

28.10.1984
Mavis Taylor



Nomkita Bavuma and Andile Nyembezi in a scene from *The Trials Of Brother Jero* which opened in the UCT Arena, Orange Street, last night. The play was directed by Professor Mavis Taylor for the Community Arts Project (CAP). A review of the production will be published tomorrow.

Fun satire of religious con

THE TRIALS OF BROTHER JERO, directed by Mavis Taylor for the Community Arts Project (Arena Theatre, Orange Street campus).

THE Trials of Brother Jero was written when Nigeria's Wole Soyinka was 26. In many likeable ways, it is a young man's play.

Soyinka blithely takes on the theme of the religious con. Exuberantly, he uses every resource of people's theatre — song, music, mime, words, magic and dance. His characters confide in the audience rather than each other.

Most of all, Soyinka has divided feelings for a character whose chicanery is undeniably lively.

For us, *Brother Jero* is a satire of all-too-prevalent credit card or hypermarket religion.

One speech, a show-stopping delivery by Andile Nyembezi as the disciple, sums this up: "Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow." A big one.

Brother Jero (engagingly played by S'Manga Nhlebelala) is a preacher who finds himself irresistible to himself, preying on gullibility until he gets his come-uppance from women.

Nhlebelala's performance downplays the trickiness of the character as written. The satire is defanged, which partly reflects under-direction.

The payoff is simple fun; the losses are contrasts, repose and pointedness.

The production could be meatier. Jero's shrine, with its tawdry props, is a crucial design statement downplayed. The backdrop could also be a prop, thus reducing set-changes.

But these describe what could be. What there is, is a good deal of delight.

C. Times August '69

ROBERT GREIG