

Classic love tale shimmers

Mary Mulke

There was no shortage of operatic glitz and glamour at the State Theatre recently.

The occasion was the opening of Bellini's masterpiece, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the fabulous, feminine fashions were there to grace the occasion.

Whole dresses covered with beading and, bejewelled stiletto-heeled shoes and gossamer scarves abounded. The opening scene of the opera was in stark contrast, with a minimalist setting.

Intriguingly, a horse rider in army camouflage trotted onto the stage, followed by two colleagues. A battle ensued, people were wounded. An army troop appeared, somewhat bandaged, but who were clearly fiercely loyal. Their commander and 2-IC roared up in an army jeep (reall!) and this was followed onto the stage by an ambulance to load up the wounded.

This seemed far removed from the Montague and Capulet family feud of Shakespeare's work. Bellini went back to the historical origins of the play in which two factions of the community were at war, each



Dudu Msomi and Tumi Mphahlele look forward to the portrayal of star-crossed lovers, *Romeo and Juliet*.

supporting different branches of the Catholic Church.

Reminiscent of contemporary global conflicts, the theme had universal relevance, as the two star-crossed lovers from opposing sides tried to find happiness.

Opera Africa, which staged the production, landed a coup in luring one of SA's major opera stars in Europe back to the country. Michelle Breedt, a top international mezzo soprano, took the lead role of Romeo.

She said her heart still belonged to South Africa and she went out of her way to perform 'at home'.

Her performances are tightly

wedged between major international engagements, and she starts work on the next opera in Zurich 24 hours after her final performance in Pretoria.

Opera Africa is a Section 21 national touring company based in Sandton, which balances traditional operas with indigenous works.

The stage director is UK-born Laurence Dale, currently based in France. British conductor Jeremy Silver leads the Chamber Orchestra of SA.

Romeo and Juliet runs until November 12. Booking at Computicket. E-mail info@operaafrica.co.za or phone 011-883-3503.



Costa Binikos, owner of Village Walk's Tivoli restaurant, and Rosemary Royeppen glam it up.



Bonnie Sherman with Andrew Moore-Boyle walk the red carpet rolled out in the State Theatre foyer to welcome guests to the opera.



Addie Lang, Bronwyn Lovegrove, Hanre Lass and Jan Venter look forward to a wonderful night at the opera.