

British Theatre Guide

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Bones

Kay Adshead
Mama Quillo
Bush Theatre
(2006)

Mama Quillo present the kind of left-wing Agitprop theatre that was fashionable twenty or thirty years ago. There is no doubt that their collective heart is in the right place and their first production, *The Bogus Woman* by the same playwright, set the highest of standards.

Bones has the feel of a really good short story, embellished with a sub-plot of unnecessary silliness but always lacking in the kind of drama that is required for stage success.

The core of the plot is an allegory about the way in which Black South Africans overcame decades of White subjugation to take over the country and begin a process of truth and reconciliation.

The story-telling is accompanied by a singer/drummer Joe Legwabe, who provides excessive volume but also a sense of the African location, which the dull set never manages.

Pauline Moran plays Mrs Joubert, an unbelievably weak woman who is broken up by the imminent death of the husband whom she has looked up to since she was 13. She is highly strung and suffers from selective memory loss but receives cheerful support from the maid, Beauty.

At the same time we get glimpses of a boy, tortured and killed by the police some years before and hear of the arrival of the local Xhosa community seeking an ancestral grave in the Joubert's back garden.

Kay Adshead puts these elements together by showing us that Mr Joubert was a policeman who cruelly tortured children. While his wife was not only aware of his murderous behaviour but on one occasion witnessed it, inexplicably, she unprotestingly remained with him for 37 more years. She also moved to the site of his enormities and chose to live with him there.

Ultimately, despite exorcisms and propitiation of the dead, *Bones* is about the inhumanity of one community in South Africa to its neighbours and also their reaction as the horrors are revealed and they must choose between forgiveness and revenge.

This story could have been really meaningful and punchy but a lacklustre production, despite the enthusiasm of Sarah Niles as Beauty, loses its focus far too often.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)