

Songs make it a Knight to remember

Knights of Music
directed by **Rowan Bakker**
review by **Beth Shirley**

RICHARD Loring, co-producer of *Knights of Music*, expressed to the celebrity-packed, air-kissing audience on the opening night of the show, that theatre is a hard, hard business to be in. And yet the very shiny Loring has certainly made this business work for him, enticing thousands of patrons to his productions, which include *Lion King* and *African Footprint*.

There is a formula for getting bums on seats in South Africa – just give people the opportunity to escape the reality of their lives, to sing and tap along to old favourites in addition to being wowed by superb lighting, glitzy costumes and a funky band.

For this reason, I arrived at the show with slight prejudice, wishing that more would drag themselves to less glittering venues in the city and engage with experimental and politically provoking theatre instead of being inspired to see sausage-machine mass-produced shows.

Yet, it is crucial that any variety of theatre be judged in its own terms, and *Knights* certainly lives up to its purpose of providing glamorous entertainment, leaving theatregoers with a smile



Tracey-Lee Oliver is a natural diva

and momentary respite.

Knights celebrates the creative splendour of 21st century musical men, who for their achievements in the arts were duly knighted, providing the impetus for the name of the production. They were Sirs Cameron Macintosh, Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Tim Rice, Cliff Richard, Elton John, Paul McCartney and Dr Brian May. What is more, these knights have not only enriched musical theatre, but are philanthropists and humanitarians.

Further anecdotes about the *Knights* were broadcast on a big screen behind the musicians by a bouncy presenter. It was a clever and original touch, especially since new facts about the men were relayed. The vocalists also did the *Knights* justice, with the females especially strong. Tracey-Lee Oliver and Carly

Graeme are natural divas whose range and talent was noteworthy. There were a few times when I thought the chandelier above my head would explode when the highest notes were reached. In fact, the grandness of the theatre, together with the singers' glittering outfits and warbling voices, let us truly feel the sheer momentousness of the *Knights*' achievements.

The highlights of the show included Thokozani Nzima singing Elton John's *Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me*, Shaun V hip hopping *One Night in Bangkok* and the cast crooning to Richard's *Summer Holiday*. Furthermore, the band was impressive, seemingly playing without music sheets. There was some variation in the music, which may have been jarring for some, but added a stamp of originality for what it's worth.

Knights features memorable Broadway and West End songs, such as *I Dreamed a Dream* (*Les Miserables*); *Pinball Wizard* (*Tommy*/The Who); *Who Wants to Live Forever* (*We Will Rock You*) and *One Night in Bangkok* (*Chess*). The sure favourite for the audience was McCartney's *Hey Jude*, which saw a few leaping out of their seats, waving their arms and shouting "na na na na na na na" with tuneless fervour.

● *Knights of Music* is at the Lyric Theatre at Gold Reef City until November 8.

