
No Space on Long Street

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No Space on Long Street was written and performed by Uys as a tribute to the Space Theatre's 25th anniversary. It was first presented at the Baxter Theatre in March 1997, directed by Lynne Maree.

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PRESS COMMENTS AFTER THE SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIERE, 18 MARCH 1997

Hilariously funny and brilliantly observed ...
—*CAPE TIMES*

A superb performance like this underlines [Uys's]
position as a unique contributor to the South African
theatre.
—*DIE BURGER*

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[On a bare stage stands a theatrical skip. We see the words "THE SPACE/DIE RUIMTE/INDAWO". In the skip are costumes. The skip is also used as a dressing table. On either side of the stage road signs: Bloem Street, Buiten Street. Along the front of the stage: Long Street.

Areas indicated by light and sound.

SPIDER appears with today's newspaper in hand. He is a vagrant but in 90s terms, looks respectable. Could be one of us. A pigeon shits on his head]

SPIDER

Hey man, jisis! Even these Long Street pigeons have changed. Not just everything else in Long Street, but even the fucking pigeons! They used to sit up there on the roof and shit in the gutter. Decent, polite. For years, controlled kakking: the 70s, the 80s. Then the gutter fell down in 1994, the day right after the Election. So full of dove shit it couldn't hold. Crash! But do the pigeons find another gutter? Like over there at the flats? Or over the bookshop? No. They sit just here, where there is no gutter. Where it's not even safe, or comfortable for a dove to sit, because of the sloping roof. Here they now sit, uncomfortably, and shit. On me! *[Shouts up]* I was here first! You festering flying farting feathered fuckers! It's good their lifespan is short. A normal dove maybe lives for a time. But a Cape Town dove? Just a few months and it's dead. Too much eating. Gobble fart gobble splat! No decent exercise. Not even some flying. Just sitting and shitting on me!

But I was here first. Since nineteen ... ? Hang on now. *[He counts]* It was seventy-something ... 72? 1972. There used to be two palms at the Two Palms Mosque in '72. Now there's just one palm. People laugh at the name and say: "Where is the second palm?" They should have been here in 1972. It was there. Just fell over in the South Easter one night.

Now that doesn't change. That fucking South Easter. Just seems to get worse. When that wind comes down Long Street? It's like a funnel, a wind tunnel. It grabs everything and throws it in my face like I was a dirtbin! Papers.

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Cartons. Plastic bags. Even used condoms from the sexshop up there. Sis. That's changed, hey? Live sex supermarkets in Long Street? It's now like buying ... ag ... a cigarette or a beer! Except you buy tits. Strip shows. Live sex! No, it's true! Up there. I hear it at night. All that "I'm coming, I'm coming."

Like ou Gracie used to shout in the old days. "Hey Spider man, let me come before you go!" Gracie would laugh. [*Looks up*] Hey Gracie? Stop blowing the angels for a moment and look down! Freedom has hit Long Street! Officially too. It's protected by the Constitution! If not a condom ...

Unconstitutionally in the 70s we were free to do what we wanted, man, in spite of the *boere* and the laws. And we did! Listen, we had nice sex here in Long Street, but it was always illegal in those days. Ja, breaking the law gives you a good horn, hey? You *pomped* up against a parked Cortina. No damn alarms that go off like today when you just breathe on a car. In the seventies no one stole cars. We couldn't drive!

We also used to *pomp* under cardboard boxes in that alley over there, before it was bricked up after that crazy Italian was murdered. We had some of that too. Murders. But it was called that. It was the death of a person, not just a statistic. [*Looks at the paper*] Now it's all just violence. Words that mean nothing. Massacres. Hijackings. Muggings. Rape. Democracy. Another useless 90s word with no beginning, no middle and no end ... I suppose it was my "democratic right" in the 70s to say: "Let me off the bus of life ..." Mmmm.

So the fucking doves shit on me. And the fucking people shit on me. And fucking life shits on me. But this is now a fucking democracy, so sometimes I can shit back! I just got to be quick enough to catch one of those doves. He'll be fucking sorry.

"Hey, Spider? Bergie!" That's what Gracie would call me. Well, I'm not a bergie anymore. I'm a "potential voter"! I am now "disadvantaged". I am one of the "Victims of the System". What shit! I left the System to avoid being a

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victim. I'm a chooser, not a loser!

Now I can choose democratically: a) Do I keep an eye on your car when you park? Or b) Do I feed your meter? Or c) Do I demand to get paid? Or d) Do I bum a beer and a smoke? Whatever, I'm self-employed. So, dove? Go shit on a victim of the system! Not a managing director of his own business!

[Gets to the arts pages]

Twenty-five years? It must be. When I came here to Long, this theatre they're talking about in the paper, The Space, had just opened its doors. I remember that Space. Never went there. "Full of hippies," that's what Gracie said. "Druggies. Queers. White Kaffirs." Now they say in the paper, it was a place where people could be normal, like sit together, black and white.

Normal? We been doing that here in The Street for years. No one ever said to me: "Spider, you can't sit here on this kerb. It's for whites only!" I think Gracie was coloured. Not that it bothers me! I never thought about it then. I would fuck her here and ... well, she never asked: was I white? Maybe she thought I was also coloured. I wasn't very clean. No, just sunburnt.

Anyway I knew more things than a coloured. I did my school and knew ... things. But ... I don't know. When the army chucked me out in '71, then all that surfing at Long Beach. After my accident ... One day I was going that way with the bus, and the next day I was here sitting on the kerb with a smoke and a beer in my hand. I just sat for a bit, resting. I thought I was going to go back to over There. But I just stayed, over Here! It was lekker in those days. There by Carnival Court, all the girlies that stayed there. Nice Afrikaans girlies. Sexy. Rude. The one fancied me. Called me a wild man! It's not Carnival Court any more. Now it's a youth hostel. 'The Lion's Den'! The Blue Lodge up there was blue, man, blue. Now it's just a B&B, shame.

There by the junk shop, there was the keffie. Run by this mad deaf Italian fucker. We called him Mario, like in Lanza. Shouted at everyone. Hated everything except his Italian

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opera. I laughed man, I laughed. Me and Gracie would sit and pee in his doorway and then wait for him to scream: "Fuck off, you rubbish!" In Italian, but we understood ...
[*Back to the paper*]

The Space/*Die Ruimte*. Maybe I should have gone in there and just looked. Gracie said they would've chucked us out, but I don't know. Maybe I could've been an actor there? No, they wouldn't have wanted me. But listen, I am an actor. This is my stage. That Space closed down after 10 years, but we're still open.

[*He watches someone walk past*]

Hey, but I know that person. Some actor? I saw him on the TV in Morkel's shop window. He's the one who dresses up like that Afrikaans woman! I remember him from those days. He was also there at The Space! Doesn't look the same, that's for sure. Twenty-five years ago he had more hair. Thinner. A fat cat, shame.

