

8/1/2/1/18



" S P O N O N O"

A P L A Y I N T H R E E A C T S .

" S P O N O N O"

CHARACTERS.

SPONONO
THE PRINCIPAL
MR. MABASO
HA'PENNY
WALTER
JOHANNES MOFOKING
SPIKE MOLETSANE
ELIZABETH
MR. MAKATINI
MRS. MAKATINI
TWO POLICEMEN
and REFORMATORY BOYS

ACT I

Scene 1 : The Reformatory Yard.
Scene 2 : Elizabeth's Room in Victoriatown.
Scene 3 : The Principal's Office.
Scene 4 : The Reformatory Yard.
Scene 5 : The Principal's Office.
Scene 6 : The Visitor's Room.

ACT II

Scene 1 : The Principal's Office.
Scene 2 : Elizabeth's Room.
Scene 3 : The Visitor's Room.
Scene 4 : The Principal's Office.
Scene 5 : Street In Victoriatown.
Scene 6 : Elizabeth's Room.
Scene 7 : The Principal's Office.

ACT III

The Court.

The action takes place in the reformatory and in
Victoriatown a suburb of Johannesburg.

The time is the present.

THE REFORMATORY YARD.

The whole stage represents the Reformatory Yard. Occupying the rear portion of upstage centre is a dais. Steps lead up to this dais from upstage left and upstage right. Two long walls run, one from the left-hand corner of downstage, one from the right-hand corner to the rear of the stage.

The stage is on two levels, one about a foot higher than the other. The dais stands on the higher level. For some scenes the dais is broken into two portions, one being pushed to stage centre R and one to stage centre L. On the platform of these two portions sit the CHORUS in other scenes. The Principal's Office is situated between these 2 portions. Upstage R is the Visitor's Room and upstage L is Elizabeth's Room.

The play opens with DRUMS and the CHORUS sings CRESCENDO, followed by INYANDA, then SOFT MELODY, then MALABULABU then BLACKBOOTS.

In the semi-dark a very tall reformatory boy (FIRST BOY) is standing on the top of the undivided dais. To right and left of the dais stand the CHORUS. On the dais at the foot of FIRST BOY is SECOND BOY who plays the part of the IMBONGI or PRAISEMAKER. At the foot of the dais stand four reformatory boys, one called SPIKE, one called JOHANNES MOFOKING and THIRD BOY and FOURTH BOY. JOHANNES leads off the WARRIORS' DANCE. He is joined by five other REFORMATORY BOYS. These are dressed in khaki shirts, khaki shorts, shoes, and socks, which are the reformatory uniforms. Two of the boys are PREFECTS; over their left hand pockets are sewn green pieces of cloth the same size as the pockets. Similarly a red pocket indicates that the wearer has won his freedom. The DRUMS grow louder, and SPONONO enters, followed by an attendant, the FIFTH BOY. Over his clothes he wears a blanket to show he is important, and on his head is a circlet of red material, and at the front of the circlet sticks up a red feather. He wears no distinctive badge.

He is one of the bigger boys, aged 17 - 20. He is well-built, nice-looking, bright, intelligent. As he walks to his seat the IMBONGI calls out praises suitable for a chief in Zulu and/or English, and/or Afrikaans.

The ingredients are given below.

Wena O Mnyama! (Thou Awe-Inspiring One!)
 Wena Silo ! (Thou the Wild Beast! Kyk die Groot Wildebees!)
 Wena Nkonyama ye Zulu!
 (Thou the Lion of the Heavens!) (Kyk die Leeu van die Noorde!)

Wena o Bulala Amadoda!
 (Thou who devourest Men!)

(To the People)

Ufana nensebe yelanga! (He is like the rays of the Sun! Hy is mos like die Son in die Hemel!)

Iso lakho lifana no Nzwi we Zulu!

(His eye is like the lightning flash!)

x Inja Kayisuke lap 'emnyango! ngoba kukhona isikhulu lapha! Inja kayisuke (Let that dog get away from the door! For there is a great man here! Let the dog get away!)

Son of Solomon! Wise Judge!

(SPONONO sits. All sit. He enjoys the praises. His looks are serene and confident. He silences the IMBONGI.)

SPONONO

Call the prisoner. (JOHANNES is brought)

SPONONO

What's the case?

PREFECT

(Standing)

Johannes Mofoking. He ran away from the reformatory, and while he was away he stole a gold watch.

(The crowd moans).

