

Kwasi and Kwame, a successful opera from our own past

Algemeen Dagblad,
30 October 2007



Kwame, Brian Green

One of the best selling Dutch books has now become one of the most attention-getting operas in this country's history. The director team Mirjam Koen and Gerrit Timmers have produced Arthur Japin's novel *The Two Hearts of Kwasi Boachi*.

The performance more than lives up to the promise of Studio Onafhankelijk Toneel's reputation for opera production, already responsible for operas such as *Orpheus's Daughter*, *Monteverdi's Poppea*, and *The Death of Klinghoffer*. Like

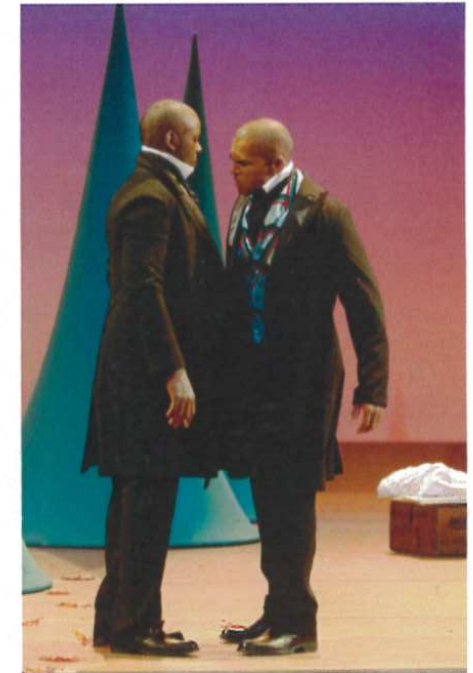
modern Verdis, Koen and Timmers give voice to society's outcasts. They relentlessly show the pressures and repressions of the established order: in this case, that of Dutch colonial overlords. You watch with empathetic shame as decent middle class people prove themselves no better than any other oppressor.

With *O.T.*, the story of Kwasi and Kwame (two African princes who as children were given to King Willem I and grew up in this country) is not just about the past. It is about identity and

integration, about the facile idea we in the West have that identity is something that can be traded in, and the notion we have that our values are somehow cleansing. It is about the chasm between the old and the new world of the refugee. When, at the end, one of Kwasi's children flies over the stage in a large paper bird, the message is clear. Every generation has its own paths to trod. There is no happy ending.

Everything comes together perfectly: the suggestive staging, the sublime libretto (written by Japin himself), and the stirring minimalistic music of the British composer Jonathan Dove. In 21 scenes we see the princes grow up. One tries to blend in, the other goes back to his country of origin, vainly seeking for his roots. All the performers (including the many children who participate) sing and act convincingly. In short, Japin's bestseller has made an auspicious beginning as an opera.

Oswin Schneeweisz
Rotterdam



Kwasi, Hans Voschezang
and Kwame, Brian Green