I remember him coming down here, 1973, in purple and yellow bellbottoms and those clumpy platform shoes. Bloody fool! These "artists". Think they can get away with anything. They paint, they act, they write. They have opinions, about everything! They scheme they have style. To us in The Street they just look like arseholes. And that one was a hell of an arsehole in his bell-bottoms in 1973!

[*LIGHTCHANGE to PIETER-DIRK UYS in the present in basic black t-shirt, pants and shoes. During this link get GRACIE costume out of skip and prepare*]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Where did it begin?

Ironically, with CAPAB's experimental production of *Orestes*. Brian Astbury shared the process of the creation of this work with Athol Fugard and Yvonne Bryceland in 1971.

Then a night at the Open Space Theatre in London. Leading to chats and plans. What-ifs and why-nots.

To cut a long story short.

The Space/*Die Ruimte* opened round the 27th March 1972

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with a new play by Athol Fugard: *Statements after an arrest under the Immorality Act*.

The Space's colours were nailed to the mast.

The impossible was probable.

It was the beginning of freedom of expression in the theatre. Then came *People are Living There*. *Gilgamesh*. *Othello Slegs Blankes*, because in those days a black Othello would not be allowed to appear on stage with a white Desdemona. So he didn't turn up!

Donald Howarth's *Scarborough* introduced nudity. A plain-clothes cop watched the third performance with a hard-on. The next day it was banned.

Sizwe Banzi is Dead was born. John Kani and Winston Ntshona stepped out of the shadows of apartheid and started leading the way. It led to more police harassment. It also led to Tony Awards in New York.

The Space became the conscience of a generation.

I was in London being Peter A-C-E, fourth-year at the London Film School. Someone sent me a tape of Mimi Coertse singing 'O Boereplaas' as a joke. I cried all day and got on the next boat home. The *SA Vaal*.

I knew about The Space.

I also had a first play written.

When I popped into the theatre on my first day in Cape Town, just to say hi to Brian and maybe drop a few hints, they were all waiting for me, including Lynne Maree who, I think, should have been at school!

Lovey? Darling? Pieter? Pietie! Poepie! Lovely long hair!

"What's happening?" I asked.

"Nothing!" they lied in unison.

"What's opening?" I asked.

"*Skyvers/Jollers*," they said. A localised British play about schooling.

"Oh?" I said. "When?"

"In three days," they said. Robin Malan directing and playing the teacher. Starring Bill Flynn, Paul Slab, Peter Piccolo, Lynne, Dawie Malan.

"Nice," I said.

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“Well, no, Robin Malan had to leave. The teacher is still uncast.”

Opening in three days? Uncast? Teacher? About my age?

“Is that your play, *Faces in the Wall*?” said Brian. “Just what we might need for our upstairs venue.”

“When?” I said.

“After *Skyvers*. If it works. In about 6 weeks. So what are your plans now, Poepie?”

“Don’t I open in three days as the teacher in *Skyvers/Jollers*?” It was not the first time affirmative blackmail was used!

After that I did *Faces in the Wall* in the Upstairs Theatre. At the same time helping out by directing *We Bombed in New Haven* in the Main Theatre, when director Mavis Taylor contracted jaundice. No, Mavis Taylor didn’t just contract jaundice. She rehearsed it, moved it, designed it, produced it and directed it!

I started learning how to burn the candle at both ends and save wax!

Then came Yvonne and Percy Sieff in Bill Tanner’s production of Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. It was the first birthday of The Space.

Many strange people suffered through that long day’s journey into night!

[LIGHTCHANGE into GRACIE. GRACIE, *a vagrant of undetermined age and sex, is making her bed in Bloem Street, in the doorway of The Space’s fire exit. It is night. Sound of car stopping, door slams. GRACIE stumbles into view. Muttering and wiping herself clean after being mauled*]

GRACIE

Gracie? You gotta stay clean. No excuse, lying in the gutter like a piece of rubbish? So if you’re not rubbish, stay clean., Gracie!

[*She wraps herself in a blanket and lies down painfully*]

But no wonder I can’t sleep. This pavement is hard. Just here, specially hard, with a bump. When I lie down here I

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can also hear water underground. The pipes. Maybe a river?

Spider said he learn at school there was a river under Long Street. Let me move before I drown ... [*She moves her position*]

That doorway there, it's softer. It looks like some sort of fancy marble? It's really just old Cape granite! Here's that nice little hollow for my hip. [*She lies down painfully, but can't settle for the pain*]

So damn sore, man. First it's the traffic cop.

"Hey Gracie Goffel? Get off the streets."

"*Gaan kak!*"

Gwa! With the back of the hand. On the ear. Now I hear the sound of running water, even when I'm lying down! They make something go loose in my head.

They klap me *tien, twaalf*, twenty times. "*Meid! Goffel! Hoer!*"

Then it's the police in the green Ford Fairlane.

Boere out of uniform. Young boys, smelling of beer and *poes*. Disappointed because they didn't have a lekker time with the fancy *hoere*. Makes my stomach turn. How can a *hoer* kiss a drunk who pays for *poes*. It's bad enough having to be *pomped*. The mouth should be private property! My mouth is my secret. No one goes in there. I wash it out every day. Purple mouthwash? Meths.

[*Gargles and swallows*]

Sometimes it slips past and just goes down. *Hier aftot onder in my maag*. Hot. Soft. Bit sore. Maar okay.

"Just don't light up a *skyf*, Gracie! With all the meths in the *maag*, you'll go up like a Guy Fawkes."

"Spider, as true's God, man, mind your own bleddie business, okay? Look after your own problems! And God knows, you have problems: a) You too young to look so old. b) You got education. You know better. How can you live like me? I who know nothing? Just how to keep myself clean. And c) You are white, under all that shit and dirt and *vuilus*. And you break the law of the land, because you *pomp* me *en ek is 'n meid!*"

And who was here first? Me. Already so long, ou Mario Lanza puts food here for me under his *Cape Times*. '*n Bakkie*

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volwurms bolognaise! Even when I'm not home. He knows.
This is Gracie's place. But now?

[*She points upstairs to the theatre as we hear applause*]

My dear, the Culture Vultures has come to Long Street.
God help us all! Every night the noise! Just when you settle
down, the sore hip in the dent in the stone, cover your face
with your dress, wind the *doeke* round your ankles, so no
fokker can force open your legs and rape you when you sleep.
Then it starts from up there. Always big words. In that
unnatural voice. [*She intones grandly*] Theatre? *Kak man*, it's
unnatural. Who talks like this? [*Again*] I have to lie here and
listen to all this? The mother says to the son: "Why you do
this?"

The father begs the mother: "Stop doing that!"

The son to the brother: "You did this! You did this to Ma!"

"No, I didn't!"

"Yes, you did. Forsooth!"

