

The Star

TUESDAY OCTOBER 7 2008

TONIGHT

Let's Fix It, at 8.30pm, is a feel-good programme that will bring some delight to even the most cynical person. It proves that there are still some good Samaritans out there in this crazy wilderness called life.



FEET ON THE BEAT



**GUARD ON SHIFT,
A THEATRE INSTALLATION,
TARGES A SECURITY
OBSESSED SOCIETY...
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PICTURE: SUE PAM-GRANT

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TONIGHTSTAGE

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21ST CENTURY SUPERHERO?

As a security guard watched her car, **ADRIENNE SICHEL** was caught off guard by an electric encounter which stitches and unstitches the urban psyche ...



Wounded soul music bruises the sun-filled Melville artist's studio with its bleached concrete floors.

Composer Xoli Norman and his guitar spur the four singers on to produce sound bleeding from a "metropolitan jagged landscape". Read: safety-obsessed crime-ridden Joburg (or anywhere in Mzansi).

Sue Pam-Grant, who conceived this theatre installation, views the activities and her handiwork for this animated "pre-drawing" over an enamel bath filled with freshly-cut calico pattern panels. Outlines of stitched, cream female garments are pegged on the indoor washing line. The seams are as raw as the vocal emotions that emanate from the female singers who represent housewives imprisoned by fear and paranoia in their high-walled homes.

There's no sign of trousers or mens' shirts. In any case, it would have to be a cape, because the hero of the piece is the security guard who is envisaged as our suburban superhero, a superhero.

"Without a gun," remarks Norman wryly.

The guard is the tireless protector honoured in *Guard on Shift*, an interdisciplinary collaboration brokered by German producer Indra Wussouw, chairperson of the kunst.raum sylt quell foundation, which runs an international artists residency on the island of Sylt.

This year, kunst.raum launched the jozi.artlab to foster dialogue between African artists and their European counterparts.

Intriguingly, *Guard on Shift* is a co-production with Parktown North's Gallery MOMO (where Pam-Grant had her recent solo exhibition titled *Open at the Seams*) and The Market Theatre, where

both artists have a long history.

The fact that the actual site-specific performances, which form part of an international series interrogating domestic security, are at the Dance Factory further broadens this project's ambit.

Norman has returned from his island residency determined to "make sound obey the core of the concept. This is a sonic version of a three-dimensional space. It has taken two weeks to perfect this phrase."

The singers - Sister Zungu, Nqobile Sibeko, Yolandi Nortjie, Lesedi Jobe - smile indulgently. Admitting that this venture is an extension of her poignantly feminine art, Pam-Grant is aware of the inherent contradictions and difficulties of expressing and interpreting such a fluid, even intangible, situation and ethos.

"The suburbs are getting more and more dislocated, more and more bizarre. We are fenced away, kept from engaging with our natural habitat which is the street."

"It has turned against us. It is scary. Everyone's experience is slightly different," she explains. "It is not an easy space for the people living in the suburb, or the guard protecting it ... Somewhere along the line it is a suspended space."

In that vein, the performers will be placed on high packing boxes. "They are garbed as if they have just come off the line and are suspended from the light," says Pam-Grant.

"They are connected by suburban washing lines. A 12-metre projection of these garments billowing in the wind on my washing line will take up the entire Dance Factory back wall with its own choreography and sonic landscape."

"This is also to create a context of some godforsaken place where we are all suspended right now."

"We are being blown from side to side and are being whipped up - sometimes in terror and turmoil."

"There are also moments of beauty when we are floating and being still ... This is what this exploration is about. We are addressing an issue which is familiar to every South African right now - fear, insecurity - but from a different take. Not barbed wire. We are living in fences, but we are bringing an elegant interpretation of fencing."

Mr Composer joins in from across the room. "We are making the detestable elegant. Look at the history of Beethoven. Black people were angry. That has become a sonic signature which we are using so that globally this can read ... The human body is a site of war - men on two feet were most dangerous in World War 1 and 2. World War 3 is in the human body, which is a site of transgression."

"More eloquently it could not be put," chimes in his collaborator. "Hence, what seems like hospital ward costuming. It is as if they are wearing the body and skins of the wounded. We are pulling out the inner scars and baring ourselves."

"The question we are asking our



SUBURBAN BLUES: Nqobile Sibeko (mezzo soprano, left), Lesedi Jobe (alto) and Sister Zungu (tenor) break out in song for the suburban security guard in *Guard on Shift*. Not pictured is Yolandi Nortjie. **PICTURES: SUE PAM-GRANT**

visitors who view this work (one by one as they walk through a maze) is: 'Whose guard is on shift?'

'Are we able to shift, move, personal ideas? Are we able to stand without crutches?'

"We will have a 20-minute structure which repeats itself. Like a video in an art gallery, we are live-looping ourselves. Looping the

guard's life. He walks around in circles. He has to clock in for his shift. We pass him, wave and say hello to make sure he notices us. We are on his side. Yet we won't look inside his hut and say 'How you are? Would you like tea?' How shit is this job actually? He is our guardian angel and is infallible."

And now this wingless wonder

has his very own dedicated art work.

■ See *Guard on Shift* at the Dance Factory, Newtown, on October 30, 31 and November 1 at 7.30pm. Tickets: R80; R50 for scholars, pensioners and block bookings. Book at Computicket or Dance Factory on 011-833-1347.

KENTRIDGE AND PAM-GRANT SADDLE UP

Since graduating from the University of Cape Town, Sue Pam-Grant (pictured right) has distinguished herself as an actress (on stage and TV), a playwright and, more recently, as a visual artist (a conceptual sculptor).

One of her finest achievements is her direction of the award-winning *Coupé* (in the Barney Simon Theatre till October 24). Another major milestone is directing William Kentridge in his *I am not me, the horse is not mine*.

Apart from a try-out for friends, this lecture performance has not been seen in Joburg where this internationally fêted artist lives. *I am not me, the horse is not mine* debuted at the Sydney Biennale in June.

Before jetting off to Tokyo and San Francisco, this unique performance will have its South African premiere at the Iziko South African National Gallery (Sang), in association with the Goodman Gallery, Cape, on December 9. All proceeds from the performance will be given by the artist to the gallery to acquire new work for its permanent collection.

Immediately after the lecture performance an eight-screen video installation will be switched on. This installation, also titled *I am not me, the horse is not mine*, will run as an exhibition at Sang for three months.

"I joke with William that he could give up his day job and become a fulltime performer," quips this delighted director who is busy writing her director's note for the catalogue for *I am not me; the horse is not mine*.

The 40-minute performance, with interactive video projection and installation have evolved out of Kentridge's preparation process for his production of Dimitri Shostakovich's *The Nose*, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera in New York, for 2010. Nikolai Gogol's satirical short story *The Nose* is a departure point.



PICTURE: DJ GRANT



METROPOLITAN MUSO: *Guard on Shift* co-creator and composer Xoli Norman.