! Bulala - bulala 'bathakathi!*

(The BOYS wash their hands in a bucket, then crouch in ambush.)

THE SACRIFICE

(MR MAGUDU and REPORTER on the altar. The REPORTER is the devil with a flaming microphone. Dim lights and candles)

WOMEN: *(crooning gospel song)* Go away, Devil, go away devil go away
Go away, Devil, go away devil go away
Who is knocking at my door? Who is knocking at my door?
The Devil is knocking at my door...

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS MRS MAGUDU: *(stepping into centre)* This scene is about a woman who was killed, the first of the women they said were witches.
(She kneels with a candle, centre, to pray)

REPORTER: Mr Magudu, your mother was the first to be killed. I do not wish to be insensitive, but – uh do you think your mother was a witch?

MR MAGUDU: No she was not a witch, I mean every Sunday she was going to church, and I never saw a snake or even a bird living inside her room - I mean there is no proof.

BOYS: *(encroaching on Mrs Magudu)* *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?
Ziphi izitshixho? Where are the keys?

REPORTER: Can you tell our viewers what happened that night, it was the Friday before the funeral for the boys -

MR MAGUDU: I'm still seeing this... I can't believe...I-I-I don't understand why this thing happened. I mean, we are Christians -

BOYS: *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys? *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?

REPORTER: Um, our viewers are very interested in these things, perhaps you could tell them what did happen to your mother...

MR MAGUDU: She came from the memorial service for the boys, she was so tired and she was in a rush to cook... Actually I was not there at that time, I went to a friend to get a part for the taxi... they sent one of the boys to knock at the door, a big crowd, they had a meeting that afternoon...

BOYS: *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys? *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?

MR MAGUDU: He knocks on the door and says to her:

ZOL: Where are the children?

WOMEN: *(singing)* Who is knocking at my door? Who is knocking at my door? The Devil is knocking at my door...

MRS MAGUDU: What children, *nyana?*

ZOL: Those who were killed, the school children.

MRS MAGUDU: No, I know nothing about those children.

BOYS: *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys? *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?

(BOYS gather around her as she kneels, clapping their hands together loudly in her face, driving her on with fear)

MRS MAGUDU: *(taking a deep breath and then exclaiming in a stream of shrill exhalation)* Then there was a smashing of glass and this gang was coming through the back door, and others coming through the front, breaking the tv and the pictures and everything, and my grandchildren were screaming because they were scared, and the boys were shouting, and the boys were shouting: *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?

BOYS: *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys? *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?

MRS MAGUDU: They wanted the keys of my cupboard, and they were checking all the rooms but they couldn't find anything, and I said: "Come and look in the cupboard!" - They were too scared! And I was praying "Oh my God, Oh my God!"

BOYS: *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys? *Ziphi izitshixho?* Where are the keys?

MRS MAGUDU: They dragged me out and the dog was dead in the garden, they carried me through the streets singing, "Kill the witch! Kill the witch!" and I was saying: "Oh my Jesus, help me, forgive them for what they do..."

(Burst of percussion. MRS MAGUDU launches into a desperate dance of fear, ZOL dancing about her seductively, then FIRE joins, then SENTI with a knife. They dance the dance of her death then drag her to the altar, plunge in and bludgeon her to death. One of the women is screaming as the assailants pull back; she tries to hold MRS MAGUDU then collapses in tears. MRS MAGUDU crawls forward to centre stage and dies. All boys except SENTI - with a bloody dagger clenched above his head - slink away.)

MR MAGUDU: They cut off all her fingers and stabbed her in the chest, but she still had her clothes on, so the intestines could not come out, they carried her to the field on their shoulders, like a soccer champion, and beat her with sticks and crushed her with rocks, these big, big rocks they picked up. When I first heard I just ran in confusion, when I got there I mean if I had a gun I would have blown somebody up - bah-bah-bah - but there were too many police. They arrested seven boys.

SENTI: We are cleaning this town, my brother, all of these cockroaches must go. We want to live in peace. We want our rights, and you want to charge me for murder. Must we all work for these mamas?

MR MAGUDU: You know, if she had been a witch then I would not blame them, but she died saying, "I know nothing." She died saying that.