Watse kak woord is dit: "forsooth"?

Acting, acting, acting! So it goes on till eleven o'clock at
night! I just stand up in my bed and scream: "*Ag jou ma se
poes!*" No, they hear me. They all stop acting and laugh!
Mario Lanza says even he hears me down in his keffie
without his hearing aid.

Then Sunday comes and we all say, thank God, Long
Street is dead. No one walks here. Even the birds sit like
stale loafs of tired old bread. The day of rest? Not up in this
windgat place.

[*Intones sarcastically*]

"What are they doing up there?" I ask Mario Lanza.

"The Space," he says.

"No, my space!" I say. "I was here first."

"They practise acting on Sunday," he says.

"Ja, well, I sleep on Sunday," I say.

They build things and make clothes, he says.

I wish they would just go away. Make some space!

[*She touches her mouth carefully*]

Shit man, I'm worried about my teeth. Still feel loose after
they kicked my face. I don't want to loose my teeth, man. I

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never forget that drunk lying in the gutter by the old Cape Town Station. Before all this; before I was here. I looked at her for a long time. She lay there with a open pink wet mouth.

No teeth. God man, it looked so horrible. Like her smile had been ripped out of her face. At least with teeth you could say, shame, she's sick. But with no teeth? Like a terrible black hole. No lips. Just a hole ...

When Spider buggers me up, I make him promise: not the mouth. Leave the teeth. He pretends to be tough, showing off, like he was once somebody. I say: "You don't have to try. You're here. Where you were, is nothing. Where you go to, is nothing."

He must keep himself clean, that Spider. He gets so drunk and comes and tears at my clothes. Hurts me.

Except sometimes. He holds me and cries. Like he was my child. My child would not be so dirty. No, not my child.

[She looks up again]

It's quiet up there. For a change! Maybe the police closed them down again, for mixing the races. Sis!

Disgusting to see who wants to sit next to blacks!

That Alex says it's all political. Just to be *hardegat*!

[More applause and laughter from above; shouts]

And meanwhile decent people can't sleep!

[Shesettles down. Then:]

Oh shit, I forgot to get some dagga for that Alex.

I don't trust him. Last week, early one morning, I see him get out of the green Ford Fairlane. He doesn't know I'm under my blanket. I see it all.

What's he doing with them? He knows the cops? But he asks me for dagga? Maybe he's a cop? Maybe I should warn The Space people?

No man, I was here first. Let them all go to jail.

But then maybe I get taken for the dagga? Maybe if I tell Mario Lanza? He's got the right words to talk to them with. He's from overseas. Like he said again last week: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!"

Hey Mario Lanza? *Jou ma se poes!*

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[LIGHTCHANGE]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* was never done at The Space, but Ross Devenish's film was shown. *Boesman and Lena* happened outside The Space in the streets: Spider and Gracie!

His name wasn't Alex. Sometimes stage managers were also women. Not all of them were spies for the Security Police. But on occasion, usually when Brian and I would be sitting at the Stuttafords First Floor restaurant and have tea and cheese toast and HP sauce, and plan the next 24 minutes, we'd remark how lucky The Space was to get, say, Alex as a stage manager. Committed, interested. On time. On the ball.

And then inevitably, two days before opening, Alex would resign.

We pleaded! "Stay. You'll get a raise of 50c!"

But Alex would go. Frustrated by the lack of secrets. There was nothing to spy on. Whatever we did at The Space we did on stage.

We acted and directed, sometimes for the first time.

We wrote and rewrote and world-premiered something every week.

We found begged costumes, borrowed props and usually stole furniture from our parents' homes. My father would come to opening nights and as he walked into the theatre explode with: "*Mymagtig, daar is al my goed!*"

There was the art gallery displaying art and nuovo-art and not-much-art, and even the famous fried eggs that were all supposed to be Art, but as the days went by, smelt more like fart!

To get money from your budget, you had to go to Brian's mother, Mrs A. Oh God, Mrs A! If only Trevor Manuel had a Mrs A!

"Your budget is spent dear. What do you want it for, dear? Why, dear? Is it necessary, dear? Can't you do without it,

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dear? Fine, dear, but this is the last money you get.” And she'd peel off ten one-rand notes! And you'd sign the ten receipts!

The magnificent Moira Fina of The Space Club wafted around in a cloud of Gucci and Chanel, sometimes helping to wash the paint brushes without removing her elegant rings. We worked like slaves, but felt like kings.

We were all paid the same: R22.50. From the assistant stage manager to Yvonne Bryceland, who was sometimes also the assistant stage manager ...

We had rooms just round the corner. Across in Bloem Street on the first floor. Over in the alley off Long Street in the cottages. On the corner of Long and Bloem above the fish shop.

On R22.50 we even saved for a rainy day. And ate well at the Isola Verde!

[LIGHTCHANGE into MARIO. *Mario Lanza sings. MARIO is in his restaurant in Long Street, folding a table cloth. He sees the stain*]

MARIO

Madonna mia! These actors! They are pigs. And I am not even a Chinese restaurant. There you are expected to leave half your chow mein on the table cloth. But this is Italian. Fingers full of sauce, yes. Your silk shirt, your cufflinks, your tie? Okay. Your plate? Licked clean with a piece of bread. But the table cloth? No! Not like this.

The big fat actor come in for breakfast. He eat six eggs, four sausage. Lunch the same. Supper still more. I say: “Your heart will stop!”

He just laugh and his body go wobble wobble! He has great deep voice. My God, what a singer he would have been in Italy. He could have stood on any stage without moving and sung the greatest arias!

I said to him: “Why you not sing opera?”

He with mouth full: “Why you not act Shakespeare?”

The pretty girls come and smoke, drink strong black coffee and talk about important things: Brecht and Stanislavski

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and I don't know what also. Then come that irritating Afrikaans boy with blonde hair and bell-bottom and fat shoe and say: "Mario? Where is the picture of Sophia Loren?" The ring, the bracelet. I look for the make-up, but no, just bag under eye.

"Too much rehearsal!" they say.

Ha ha, too much sex and drug, I say. I know that bag under eye. When you do too much wanky wanky, bag under eye. Look, no bag. I not wank. I have beautiful girlfriend across at the Carnival Court. Rita with red hair. She call me her wild man. I love women. I am Italian.

Just I draw the stripe with this dirty coloured bitch who pisses in my doorway. I call the police and I complain. I say: "I pay the taxes, but why she piss in my door?" They laugh and say: "It's just Gracie. We all know Gracie."

I say: "I don't want to know Gracie! Come and take her away. You can keep her!"

But she come back.

