



Mavis (Jenny Logan, third from left) leads her class in a tap routine during "Stepping Out" playing at the National Theatre until June 16.

Theatre extra by Elizabeth Wight

"Stepping Out" is tremendous fun! This lighthearted comedy presented by City Players at the National Theatre until June 16, is directed by Gerry Tebbutt with the confident touch of the professional. He is a director in whom Nairobi audiences can have every confidence after his success in previous years with "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" (1988) and "Godspell" (1989), both for City Players.

"Stepping Out" is best described as a comedy with music. There are no songs but plenty of opportunity for the lively cast to show their terpsichorian skills (or lack of them).

The story is simple. A group of aspiring amateur tap-dancers meet weekly in a local hall. For at least one it is a compulsion, she is hooked. The situation where one steps into another world for one hour a week without the need to project oneself more than one wishes will be familiar to any who have attended night-classes in the anonymity of a large city. Into the happily humdrum group comes newcomer Vera. Previous to her arrival they were just there, accepting each other at face value,

making no demands. Vera, the archetypal "dogooder", smugly self-satisfied attempts to improve the lot of those around her.

She is direct contrast to the abrasive Maxine, gauche Andy, nervous Dorothy, loudly vulgar Sylvia and cynical Rose. With Lynne, who is awfully nice but rather colourless and the hapless single male member these make up the class which is led by Mavis, played with a nice edge of weary professionalism by "imported star" Jenny Logan.

The comedy comes mainly from the exchange of small talk about their ordinary everyday world and they become very real people. We never meet

but we get to know the dull husband, the brash teen-age son, the loneliness and the heartache that are part of their lives and warm to the good humoured acceptance of this and each other. It is to their credit that each player stays totally in character throughout so that the audience can fully identify with them.

The prospect of taking part in a Charity Concert steps up the action. Tempers begin to fray, personalities become more distinct and more demanding. We anguish with them and there was audible sigh of relief from the audience when they nearly got it right at the Dress Rehearsal.

Jenny Logan as Mavis holds her group together with force-

ful energy. She manages to convey both world weariness and hopeful optimism in turn with total conviction. She is, as she says in character "one step ahead of the class".

Vera is played by Ruth Sherwin, last seen at Braeburn Theatre as Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". She brings to the role both grace and a cloying, smirking innocence central to much of the humour in the play.

Lesley-Anne McGuinness who plays Maxine has a strong stage presence. She moves beautifully and has a fine sense of comedy. It is hard to believe that she has appeared to Nairobi audiences only once before (as Jill in "Mother Goose") in the six years since leaving Mombasa.

Visions of hope and aspirations

"I belong to the young and growing. Just starting from the trail."

This eloquent little stanza by an unknown poet appears to be reflecting the spirit of the artists who came to present their works in different art exhibitions held in Nairobi recently.

Esso calendar competition appears to have triggered a trend which turned into a mighty movement now known as *Ngecha Artists* continuing winning praise from different media quarters. This unique exhibition is still running till June 17, 1990. But the first Salvo was shot by K.L.M's

art competition. *Flight To 21st Century*, was open to different category of school children.

In this competition, held at Kenya National Museum Art Gallery Young artists in different category and age-group exercised their flight of imagination to soaring heights. Their lack of dexterity was amply compensated by their fantastic vision. It was a riot of colour and futurist drawings.

Almost at the same time at a different venue; Sarit Centre Kenya's cosmopolitan group of children displayed their skills and imagination in a disciplined media of Chinese Art.

In this 7th exhibition by the school of Chinese Art run by

Madam Rosa Lee, more than 35 young artists participated displaying hundreds of paintings depicting a variety of subjects. There were little scenes, from China and display of Kenya's flora and fauna. Some of the young artists, whose works stand out in originality and composition are Liliane Tassin, Hee Kyoung Yang, Maureen Rego, Young Sook Lee, Roshan Manzoor Naveed Awan. It was opened by Mr Mohammad Aslam with Chinese Ambassador to Kenya H. E. Wu Ming Lian acting as the Host-in-chief. I wish these talented young artists had exercised their brush and imagination in arresting Kenya's breath-taking beauty.

There was yet another youthful display of art at the Goethe Institut in which German students of Michael Grim-

zek School exhibited in their excitingly vibrant work in different media. In numerous exhibits the students dealt with various sculptural problems such as spatiality (disposition of space) plasticity colour and tonal effects, two dimensional spaces etc. Starting provocative paintings and graphic design were executed under the direction of the art instructor Ms. Gabriele Sadzisz, who deserves all the kudos for making this art exhibition feast of colours and compositions.

