

Tapping into the power of the African spirit

By Solomon Makgale, Cue student reporter

IPI ZOMBI? is a mind-boggling, disturbing piece of art. It is like a missile guided to hit the vulnerable and core part of our beings: our souls.

Brett Bailey cleverly uses the powerful tool of drama to get people thinking and alter perceptions. Never mind the black coffin, candles, zombies, witches,

it is the hypnotic thudding of a gigantic drum, funeral chants and wailing that disturbs more.

It creates a peculiar atmosphere — spiritual. The presence makes your body stiffen as the aura freezes your spine.

The play might be regarded by some as the perpetuation of black

stereotypes, but there are lessons to be learnt from it. *Ipi Zombi?* reinforces the power inherent in African spirituality — it can challenge any mainstream religion.

It conjures up strange memories for me. A friend and I stole sugar from his house and ate it. Later I fell ill and lost consciousness. I was taken to an *inyanga*. When I woke up, he showed me a frog that had come out of my stomach after purgation.

Western influence on our culture has popularised the belief that witchcraft, *sangomas* and *amaghirha* are non-existent and impotent.

Go and watch *Ipi Zombi?* before you decide if the power is there. The stuff is real, chaps!

African culture is usually depicted as barbaric or reduced to mysticism. Like one Kokstad farmer who described the kombi crash on which the piece is based as: "A load of kaffir bullshit".

Bailey's play is a true picture of African spirituality.

The performance is realistic. Nomfundo Dubula, who acts as a witchdoctor, says when she is on stage the distinction between herself and the character gets blurred.

"I feel like I am the most powerful witchdoctor. A spirit wells up inside my

belly making me powerful and capable of anything," she says.

Another cast member, Andile Bonde says he feels like a true zombie. *Ipi Zombi?* is not fictitious, it is figurative.

The stage is treated as a sacred place. Before meditation rites the actors dance and sing around the fire.

"I push them really hard. I turn their bodies into flames. I put red coals inside their bellies and their imaginations. I tell their blood and their veins to run orange. I want this whole fuckin' place up in flames," Bailey says passionately.

And this is the energy he wants the audience to catch.

STATE OF MIND: Andile Bonde (with a coffin behind him) plays Krotch in *Ipi Zombi?* Pic by Clive Ntingi