I learn my lesson here in Long Street. No more bleeding heart. I was here first! Start this restaurant before the theatre, before the actors come and expect me to feed them for discount, because one day they will be a star! [*He is proud of his place*]

Isola Verde. Mean "Green Island", where I come from. Good name? The decoration I do myself. Paint the ceiling. In all Italians lives a small Michelangelo. The smoke from Vesuvius over the top, the lava over the people of Pompeii. They scream: *Mama mia!*

There in the corner, the pictures of Caruso, Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi, Moffo, Di Stefano. Here, Mario Lanza.

They call me Mario Lanza. My name is Mario. Not Lanza, but what the hell. I say: "Okay," when they call Mario Lanza? Okay!

It's all rubbish in this street with the whores and the bergies and the actors learning always new words. And the old Auntie Dora who pretends to be Sylvana Mangano. Very Frederico Fellini. Maybe it needs a bit of Puccini, Verdi, Rossini!

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Yes, why not put Long Street to music. Make an opera!

Sing a quartet about the crazy South Easter. Then a duet – soprano/tenor? – with a pretty young girl and the charming restaurant owner. Then the old lady come and pretend to be a Contessa, but we know she is a mezzo soprano and comes from nowhere. Then the actors come and do some *comedia del'arte* and soon the whole street is decorated like a Neapolitan Festival and singing and dancing and eat my spaghetti and I get rich ...

Sometime I've told them at The Space. If you want some Italian opera, I can make together a lunchtime. I even close the shop for the hour. The Space say: "Maybe ... don't call us, we call you!"

They not too bad. Don't wash, don't pay, eat what is soft, and what is hard they can take. Spoons and forks. I must go and check that canteen. But I like it, that theatre. It is like old Europe when there was no opinion. I take Dora to see a Feydeau farce. She pee in her pants, she laugh so much. Poor old Dora.

Si, I shout at them, but I like it very much. It is good for the street. There is no money for costume. So every now and then I see my tablecloth as dress or shirt. No money for big sets, like at Nico Malan where they spend hundreds of thousands! Where audience then applaud the set, and sleep when Tosca sing.

Who can sleep when Tosca sing!

I never forget where I meet Tosca. On the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples. Isola Verde. I come from there. Forio, a small village by the sea. One day the opera company come from Naples with *Tosca*. Make stage on the soccer field between the poles on the edge of the cliff.

We all sit, small boys in the front and watch. *Tosca* Act One. *Bravo!*

Tosca Act Two? *Bravissimo!*

Then a tragedy. One cloud come over from Africa and sit over the island. Then a drop of rain fall on the electricity. Or God see us and laugh and shed a tear?

The lights go dead. Blackout! No Act 3 of *Tosca*?

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People want to fight. Knife is flashing.

Then Eduardo Chellini, the Mayor of Forio, stand on the stage. He has a torch because there is no light, just the gold of the sunset far at the back. He hold the torch here, under his chin. He look like Bela Lugosi. He say: "*Signora e Signori*, Ischia has no more light because etc., etc. There can be no more opera because etc., etc. But I will tell you story of Act 3!"

Now you know Act 3 of *Tosca* already before you can say "Mama"! Your eye is cried out because it is so tragic. Tosca run up on the wall of the castello and throw herself off to die!

This is what we all want to see, here on the soccer field on the cliff ... Will the Tosca, a fat girl from Sicily with the voice of a fat girl from Sicily, jump off the wall into the sea? Or will she find the trampoline and bounce back into the sky?

But Mayor Chellini tell his own version of Tosca Act 3. He says: "Tosca made a mistake with putting the knife in Scarpia and she is sorry. She was peeling an orange and the knife slipped."

Scarpia says: "*Va bene*, Tosca, it's okay!" Then she put all her children in a horse and cart and they go off to seaside and have a picnic!

Ma! It was okay. We all know the story of *Tosca*. It was good to hear a new Act 3. Sometimes I say to The Space actors: "You are always so obvious. You always give the same Act 3. Apartheid. Black and white. OK, *basta!* We know. It stink. So, surprise a bit with a new Act 3? A happy dream? No apartheid? Black and white become green. No problem!" Except then, it become light green and dark green!

This is a good street. A good time to be young and full of hope. Hope is crazy. But you got to be crazy to hope. I hope for a long life in Isola Verde, here with my spaghetti and cannelloni and a few tablecloth left?

And maybe one day they come and say: "Mario? You come and sing at The Space?" And I will say: "Basta! Speak to my agent!"

[*He laughs*]

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[LIGHTCHANGE *after which* PIETER-DIRK UYS *adds DORA's long dressing gown, her grey hair. Unpack her props from the basket and close lid. Use it as a dressing table*]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

It was a hot summer night in the City Bowl. Very Tennessee Williams. Steamy, smelly, quiet. Hooded eyes watching you. Everywhere.

Someone came rushing in from outside. There was a drama in Long Street! We all ran out, actors and Cathy and Mrs A and audience and the plain-clothes man with the hard-on.

In the middle of The Street, just in front of Carnival Court, stood a man, a young man maybe. After life in the Mountainview Bar, not so young anymore. His eyes were wild. His face snarling. In his hands he had two huge butchers knives. He pointed them at us, the appalled delighted watching crowd.

"Don't come near me," he snarled. "Stay away!"

Of course none of us rushed him. We stood entranced. This was better than theatre.

The man wheeled round and thrust his knives into all directions.

"Leave me. Stay away," he cried.

Then we saw a small figure come out of the shadows. She was crying, her arms outstretched.

"Johnny?" she sobbed. "Please Johnny, put them down."

"Leave me Ma! I'm going to die now. It's enough! Leave me, Ma!"

"No Johnny, you can't die. What about me? And Kittie? And the others? Please Johnny ...

She shuffled towards him. He wheeled round and the knives nearly touched her tearstained wrinkled face.

"Leave me Ma ..." He started to cry. Sobs tore his pose to shreds. The knives lowered. She stood up against him and put her thin arms around him. She didn't even reach his shoulders. He cried against her tiny head. She slowly shuffled him towards the kerb and the dark door of Carnival

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Court, muttering motherly things to this large hunk of unhappiness she called son. Then she turned to us and gave a small smile: “Good night, the show’s over ...”

The show was never over in Long Street. Sitting in our kaftans on our verandah and looking over at the balconies of Carnival Court and the activity there among the girlies and their friends, and Auntie Dora, inspired my play *Karnaval*. I didn’t have to use my imagination; just look through the window.

I invited the inmates of Carnival Court to come to a preview. We had built a set that reflected their home outside, balconies, broekielace, washingline, Springbok Radio, the works. I didn’t want them to hear from others and think that we were making fun of them. I was quite prepared for their anger and hurt. They came out of the play in tears. “Ag dearie me,” wept Auntie Dora, “those poor girls? *Haai*, so tragic, *maar ag*, so brave! There, by the grace of God, go we!”

And they went back to their Long Street lives not having seen the similarities at all. So much for theatre being the mirror of life! Maybe it is just a window...

