

# New take on music of the knights

Musical standards are lifted beyond the ordinary in this outstanding show

## ZENGI MKEFA

I WAS not looking forward to seeing the latest Richard Loring production *Knights of Music*, in which he collaborates with musical arranger *extraordinaire* Bryan Schimmel. I did not want to see yet another musical revue featuring music from Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals and Queen.

But once I heard the voices of the show's stars, the production's real gems, I reviewed my prejudice. *Knights of Music* is a show that, among other things, celebrates the British musical geniuses who have been knighted: Sir Cameron Mackintosh, Sir Tim Rice, Sir Paul McCartney, Baron Andrew Lloyd Webber, Sir Elton John and Sir Brian May.

We have certainly heard their songs countless times. And it is rare to find artists and producers who are able to present these overplayed songs in a way that sheds new light. It is very hard to perform *Music of the Night* or *I Dreamed a Dream* from *Les Misérables*

in a way that we have not heard before while at the same time not massacring them for the sake of being different.

The genius of this particular Loring and Schimmel collaboration is the original musical arrangements and the choice of singers, who all bring something beautifully idiosyncratic to the production.

Carly Graeme, who studied acting and musical theatre in the UK, was particularly outstanding as she sang *I Dreamed a Dream*. The inspired musical arrangement of her solo performance enabled her to make all the necessary dramatic shifts, allowing her to encompass, in one song, all the drama of the entire tragic musical *Les Misérables*.

But the female voice that really wowed audiences was that of Tracey-Lee Oliver, who some might remember

for making it to the top five in the 2004 pan-African TV talent contest, *Project Fame*. Oliver, who was born in Grabouw, outside Cape Town, certainly set the stage alight.

Whether she was singing the hit *I Know Him So Well* from *Chess* with Graeme, or *Close Every Door* from *Dreamcoat*, or even *Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me* with Thokozani shimmering star.

Nzima, a singer and television personality who has starred in SABC's *Mhuzini.com III* and *Ba Kae*, brought to this show his soulful voice, which resulted in surprising renditions of *Music of the Night* and *Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me*, a duet Sir Elton John sang live with the British pop star George Michael.

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## JOHANNESBURG

### KNIGHTS OF MUSIC

Director: Richard Loring  
Musical supervisor and arranger: Bryan Schimmel

Musical director: Rowan Bakker

Lighting: Declan Randall

Costumes: David Tiale

Vocalists: Carly Graeme,

Tracey-Lee Oliver, Ruth

Brown, Shaun V,

Thokozani Nzima, Kyle

Matthews

Band: Rowan Bakker,

Ryno Zeelle, Theo van

Rensburg, Etienne

Oosthuysen, Llewellyn

John, John Manamela

Where: The Lyric

Theatre, Gold Reef City

When: Until November 8

### VOICE OF ANGELS:

Tracey-Lee Oliver and Shaun V in *Knights of Music* at the Lyric Theatre at Gold Reef City

Picture: BRENDAN CROFT

Shaun van Staden — better known as Shaun V — is probably one of the busiest young stars in the world of musical theatre, having left boy band Hi-5 in January 2006. To *Knights of Music* he brings an energised rock sound when needed or an almost angelic sound at other times. It's not surprising that he has been a hit in the leading roles in productions such as *We Will Rock You* and *Rent*.

The singers are masterfully supported by a tight band, thanks to musical director Rowan Bakker; lighting that is not only creatively designed, by Declan Randall, but exquisitely complementary to the drama of the musical performances; and costumes tastefully designed by gifted fashion designer David Tiale.

Loring, whose most memorable contribution to South African theatre is undoubtedly *African Footprints*, has brought together all the right ingredients to create an outstanding musical revue that breathes new life to a theatrical medium that can so easily be boring and stale. Congratulations to all involved.