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41 COLONISATION CHAMBERS, WEST STREET

PHONE 66403

DURBAN

Telegraphic Address: "NEWSCUT"

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CAPE TIMES

## Exciting Exhibition of Producer's Art

AFTER a sensationally successful season in Johannesburg, the all-African musical "King Kong" opened at the Camps Bay Civic Centre last night to a fashionable audience not as wildly enthusiastic as the performers. It was a slick production in an unhospitable hall, but because so much adulation has flowed from the pens of other writers into the columns of the *Cape Times* as preparatory propaganda I find myself—as humble critic—at a loss for laudatory words and phrases not used before!

In February, Mr. Ernest Fleischmann, well-known Cape Town music critic, saw the show in Johannesburg during the first week of its run, and shortly afterwards said in this column: "Leon Gluckman's production is the most vibrantly exciting exhibition of the producer's art yet encountered in Johannesburg."

He went on to record: "Every member of Mr. Gluckman's cast sings, dances and acts with a passionate conviction quite unknown in our theatre. The impact of King Kong thrills, disturbs and exhilarates one's senses, and this in spite of a vaguely-conceived, formless book, characterless lyrics and music that at times seems to consist of all the clichés of the Tin Pan Alley hack."

### SOCIAL DOCUMENT

These deficiencies, said Mr. Fleischmann, do not matter in the least, because the cast and their producer have brought nothing short of magic to bear on this largely true story of the decline and fall of a heavy-weight boxing idol.

Turning, now, to an expansive article by Norman Howell published in the *Cape Times* on April 2, I quote: "A jazz opera portraying all the ebullient vitality, the joys and sorrows, of life in an African shantytown—a great entertainment and an unforgettable social document."

Maybe it is a social docu-



NATHAN MDLEDLE, who plays the title role in "King Kong".

ment, but personally I shall not find it "unforgettable", and taking my courage firmly by the hand in the face of the above mentioned preliminary opinions, I venture to say that the ecstatic veneration accorded "King Kong" on the Rand was

probably due to the fact that it was the first large-scale show ever presented there to the public by Africans.

Here, in Cape Town, we have long been familiar with the excellent work of the Eoan Group, in everything ranging from opera—a magnificent production of "Rigoletto" last month—to musical comedy, and our local audiences may well be more critical of an "imported" entertainment in which, I have read, "Hollywood, Broadway, the London West End stage and a French film company" are all "keenly interested" in acquiring.

Am I carping? Not unduly, for if this show is to be presented outside the Union it will need a lot of tidying-up from the point of view of diction—could any member of the audience last night catch more than a word or two in the concerted numbers?—and, with the exalted exception of grand opera, what is being sung on the stage is, to-day, as important to the understanding of the plot as it ever was in the realm of the musical.

My verdict? "An exciting exhibition of the producer's art".

IVOR JONES