

Portraying events in our society through mime

CAPE TIMES
30 APRIL
83

With body and facial expressions their only means used for communicating, they manage to convey a situation with penetrating accuracy. They grimace, writhe, seethe, frown, crouch or lunge — not a word escaping — and they have their audiences screaming with laughter or groaning with pain.

They are the Community Arts Project (CAP) mime group which will make its second major debut at the Grahamstown Festival of the Arts from July 8 to 16. By MARLENE DAVIS.

THEIR first major performance was at the Botswana conference on Culture and Resistance held at Gaborone last July.

Members of the now streamlined group are Dawood Khan, John Jacobs, Selina Beukes and Derek Joubert, who initiated the group last year.

"A mime group was started at CAP in 1979 by a guy from Czechoslovakia," Derek says. "He married a woman from Guguletu and left, but during that time I attended a mime workshop and suddenly realised that this was what I'd wanted to do all my life without knowing it," he adds.

Dawood, a shift operator in a city office, spent two years studying acting at Rita Maas and takes decisive, sometimes aggressive, roles in

the mime performances. Selina, a part-time model, had never done acting of any sort before but was drawn into it through her great interest and John, a shoe salesman — the clown, the precociousbrat, the one who gets the loudest shrieks — was a natural. "A born act," his colleagues agree.

Derek has carried on the mime group which has evolved into a co-operative of talents, skills, new ideas and improvisation about life and situations.

After returning from Botswana the group put on performances at community venues throughout the peninsula with great success. Their act, Die Grootbaas, has brought them acclaim in terms of both acting and content.

"We develop our



pieces not merely to provide entertainment but also to portray events in society that are of social concern. Whatever we work on relates directly to the community and wider issues in the country," Derek explains.

Workshop and practice sessions are intense with each minute of the mime taking more than half an hour initially. "It is refined all the time so that absolutely no movement or action is superfluous to the action of the story-line," they say.

Their workshops are held twice a week for two hours each at CAP's Chapel Street, Woodstock, base. Currently they are practising Die Grootbaas to perform in July and are also making masks. They feel masks would be less inhibiting to use during street theatre, which they plan to do in Grahamstown.

Their face make up is superb, with many

of the ideas coming not from Marcel Marceau and the harlequin image, but from the African Nuba tribe which is renowned for its elaborate and creative face designs using natural clays and colouring agents. Masks will add another facet to their performances, they feel, and make for quick and easy changes of character.

Before going to Grahamstown they'll have to raise enough money to pay for their transport and accommodation. In return for donations from the audience, they are available for performances at any community, school or other gatherings. Also, it is likely they'll do a series of lunch-hour concerts in the city. Watch the press for details. Anyone interested in inviting this group to open up a new awareness of mime and in hosting them can ring Derek Joubert at 45 3689.

● Above: With an expression of pure sadism, Dawood pushes his victim's head into a paint tin.

● Right: Tired, tried, kaput — her body says it all. Selina slumped across a table.

Pictures:
TIM BESSERER

● Below: Coy, innocent, or merely waiting for an opportunity to revive? Dawood sits inert between scenes of hyperactivity.