Karnaval was banned after ten performances. The Censor Board must’ve been right: “*Ons mense is nie so nie!*”

[LIGHTCHANGE into DORA. AUNTIE DORA, a nondescript middle-aged woman, arthritic hands. Sentimental with a will of iron. Sickly. Brave. She has a small bag and she is packing things. There is a large brown envelope with X-Rays]

DORA

“Feydeau!” Not Faydow or Vydou. “Feydeau!” That’s the name. It’s been at the back of my mind ever since Mario took me to see it. A French name, “Feydeau”.

Haai, maar ek het gelag! I never knew it could be so much fun. And not even in French! In English. And one of the actors even had a way of saying the words in English that made it sound Afrikaans.

Young actors. *Baie slim, die kinders. Al die jong mense, tot hier*

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by my in die boarding house. Like *rooikop* Rita. Oh dearie me, the day she arrived here, *kon jy van haar lyf afgeeet het. Oulike kind. Niks Engels geken nie. Ons het hier vir ure op my verandah gesit en praat.* I thought she was a friend. *En toe vreet die Stad haar op.*

“Hoe lank sit jy al hier, Antie Dora?”

Oh me oh my, I remember sitting here with my packet of Cavallas listening to Springbok Radio on 6th April 1952, when old Jan van Riebeeck came up Long Street looking for nice accommodation? If it wasn't for old Maria van Riebeeck at his side, Stadsvader Jan and me would have been married and run away to Batavia.

“Feydeau!” Mario made me say it over and over. In his funny accent? Italian? I never understood a thing he said! But oh, how that man could sing! He would sit here with me after he closed his place, come and bring me some nice canelloni and spaghetti and some Italian wine. Then sing to me from the operas. Very softly, because he was scared the girlies would laugh at him. *Haai foeitog raai*, Mario didn't feel happy here when the girlies had all those sailors from the Docks.

He said: “It's wrong for girlies so young!”

I said: “Mario, it's okay. The sailors are not black. They are Javanese. Honorary whites! It's okay darling!” But sometimes, looking at Mario? The sailors were whiter than he was, *en ek weet hulle was almal net hotnots! 'n Klomp skollies* disguised as foreign trade. *Maar ek sê niks.* The less I said, the less they know. Someone had to walk this narrow path and make it wide enough for the girlies to run along, if you get my drift.

[Looks at the X-ray]

Haai, I can't believe that's me. And I smiled when they took the photo, but you can't see me smile. Just horrible big teeth, like a dead person's mouth. How can the X-ray camera see death, while I'm still alive and smiling? I wished Mario was still alive, so I could go and show him this. Find out what this really means, this ... whatever they say I've got wrong with me. Mario Lanza would make a joke and call it a picture

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of a beauty queen and sing a song from one of his operas.

Poor Mario. Just a week after they found him stabbed in the alley ... and I swear I can't think who would do that to one of us who live here? Maybe some *skollie* from the Cape Flats? Ag, Mario, Mario, Mario! No more singing? No more spaghetti!

That Sunday after his funeral they had a classical piano concert at The Space. I didn't know, but it was only after I walked past Sunday morning to church and heard the piano playing. I went up the red steps, but it was still closed to people. The cleaning lady, ou Cathy, said there was a classical concert in the afternoon.

I said: "Oh?"

She said: "Why don't I come also?"

I said: "No man, I'm alone."

She said: "No, it's fine." She would keep me a ticket and I can pay when I come. *Haai*, and I was still so very sad about Mario and I prayed for him in church.

Dit was baie hartseer. And I put on my green hat and went over to hear that classical concert. But there was too many smart people. So I just watched and listened from the doorway there on the corner of Long and Buiten. Me and old Gracie. I think she was asleep, bottle in hand, empty. Again.

That music. Took me so back to when I came to Cape Town from Philadelphia. I went to the City Hall to hear the concert. It was ... *haai* dearie me, *daai* soort musiek? *Ek het so opgewonde geraak, ek het somaar hard gepraat. Haai* Dora?

Really dearie ... *mense het omgedraai en vir mygekyk* –

"Shush" – *en gelag vir my pers rok en groen jas. My scent het skielik in my neus gestink.*

I was ashamed for being so alive. No man, all those fancy people sat like the dead, listening like the dead. I wanted to get up and dance and sing. *Skreeu, jubel, spring! Here, jou musiek was so mooi, so puur ... Ek het daar my God herken. Maar ek was skaam.* Drab. *Ou verlepte uit die backstreets. Wat weet sy van musiek? Niks.* True. But even in Buiten Street that Sunday, listening from afar, classical music sounded just like the angels talking.

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Do I need to take my dressing gown? Or do you get a gown when they book you in? Doctor Steyn says it will only be for a few days. Just a check up. [*Looks at X-ray*] Check up for what? Signs of life? Play me nice music and let me listen. Ja, that's what I should ask for.

I'm sorry to miss the new play that starts at The Space next Wednesday. *Haai*, I now just can't stop myself going. So exciting, much better than the films.

Cathy and old Mrs A at the box office let me slip in. There's a seat at the back they keep open for a doctor. I sit there through all the acting. "Luv"! A play called *Luv* about a woman and two men on a bridge. Then a *grillerige ding* about Dracula. *Bar and Ger* – about a brother and a sister. That Yvonne Bryceland and Billy Flynn. They don't know me, but I know them. I know them all now. [*As she packs her bag*] *Hulle's nog so jonk. Hulle't die lewe voor hulle uitgestrek soos die see. Ek wens ek kon vir hulle my memories wys soos photos ... my wonderlike lewe! Nie X-rays van die dood nie, maar lewe! O, nog vandag ook so. Bietjie stiller; ek dink meer, onthou meer. Toewas dit vol wonderlike mallighede. Is maar goed ek het nooit getrou nie. Sou man en kinders onder my voete platgetrap het. Gedans ... Nuwe Jaar in Gordonsbaai. Kerk toe en dan wegsluip agter Henderson se Slagtery waar ons gedans het. Trek-klavier gedjol. New Year Resolution: Dora, moenie drink nie, moenie vloek nie, moenie ophou lag nie ...*
[*Loss of breath, she must sit*]

I see in *The Argus* yesterday Jan Venter is dead. I knew a Jan Venter in Gordons Bay. I wonder if it's my ou Jan Venter. Dead? My Jan Venter wanted to be a missionary; this Jan Venter died a rich man. Probably the same Jan Venter. *Ai, dit gaan so gou verby. Gister gebore, môre weg ... die son sak al op my.*

"Feydeau"! Not Faydow. Feydeau! I must just think about that funny play when I lie in hospital. Oh dearie me, it was so funny. Funny ...

[LIGHTCHANGE]

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PIETER-DIRK UYS

Long Street has always been special. Even today, take a trip up and enjoy the nightlife. Even the streetpoles have coloured lights wound round them. High voltage. When a bergie touches the poles ... zhssts! One man one volt! But in the 70s Long Street led the way in so many areas.

