

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Bend It Like Beauty

Written and performed by Ben Voss  
Mamba Productions  
Oval House Theatre  
(2010)

Beauty Ramapelepele is (according to her at least) the first black South African to become Business Woman of the Year. She has come a long way since she was a white family's maid back in the old days of apartheid and is not reticent in telling you all about it. In a dress based on the national flag she clearly sees herself as an emblem of the new South Africa and from the eagerness with which she seems to want to welcome us over there for the World Cup one suspects she's managed to wheedle something out of the South African Department of Tourism.

Now Beauty is a bit of an enigma for, as she herself tells us, a white man can't possibly be a black woman and yet that is exactly what she is - or rather the reverse for Beauty is the creation of actor and satirist Ben Voss. For all the flounces on the frock he can sometimes go all bass and butch and quite belie the nervous giggles of his creation, but that's when she's giving us a bit of male impersonation. She doesn't have the classiness of compatriot socialite Evita Bezuidenhout (Pieter Dirk-Uys's creation), though of course they've met - on South African television actually), but she never had that lady's Africaaner advantages. Nor is she as travelled as Dame Edna but she could stand up to that lady too. Her wit can be quite savage and is definitely not PC with the tongue that never stops talking and can sometimes be a little indelicate, she won't spare your blushes.

Her nervous giggle perhaps betrays a certain suppressed insecurity in this bossy businesswoman who can find her targets everywhere from Mugabe the freedom fighter now fighting freedom to members of the audience, from crime in South Africa with her crime report in the style of a television weather forecast to the prevalence of Poles in Britain with a hilarious demonstration of the lack of innate dancing skills in the English.

No, it is not all in the best of possible taste but it is the funnier for that and beneath the forced smile on Beauty's face is a warm performer who knows how to connect with his audience. Though Voss has previously toured in Britain as an actor this is the first time he has brought Beauty to Britain. It certainly won't be the last if the reception he got for this show is anything to go by.

*Until 12th June 2010*

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)