SPONONO

(sternly)

You know every time someone runs away from the reformatory it is harder for the rest of us?

MOFOKING

(subdued)

Yes, Sponono.

SPONONO

Why did you do it then?

MOFOKING

It was my head.

SPONONO

What's the matter with your head?

MOFOKING

It.... it turns, Sponono.

SPONONO

We are not interested in your head turning. What we want to know is, when are you going to turn.

MOFOKING

I've turned, Sponono.

(From stage L enter Walter and his sycophants, Temba and Fritz, chasing Ha'penny.)

HA'PENNY

Sponono! (He runs up the steps to SPONONO, who puts his arm round him protectingly. WALTER retires sullenly to upstage L.)

SPONONO

(sternly)

You know what the Principal wants to do? He wants to send you to prison.

MOFOKING

(pleading)
Speak for me, Sponono. The Principal listens to you. I promise you....

SPONONO

(sceptically)
You promised before.

MOFOKING

(earnestly)
This is a real promise.

SPONONO

How do we know it is a real promise?

MOFOKING

(convincingly)
Because I'm telling you, Sponono.

WALTER

(contemptuously)
Why don't you test him, Sponono? With boiling water, and the stones, and all that bog?

SPONONO

For a case like this? Don't be damn silly (to WALTER) Who asked you anyhow. (to JOHANNES) O.K. Johannes, you are forgiven.

(sternly)
But God help you if you break your promise again.

(Immediately the REFORMATORY BELL sounds - a sharp authoritative sound. The Court breaks up unceremoniously. The dais is broken in two. SPONONO removes his robes of office. He is revealed in his reformatory clothes. BOYS assemble, in front of the dais downstage R. SPONONO joins them. The PRINCIPAL of the reformatory, a man 35 - 50 years old, mounts the dais. The reformatory is one for African boys. At the PRINCIPAL'S right hand is MR. MABASO, the Head Teacher of the reformatory. After a brief drilling by a PREFECT, the BOYS are silent.

MR. MABASO

Sponono!
(Sponono comes out smartly, and goes to stand facing the PRINCIPAL. He is happy and excited).

PRINCIPAL

(speaking in a formal voice)
Boys, this day another boy in the reformatory receives his freedom. He can go in and out of the gate as he pleases, except at night. He will be allowed to visit his home. If he continues his good behaviour, the time will come for him to leave the reformatory altogether.

(to Sponono)
Sponono, today you receive your freedom. What do you have to say to us?

SPONONO

(Salutes and turns to face downstage. He repeats a formula)
Today I receive my freedom. In front of you all I promise that I shall obey all the laws of the school. I promise that I shall not touch anything that is not mine. I promise when I leave here to

try to keep the law.

(He turns back smartly to face the PRINCIPAL)

PRINCIPAL

We have heard your promises, Sponono. We accept them. (He shakes Sponono's hand). Here is your badge of freedom.

(He takes a shirt from MR. MABASO, already ornamented with the red badge. SPONONO stretches out both his hands to receive it. He takes it. The boys clap their hands).

SPONONO

(He looks at the badge with satisfaction, and obvious pride). Thank you, meneer. (He adds his own account) Thank you, friends. (The boys respond with a kind of rah-rah-rah). (He turns back smartly to face downstage. He pauses a second, then he goes to take his place amongst the boys. MR. MABASO strikes up a hymn which is sung with beauty. The hymn ends. All close their eyes.)

MR. MABASO

(pronounces a benediction in Zulu - he prays briefly for the reformatory) ~~and Nkosi.~~

Beka isandla sakho kulabantwana lapha eReformatory. Baze Daphume babe nabafazi nezingane abazozondla. Siya themba, Nkosi, vkuthi uzosizwela kulesifiso sethu, ngegama lalowo owata uJesu Krestu. Amen.

Amen.

BOYS

PRINCIPAL

Goodnight, boys.

BOYS

Goodnight, meneer.

(for a few seconds there is silence. Then the parade dissolves in shouting, laughing, whistling and mock fighting. The BOYS go to other parts of the yard. The PRINCIPAL comes down from the dais with MR. MABASO. The Yard is full of noise and activity, and the ingredients are given below:-

One small boy is chasing another. They pass before the PRINCIPAL more than once. The chaser is shouting I'm telling you, wait till I catch you, and the one being chased is shouting back, Couldn't catch Katie, Run harder, Fanie, in English, Zulu, Afrikaans or any other language. A boy passes playing Clementine on a mouth organ, and another passes plucking the strings of a home-made one-gallon tin guitar in a monotonous but not unpleasant melody. A football lands near the PRINCIPAL, and a boy rushes up, says Sorry, meneer, and rushes away with the ball. Off stage a choir is preparing for Christmas, and we hear them singing.