Kenyatta International Conference Centre was the venue of still another exhibition: "Youth in Electronic Age" organised by Kenya Post and Telecommunication which like all bureaucratic half-hearted attempts, went almost unnoticed. This exhibition was unique in very many ways.

Like K.L.M.'s "Flight to 21st Century" "Youth in Electronic Age" provided a splendid opportunity to the budding artists to exercise their imagination to capture the future in spirited colours futuristic compositions. Entries were really mind boggling stretching from the Coast to the Lake. I wish it had a longer duration and better exposure.

But the place where the rivers of creativity really flowed was British Council. First it was many displays of Pottery and Brush-on-tile by two highly talented craft-artist Waitheera Chege and Juliet Waterkeyn. Waitheera Chege, a Green-acre graduate who went to Britain on council's scholarship specialises on the formulation of glazes and raw material. Her exhibition demonstrated her talent in hand-

ling local clay and glaze material. Artistically her pottery art has sculptural form with quality. Juliet Waterkeyn, a Zimbabwean working in Kenya as an illustrator, complimented Waitheera's pottery (or should I say poetry in glaze). The Chinese brush stroke technique found eloquent let-out in Waterkeyn's works depicting crayfish and birds providing a running competition to Madam Rosa Lee's Chinese students. By using tiles rather than paper or canvas, these pieces are promoted to a high art form in its own right.

The solo artist who really steals the show in this crowded melece of exhibition is none other than James Odhiambo. It's not very often that a person who sells cigarettes as a profession finds time to involve himself in the work of art.



A scene in *How to Succeed in Business* . . . Gerry Tebbutt, who directed it will direct *Stepping Out*.

Stepping out with tap dance

By Samuel J. Wolff

Lesley-Anne McGuinness, well known from Mombasa Little Theatre, Nairobi City Players and her major roles in several movies filmed in the country.

Jenny Logan, London's West End Star of such hits as *Irene* and *Chicago* will come over for the lead role. She was last seen playing the role of Mavis (the teacher), in nothing less than the National Tour of *Stepping Out*. Rounding out the cast is Anne Cohen, Jane Bailey, Maria Cunningham Asheline Makokha and Ruth Sherwin.

Gerry Tebbutt, well known London director has again agreed to come over to direct the performance. Previously he has directed City Players' productions of *How to Succeed in Business* and *Godspell*.

Stepping out will open with a charity performance on June 6 and will run through to the 16th.

What makes a group of nine women and one man meet together

in an old church hall on dark, cold winter evenings in North London? Is it religion? Well yes, but not in the orthodox sense. There may not be salvation but just for one moment, they will leave their humdrum lives to be lifted up to the level of their idols of the silver screen. Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Shirley Temple and "Bojangles", the tap dancers of Hollywood musical fame.

Maybe like me, they saw all of these gods and goodnesses on Sunday afternoons before the advent of rock and disco.

But why tap and not ballet or ballroom dancing? Tap certainly requires as much discipline but perhaps its origin is closer to the folk art that seems to draw people together. Tap dance grew out of the English clog dances and the Irish jigs. Taken across to the United States, these dances were adopted by the American Negro Slave who added parts of their native African dances, the end result becoming tap

as we know it today.

By the late 19th century, touring minstrel bands featured their specialist tap dancers and a new entertainment was born. The birth of the Hollywood musical handed the tradition of tap dancing back to the Caucasian through Shirley Temple and Fred Astaire but most notably through the vast extravaganzas produced by Busby Berkeley, where literally hundreds of dancers were brought on screen in spectacular routines.

Throughout Hollywood's golden era, young hopefuls lined up at the gates of the city and therein may lie the secret of tap. Perhaps it has a promise of glamour that even the humblest counter clerk or shoeshine boy can hope for.

And that promise of glamour is what makes the characters in Nairobi City Players upcoming production of *Stepping Out* come together in an old church hall. *Stepping Out* is a brilliant play,

STEPPING Out is a play of warmth, comedy and dance. It is a winner of the British "best show of the year", a perpetual West End hit and a just plain enjoyable evening.

Nine women and one lonely man, need one say more about the endless possibilities for comedy and complication. The characters, which include a rainbow of various and often clashing personalities, are thrown together by their interest in taking tap dance classes. Each with his or in most cases her own expectations.

The cast includes such known names as Ian Barton, seen last in his brilliant portrayal of John the Baptist in *Godspell*, Eleanor Stevens, most recently seen in Phoenix's *Plaza Suite*, also having appeared in various City Players productions as well as singing with the Hootenanny. Denise White, the unforgettable Queen Wotta Wappa in last year's Pantomime, *Robinson Crusoe*, being just one of her many credits.