(He exits. SENTI is alone with the knife and the body)

SENTI: *(angry)* Even the police, they do not protect us at all. They just come with their big cars and take all our girlfriends to Chicken Licken while our brothers are murdered by these witches. This thing is not finished, I promise you. I'll go to jail - maybe for twenty-five years. That's how life is. But this thing is not finished. I'll be back. And when I get back I will get those who have sent me to jail. That's how life is. *Bunjalo ubomi.*

(SENTI off.)

SHAKIN' THE BLUES AWAY

(Insect sounds fill the dark night; DEVIL opens cupboard doors. Inside waits a group of white-painted boys, naked but for loin-cloths, arms twisted behind their backs, and wearing long narrow African masks. They throng out onto stage, bobbing like vultures, and gather to feed on MRS MAGUDU, and to menace the audience. A thrill of crackling turntable sound, the spotlight comes up on INTOMBI 'NYAMA in the cupboard, the zombies glance up as she breaks into an up-tempo and over the top lip-synch of Doris Day's 50's up-tempo hit "Shaking the blues away", which tells troubled people to "do like the voodoos do and listen to a voodoo melody..." The thrilled zombies caper around backing her in fifties musical song and dance. Then, like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, she leads the adoring zombies out into the world at large...)

THE HACKING

(A big bass boom throbs into life. VIVA leaps into the arena and throws himself into a frenzied dance, then begins his tirade. BOYS return to arena and change into their school attire, and take up in a ring around the arena for the 'hacking dance'. The open coffin is placed centre stage.)

VIVA: My friends, this is a true story, you do not believe it. This is a true story of sickness and nobody is knowing how to heal it. Even our ancestors cannot help us as they did in the past - they work fulltime for us day and night, but the people have forgotten them and they have so little power. They come to us in our dreams and say, 'children of our fathers, we are so hungry'... This is a story of a big hunger, the hungry ghosts of Africa. This

is a story of power! Do you feel it?! Feel it all around you. This is our power!

(drums crescendo, and VIVA is trance dancing) For six weeks those bodies lay there in the mortuary. *Sangomas* came, but they could not bring life back to those bodies, they were saying ‘no, there are too many witches in this place, the witches eat holes in our power. This thing is too strong!’ And what can our ancestors do and what can even Jesus do when this thing is eating a community?

(Women shriek into “Ababuyanga ‘bantwana bethu”- “Our children have not returned”.)

VIVA: *(raving, psyching the BOYS up)*
This is a hungry story,
This story eats people alive,
Can you feel it, the hunger of this story,
It eats us with its jaws, it eats us bones and all,
The hunger of this story, it has the teeth of the night,
The hunger of the forest,
We are telling you this story, do you see how we die like flies,
Do you see how it eats us alive,
The hunger of evil,
The hunger of the spirits,
The hunger of the night,
The hunger of the people,
The hunger of the roads,
The hunger of God,
The hunger of the mothers,
Eating us alive...

(BOYS, crouching in a ring, have slowly risen up, and as VIVA cracks his whip at the summit of the altar they launch into their dance around the open coffin while the drums pound and the singers cry. Suddenly they freeze, axes are handed to them and they face the audience in a ring.)

BOYS: For two months - it grew fat here - this thing
turning the people against each other
eating the people of our town
until we chopped those bodies - into little pieces.

VIVA: Why? *(cracking his whip)*

BOYS: To drive this thing away.

VIVA: Where?

BOYS: Back into the forest.

VIVA: Where?

BOYS: Back into the night.

VIVA: Oh! Kubo! Kubo!

(BOYS launch back into the manic hacking dance. FIRE leaves the dance, lifts his axe over his head, and with a great cry chops into the body in the coffin. The others collapse. FIRE hacks and hacks.)

WOMEN: *(crooning)* Go away, Devil, go away devil go away
Go away, Devil, go away devil go away
Who is knocking at my door? Who is knocking at my door?
The Devil is knocking at my door...

(The performers wrap themselves in blankets and gather around the coffin, singing softly, then leave the arena still singing.)

VIVA: We build our fences up and up and up, even with thorns and with aloes. In the morning they are broken and the mielies are gone. There is something bigger than all of us - something worse than you can imagine. There, in the river. There, in the veld. We pray to our ancestors and offer them gifts: beer, meat and even money, but this thing is too hungry. You lock your doors at night and close the windows, but it creeps inside, in through the keyhole, and in through the cracks, in while you sleep, in while you breathe. You wake up in the morning and this thing has been inside you and then you are so empty. You wake up too quickly - it is still inside you, and then you are lost... Good night *(exit with maniacal laughter)*.

END