PRINCIPAL

(in a conversation not necessarily heard). (pointing)

Let's have the Christmas tree here, Mr. Mabaso.

MABASO

Good, Principal. The fireworks came today.

PRINCIPAL

Are they good?

MABASO

(approvingly)
Better than last year.

(The noise mounts again. Watching the PRINCIPAL shyly is HA'PENNY, a small boy of 10 - 12, craving attention. He is in his turn being watched by WALTER, more a man than a boy, age 19 - 22, physically powerful, with a record of violence. He is a tough hard fellow. He dislikes the reformatory, considering it a place for children. He is a seducer of small boys, and has his eye on HA'PENNY.

WALTER is not the only one who is watching. SPONONO is watching WALTER. SPONONO has set himself up as HA'PENNY'S protector, and he watches WALTER with hostility. While WALTER is there the small boy who is being chased round the yard collides with him. WALTER'S reaction is swift and brutal. He catches the small boy around the neck, and makes as if to strangle him. The small boy cannot do anything; he catches WALTER'S hands and his eyes appear to start out of his head. The small boy who is chasing lets out a cry of anguish to see his friend being held thus. WALTER, with a quick glance at the PRINCIPAL who is not looking, lets the small boy go, with a muttered Next time I kill you. The two small boys go off, one tearfully holding his throat, his friend solicitous. WALTER goes nearer to HA'PENNY).

WALTER

Ha'Penny, come and play in the Games Room.
(HA'PENNY gestures toward the PRINCIPAL, indicating that he wants to speak to him).
Come on, I've got sweets for you.
(HA'PENNY shakes his head. WALTER looks at him angrily. He looks at SPONONO with dislike. He goes away muttering. SPONONO now approaches the PRINCIPAL).(Others fall away).

SPONONO

Meneer.

PRINCIPAL

(He obviously likes standing in the Yard and listening to the bedlam. He obviously likes to be approached at this time, though at other times he is more formal. He greets SPONONO with pleasure, in which there is a touch of raillery).
What's your trouble, Sponono?

SPONONO

I've no trouble, meneer. I want to speak to you about the trouble of Johannes Mofoking.

PRINCIPAL

Are you his lawyer?

SPONONO

(brushing aside the flippancy)
You are being too hard on him, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

He ran away. He stole a gold watch. What must I do? Keep quiet, and put the watch in my pocket?

SPONONO

You can't do that meneer. You must tell the police, and they must take him to Court. You were right in that.

PRINCIPAL

It's good of you to say so.

SPONONO

But where you are wrong, meneer, is that you think he should go to prison. If he goes to prison, that'll be the end of him.

(winningly)

If you let him come back I promise he'll never run away again.

PRINCIPAL

(he cannot help laughing)

Once I spoke to him too, Sponono, and he promised me too.

SPONONO

(assuringly)

This promise is real, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

How can you tell?

SPONONO

(assuming an air of great wisdom)

I can tell meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Johannes, come and see me tomorrow, and we'll see what we can do.

JOHANNES

(delighted)

Thank you, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Don't thank me. Thank Sponono here.

JOHANNES

(to SPONONO)

Thank you, Sponono.

SPONONO

Don't thank me, thank the Principal.

(Johannes goes back to PRINCIPAL and thanks him again).

PRINCIPAL

(laughing)

All right boys, off you go.

(JOHANNES goes off very pleased, but SPONONO does not go).

SPONONO

Sorry to bother you, meneer. There's one thing more, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Yes.

SPONONO

I want to work in your garden, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

William's working there.

SPONONO

He's going home next month, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You know everything.

SPONONO

I don't know everything, meneer.....
(cleverly)
but I know about gardening.

PRINCIPAL

Do you know about antirrhinums?
(it is clear SPONONO does not)
Do you know about Bellis perennis?
(It is clear he does not).

SPONONO

What I don't know, I'll learn meneer. In one month, two months, I'll know everything.

PRINCIPAL

Tell me, Sponono, why do you want to work in my garden?

SPONONO

(he comes nearer. He is going to impart important information. He speaks earnestly).
Meneer, when I am by myself, sometimes I go crazy, and then I get into trouble. But with you, I wouldn't go crazy. If I were with you, I wouldn't get into trouble.
(he comes still nearer and says with great simplicity)
I'd be safe, meneer. If I could stay with you, I'd be safe.
(he makes his last point, touching the PRINCIPAL'S arm lightly).
If I could stay with you my whole life, then I would be safe my whole life.