The bookshops. From those old days, only Clarkes is left, Cranfords came and went. The others disappeared; new ones appeared. Second Time Around is still there. How blonde British spikeyhaired Brenda would dress so many of our shows out of her magic wardrobe of tat.

The late and lamented Mountainview Bar on the corner was the legend in many lunchtimes: Gracie and Spider, even Athol Fugard when his lunch was still liquid. He would sit and listen and learn.

Billy Monk made sandles downstairs in his little shop, chased girls around Town and took extraordinary photos of life in Cape Town in the 60s, great images that remain, even after Billy Monk was killed and buried at sea.

And the fish shop above which we lived? Remember the one that used to gas us out with fish pongs and frighten us to death with huge cockroaches all with snoek on their breath? It's a nice little coffee shop now.

Long Street is still charming and quaint. Property developers have always been poised to rip out its heart. But thanks to architects like Revel Fox and others, Long Street hasn't yet become another Voortrekker Rd. It nearly did ...

[LIGHTCHANGE into JACOBY. MR JACOBY *is small, round, bald. A piggy-looking businessman. Fidgety, humourless. A bully. He is holding his hat against the South Easter wind*]

JACOBY

Damn wind! Comes from nothing; goes to nowhere.

[*Looks at the buildings around him and notes in a small book*]

For Sale, To Let, For Sale ...

People are starting to leave South Africa, like rats leaving

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a sinking ship! This I could have predicted ten years ago. Even though, those days, no matter where you went in the world, no one knew where South Africa was. And when you try to explain, they stared at you because you were not black! They knew from nothing! As always from nothing, Today they know from more than nothing! One or two might say: "What is this apartheid business?"

Then I say: "It's not business. It's politics."

My friend, never the two shall meet! You asking for trouble. For what should I get involved with politics? I had politics up to here, when politics swallowed up the world. Enough is enough. So, when the black people complain? And I have some very good people working for me. I never even know they're black, they're so honest, Clean. Reliable, Everyone's got a son, who knows a friend who starts with all this political bullshit.

"What we are going through! What we have to suffer through!"

"Yes," I say, "I'm sorry for you. You can't go to see opera at the Opera House on the Foreshore? Who gives a fuck about opera anyway! You can only see films in your own cinema in your own area. Be grateful you don't have to bother about parking in town! You have to live in a shit neighbourhood?"

Believe me, Sea Point's not Hollywood! You have to carry passbooks? Big deal. How do you think I get to draw money from banks? A passbook. My ID book. My passport! Stop the complaining already. You coloured people don't know what suffering is! You people don't know the sound of broken glass over a country when thugs crack open windows and heads and lives, because it's legal to hate the fucking Jews!"

This no one can understand until you've been there. I've been there. The ghetto. The yellow star. The hopelessness. I was here as a young man. Now I'm here, not so young, but doing what I do well. I understand property. I can see what happens when property falls into the wrong hands, or in no hands at all!

[Looks at the street]

Look, all these buildings in Long Street. Prime property in

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the heart of a city. It's crap! Shit.

Horrible Victorian Hollywood gingerbread buildings with broekielace and rats and rust and rubbish. Prostitutes loiter in the doorways. Vagrants piss in the gutters. It needs vision. This I got.

But you think someone on the Council will listen?

Arseholes all. Some even Jews. Just because you got no foreskin, doesn't mean you got sense! Afrikaners with arrogance. That I remember from the old days. The man with the power, is the man with the power.

Not with the imagination, or the good idea, or the vision. Just the power! Every time they laugh at me when I try and speak their language ...

"Middag Meneer, ek kom oor die permit." Ha ha ha!

Funny accent, funny old corn, funny fucking Jewboy! I look at that power and I know, like you know, God doesn't sleep. Power comes and power goes. Like old age and youth ...

I never forget the pictures of Mussolini hanging from a meat-hook. That John Vorster? A prime minister made for the meat-hook. All those racist pigs? Meat-hook material! I know what happens when you sweep people under the carpet. They use the same carpet to suffocate you. Maybe not this week, not this year; but next year?

So I tell them when they say: No, they don't want to sell to a Jew. I say: "What you think will happen to you when the black man has had enough? Is he going to hold out his hand and say thanks for nothing? Is he going to give you a chance to say: 'I was on your side'? He'll cut you to pieces and get a medal from the United Nations!"

At first, they don't want to sell. It's nice here in Long Street. South Easter wind is a pain, but the rentals are low and the life is slow. But a few whispered words about revenge, a few casual mentions of what the blacks do to each other in the location on a weekend?

I tell them: "Look up the road. That Space Theatre? The communists are here already. They are making subversion like in the old days. The burning of the Reichstag. They say it was Hitler? It was a communist."

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And that building is worth a fortune.

These drama people can't pay a rental.

"Never mind," says Rabkin, "it's all for Art."

Rabkin is a foolish landlord! Bad for business. "There's the law, Rabkin," I say, "Group Areas Act makes it illegal to mix races, like at The Space in your building! Keep them apart, I say. It's the law! I don't like it, but I'm not BJ Vorster. I have to keep my nose clean. Already in District Six I see my arse, buying up what I can! And then they tell me to break it down and they move out everyone to the sanddunes? Now I sit with useless real estate against Devil's Peak that looks like the Sinai Desert?"

My friend, you don't need laws to keep them out.

Just the rent! Let them pay for the privilege of being treated like a person. And then if they want to behave like an animal. Okay, get back into the ghetto! It's not like they have to wear a yellow star. They got a black skin.

This is a potential slum. This must all be flattened for skyscrapers; parking garage. Break down that Carnival Court, the Blue Lodge! And that Space must go! Brings in all those drama theatre-people who now take these rooms and bring back trouble into Long Street. Drugs. Queers. Once that starts, it's the beginning of the end. I know. Look at Loader Street?

And that Italian waiter with his loud mouth? Murdered! Good riddance! I'm sorry he's dead. I don't miss him! I bought his café. I remember I say: "Get into opera if that's what you want. But get out of my street! Too many restaurants already in this street! Move!"

Then he say to me: "Mr Jacoby, for a Jew to leave Adolf Hitler and to come and sit on John Vorster's park benches with a Whites Only sign?"

I laugh at him. Idiot. I should sit on a bench! Failures and fools sit on a bench! I'm a success!

I make the bench!

[LIGHTCHANGE *after which* PIETER-DIRK UYS *into* ELSABE LATEGAN: *poncho, high heels, lipstick, beret*]

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PIETER-DIRK UYS

We did a season of my plays: *Selle Ou Storie* – they'd banned the script but you could see the play; *Karnaval* – they banned the play but you could read the script; and *God's Forgotten* the play that should have been banned but wasn't.

The pressures of three productions, no money, censorship and fear, exhaustion and the silly feeling of not being loved. Doesn't it happen in the best of marriages? There was a bust-up, a walk-out. Me and my actors that way, The Space that way. It took some time to heal, but it did heal – like in all good marriages.

It was during those last weeks as a Space creature that a new style found its alphabet in me. Maralin Vanrenen directed Jean Genet's *The Maids* with our coloured actors Bill Curry and Vincent Ebrahim as the maids, and me as Madame. It was the beginnings of another monstrous madam.

Then a one-man, multi-woman lunchtime show followed called *Just Hilda*. Various ladies: a Marlene, a *meisie van die plaas*, a Lily Tomlin one-ringadingie rip-off. And finally in her *rooi rok* and blonde hair, Tannie Hermien. It should've been so easy doing that *tannie*, because there were so many of them around ...

[LIGHTCHANGE into ELSABE LATEGAN. DR ELSABE LATEGAN, *elegant*, koud. Ongemaklik. Kom staan by die Langstraat paal. Skouersak. *Programme in hand of the play Selle Ou Storie*]

[*An English version of this scene follows at the end of the play*]

ELSABE

Nou gaan hulle te ver!

Ek sê dit nie dikwels nie, maar ek is bly my man was nie vanaand hier saam met my nie! Herman sou die stuipe gekry het! Hy verwalg hom in vroue wat vloek; ek praat nie eers van Afrikaanse vroue wat sulke woorde gebruik nie! Nie dat Herman ooit met my na die teater sou kom nie. Praat nie

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eers van hierdie eksperimentele soort teater nie!

Die Ruimte. Ja-nee, een ding is seker; g'n van my vriende sal ek hier raakloop nie. Dankie Vader! Daar was net een aand verlede Mei toe iemand my herken het. Tydens die opvoering van Tennessee Williams se wonderlike *Glass Menagerie*. My gunsteling drama uit daardie tyd. Pragtige regie deur Bill Tanner. Die Veiligheidspolisie het die teater "besoek". Net toe Yvonne Bryceland onvergeetlike hoogtes bereik het, skielik, soos die Gestapo, storm hierdie barbare die teater binne. En hoekom? Iemand het anoniem gebel. Iemand het gefluister: daar sit swart en wit saam in Die Ruimte! Iemand het geweet dis teen die wet van die land. Dit moet gestop word! Swape!

Die ligte is aangeskakel, die magic, soos hulle sê, was weg. Yvonne was skielik maar net Yvonne. Die twee jong spelers Dunster en Flynn het opsygestaan, verward en geskok.

Ek het die mannetjie in beheer van die klomp buffels geken. In sy nuwe safaripak. Ben Engelbrecht. Ambisieus, jonk, gevaarlik, gevoelloos, oorgewig, arrogant. Iemand om dop te hou, het Herman gesê. Kabinetminister-materiaal? Beslis Minister van Polisie!

Hy't na my gekyk. Gestaar. Ek't gemaak of ek van niks bewus is nie, maar kon voel hoe sy ysblou oë tot in my siel, deur my vermomming gluur. O ja, ek was so aangetrek. "Disguised"? Ja. Asseblief, Dr Mev Elsabe Lategan dra nie gewoonlik sulke liberale gemaklike klere nie. Daar onder by die Nico Malan, sorg ek dat ek versigtig saamsmelt met die ander tannies in hulle aaklige Tini Vorster velveteen! Maar as ek elke nou en dan uit die werklikheid kan ontsnap en my toegooi met kamouflage, dan kom ek hier na Die Ruimte. En ja, ek voel soos hulle sê: "liberated". Miskien omdat ek weer kan dink!

Ek't Engelbrecht 'n paar maande later weer raakgeloop. Hy was aan die sy van die Eerste Minister. Die Groot Baas se lyfwag. Nuwe safaripak. Alreeds halfpad op die leer na die hel. Hy't weer na my gestaar, maar dié keer het ek teruggegluur, vol vertrouwe in my krimpelien.

John Vorster was heelwat geanimeer die aand. Nare ding

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om te aanskou. Hy't skielik na my verwys.

"Elsabe?" Hoe hy my naam so tussen daardie blou dun lippe kan kneus! "Elsabe? Wat hoor jy van daardie teaterplek in Breestraat?"

"Die Ruimte?" Ek was kasueel. "Dis net duskant Langstraat. En nee, ons stel nie juis belang in wat agter die skerms aangaan nie, John. Dis wat op die Ruimte se verhoog gebeur wat die probleem is ..." Maar Vorster was êrens anders betrokke. Sy konsentrasie in sake van kultuur was baie kort. Natuurlik, as so 'n vooraanstaande lid van die Sensuur-raad betrokke met teater in die Kaap is dit nie net my plig om ingelig te by nie; maar ook my geluk. Ek het dit nog vir niemand gesê nie, maar in my geval het hulle die sjokoholiek in beheer van die sjokoladefabriek geplaas!

Ek is waarlik bevoorreg om so veel keer na Die Ruimte te kan kom. Ek het die wonderlikste teater ondervind. Tennessee Williams en O'Niell en tot Joe Orton! Die beste van Engelse en Amerikaanse dramas. Dikwels moet ek myself die volgende oggend inhou. Om nie vir Brian Astbury te bel nie. Om nie te "gush" nie.

"Dankie Brian, dankie vir jou wonderlik teater. Ek is verryk. Die naamlose tjek wat jy verlede maand ontvang het was van my. Maar oppas, jy gaan te vinning. Te veel politiek. Ons wil nie geforseer word na daardie entpunt van vrye spraak en assosiasie nie. Oppas. Ek waarsku as 'n vriend, 'n *fan*. Ons sal jou teater nie 'n politieke slagoffer maak nie. Ons sal julle net verban vir godslasterlikheid en obseniteit. Ons sal jou bankrot maak. Ons ken ons werk!"

My opdrag was baie eenvoudig. Vorster het dit persoonlik uiteengelê: "Vernietig hulle in enige moontlik manier. Plant dagga, luister na hulle fone, lees briewe. Ondermyn die personeel. Versprei leuens en stories. 'Frighten them to death.'" En toe "frighten" hy vir my "to death": hy knipoog vir my! "Elsabe, sien? Ons in bewind kan ook kunstenaars wees in wat ons doen!"

En hy groet met Tini en gaan terug na die Parlement.

Ek was die hele dag yskoud.

En hier is ek weer terug by Die Ruimte. Maar die keer het

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hulle te ver gegaan. Nee wat, toe hulle subversief was in Engels, toe hulle vir ons kaalvuis in Engels gekritiseer het, toe hulle ons Afrikaners belaglik gemaak het in Engels, was dit hanteerbaar. Ons kon dit ignoreer.

Maar nou vertel hulle die waarheid in Afrikaans! 'n Rou, skokkende Afrikaans. En nie eers 'n goeie toneelstuk nie! "Selle ou storie"! Niks wat ons nie al oor en oor in Engels gehoor het nie! Maar om te sit en luister na godslasterlike humour, vieslike taal. Om te kyk hoe 'n middeljarige Afrikaanse vrou met rou emosies en maniere liefde probeer vind ten koste van haar selfrespek. Ons selfrespek?

Jong Afrikaner boerseuns verlief op mekaar?
Verteenwoordig hulle nou myseuns? Is ek veronderstel om te leer uit haar pyn?

Nee nee nee, dit mag nie voortgaan nie!

Ek sal my voorlegging vanaand voorberei en môre voorlê. Ek sal aandring dat hierdie vieslike drama verbied word. Ek sal sorg dat alle toekomstige werke uit hierdie skrywer se pen verban word. Ek sal hom vernietig. Soos ek al so baie jong, oorspronklike, hartstogtelike talente vernietig het.

Vermoor en gesmoor in die naam van Ons Kultuur!

Kak!

[Musiek: *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*]

[LIGHTCHANGE *after which* PIETER-DIRK UYS *into himself. As the anthem ends, he closes the skip*]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Long Street 1997.

I remember tottering up here in my bell-bottoms and platform shoes. Very fashionable then. Very fashionable now! Hell on the ankles, but boy can you walk tall.

[*He sees SPIDER across the street*]

I don't believe it. He's still here? After all those years? What the hell was his name? Bird? Snake? Spider! Hey Spider, remember me? Probably not. It's been a lifetime ...

Twenty-five years ago. Before sanctions, before the Mandela t-shirts, before it was fashionable and right to be

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anti-apartheid, there was a dream that came true. It was called The Space Theatre and it started its journey in a sprawling warehouse off Long Street, between Bloem and Buiten.

It was the place where the alphabet of South African Theatre was reinvented.

It was poor and yet gave great riches to the community. It was one of the beginnings of freedom of expression. It was the end of apartheid in the arts.

Twenty-five years later it is no longer there. But we who were privileged enough to sweep and paint and act and sing and direct and question; we who thanks to The Space now have language to communicate in a mute modern world; we who have lost our hair and our figures and sometimes, sadly, our hard-on for Theatre? We are here to remember and remind those who think we are crazy, that to be crazy in the theatre is to be sane.

The Space was crazy.

Oh yeah!

BLACKOUT

THE END

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[ENGLISH VERSION *of* ELSABE LATEGAN *scene*]

[DR ELSABE LATEGAN *walks out of the theatre looking at the programme of the play she'd just seen, Selle Ou Storie. She stands at the lamp post under the street name*]

ELSABE

This time they've gone too far! I don't often say this, but I'm glad my husband wasn't here with me tonight! Herman would've been hysterical, to put it mildly. He can't bear to hear women using profane language. Let alone Afrikaans women! Not that he would think of coming to the theatre, let alone this type of alternative theatre.

I'm glad I didn't recognise any of our friends here tonight! Not very likely. I don't expect to, thank heavens. The only time someone seemed to know me was last May, when the Security Police raided the theatre. It was during a performance of Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie*. One of my favourite plays. A wonderful production by Bill Tanner. I could've killed them! With Yvonne Bryceland at her most moving moment, suddenly like the Gestapo, these barbarians storm in. And why? Because some fool phoned them that there are blacks in the theatre and that it is against the law!

Dear God! If I had some boot polish I would've smeared it over my face and dared them to arrest me.

The lights went on, the magic was gone. Poor Yvonne became Yvonne and stood to one side. The young actors Dunster and Flynn stared.

I recognised the plainclothes man in charge. Ben Engelbrecht. Ambitious. Young. Ruthless. A killer. Someone my husband said one should watch. Cabinet Minister material, he said. Minister of Police, no doubt?

He stared at me for a long time. I pretended not to notice, but I could feel his eyes bore right through my disguise. I was dressed like this. Please, Mev Dr Elsabe Lategan does not usually dress like this.

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Oh, yes, at the Nico Malan I merge carefully with the other tasteless matrons in their hideous Tini Vorster velveteens. But when I slip away from real life and get into my camouflage and come to The Space Theatre, I am ... is the word “liberated”? I can think again.

I saw Engelbrecht again with Vorster some months later. He was in charge of the PM’s security. On the ladder up to hell. He stared at me again. This time I stared back, secure in my crimplene. John Vorster was quite animated that evening. Strange to hear him talk about the theatre. Not the Nico Malan type of theatre, but this Space Theatre.

“Elsabe?” he said, rasping my name between those thin blue lips, “what have you heard about this new theatre in Bree Street?”

I said: “John, I have been well informed about what happens at The Space. And it’s off Long Street. It’s what they do on stage that’s the problem ...” But Vorster had lost interest. His attention span with regard to culture was very small.

Of course, as such a prominent member of the Censor Board associated with live theatre in the Cape, it is not only my job to be informed; it is my delight. I didn’t say this to the Prime Minister, but in my case they had put the chocoholic in charge of the chocolate factory!

I am truly privileged to be able to go to The Space as often as I do. Of course, the next morning I want to ring up Astbury and his people and say: “Brian, thank you for the wonderful plays I can see. Tennessee Williams, O’Neill, Orton ... I love your theatre deeply and the anonymous cheque you received in May was from me. But you are going too fast and we don’t want to get to that destination of free speech and association. Be careful, Brian. We will not make a political martyr out of your theatre. We will just ban you for ‘obscenity’ and ‘blasphemy’ and bankrupt you! We know how to do our job.” My brief is clear. John Vorster gave it to me personally: “We must destroy them in any way we can.

Plant drugs. Tap phones, intercept mail. Harrass the staff. Spread rumours. Frighten them to death.” And then he

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frightened me to death by winking at me. “You see, Elsabe, we in power are also artists in what we do,” he said, and left with Tini to go to Parliament. I was ice cold for hours afterwards.

And here I am, back at the shrine. But this time I can assure you they’ve gone too far. When they subverted in English; when they criticised us in English; when they made us ridiculous in English, it was manageable. It could be ignored. But this time they are telling the truth in Afrikaans!

But no means even a good play. Certainly nothing we haven’t heard in English. But to have to listen to obscenity and blasphemy in Afrikaans? To see an Afrikaans woman my age claw her way to so-called love at the expense of her decency and self-respect? To watch pretty *boereseuns* naked in bed with other *boereseuns*?

Are they supposed to represent my sons? Is she supposed to be me? No! It cannot be allowed. I will write my report tonight and submit it tomorrow. I will insist that this filthy play is banned! I will demand that any new writing by this so-called writer be closely monitored and banned.

I will see to it that he is destroyed. As I have seen other young passionate talents destroyed.

Killed in the name of *Kultuur*. [*And she laughs bitterly*]
Kak!

[*Music: Die Stem Van Suid-Afrika*]