PRINCIPAL

(is touched but speaks matter-of-factly)
Sponono, when William goes, you can come and work in my garden.

SPONONO

(he is immensely pleased, but considers it proper to try to conceal his pleasure).
Thank you, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Don't thank me.
(SPONONO is puzzled)
Thank Johannes Mofcking.
(SPONONO goes off still more puzzled. PRINCIPAL speaks to MR. MABASO)
Well, you didn't explode.

MABASO

Well, Principal, I call him the boy with the silver tongue. Look at his record, theft, theft again, assault, robbery and assault.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, it isn't a good record, is it? But there's something in that boy - I mean something out of the ordinary. We have to build on it.

MABASO

And I hope you won't be disappointed. Goodnight, Principal.
(he goes).

PRINCIPAL

Goodnight.
(after a pause)
Ha'penny!
(HA'PENNY approaches. This is the moment he has been waiting for.)
What do you think of Sponono's new badge? /8.....

HA'PENNY

(who always speaks shyly).

It's nice, meneer.

(He is delighted when the PRINCIPAL takes him by the ear, but this delight he also shows shyly).

PRINCIPAL

You'll be getting one soon. How's your mother?

HA'PENNY

Well, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Have you had a letter from her?

(HA'PENNY nods uncertainly, and the PRINCIPAL does not pursue the matter, because many boys are ashamed when their mothers do not write to them).

(using his fingers)

And Richard? And Dickie? And Anna? And Mina?

HA'PENNY

Well, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

There's one thing I don't understand. You know in English, Richard and Dickie are the same name.

(HA'PENNY says something but the PRINCIPAL does not hear it)

What did you say, Ha'penny?

(he bends his head to hear better)

Ah, Tickey you say, not Dickie.

HA'PENNY

(relieved)

Yes, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

What's your mother sending you for Christmas?

(We see that HA'PENNY is apprehensive. The PRINCIPAL does not push the question. He gives HA'PENNY'S ear a tweak).

Goodnight Ha'penny.

HA'PENNY

Goodnight, meneer.

(PRINCIPAL goes to various groups, while chorus sings OLUWA - SPONONO comes to HA'PENNY).

SPONONO

Hasn't the letter come yet, Ha'penny?

(He puts his arm round HA'PENNY'S shoulders).

HA'PENNY

No, not yet.

(To SPONONO & SPONONO alone, HA'PENNY tells these secrets).

SPONONO

(with sublime confidence)

Oh it'll come! Don't you worry. And how will Christmas be? I'll show you. Sit down here.

(he sits HA'PENNY down) There you are.

And there's Richard.

(he sits down and makes a gesture which presumably is typical of Richard).

And Dickie.

(he sits further down and makes another gesture)

And Anna

(he sits further down and gives a childlike laugh)

/9....

SPONONO (Cont'd).

And Mina.

(he sits still further down and sings a snatch of song.
WALTER is watching, and although he does not interfere, he shows contempt for the game. SPONONO sees him, but goes on for HA'PENNY'S sake).

And here is Mrs. Maarman.

(SPONONO himself is MRS. MAARMAN. He brings out his handkerchief and makes out of it some kind of hat for MRS. MAARMAN. He mimics her. FOUR REFORMATORY BOYS join in taking the places of the imaginary children).

Now children, here are your Christmas presents. Mina!

(he stands before Mina. He gives her a doll. HA'PENNY watches entranced)

FIRST BOY

Thank you Ma for the beautiful doll.

SPONONO

Do you hear that Ha'penny?

Anna!

(he stands before Anna. He gives her a teaset).

SECOND BOY

Thank you Ma for this nice teaset.

SPONONO

Oh, that's good.

Dickie!

(he stands before Dickie and gives him a football).

THIRD BOY

A football. Thank you Ma.

SPONONO

See that Ha'penny?

Richard!

(he stands before Richard. He gives him a motorcar).

Something good for Richard. It's a motorcar for Richard.

FOURTH BOY

Thank you Ma for the motorcar.

SPONONO

See Ha'penny, he is winding it.

(he jumps as the car runs straight at him)

Wait, wait, Richard.

(HA'PENNY LAUGHS)

You're a naughty boy. Now wait till Ha'penny has had his present.

(he stands before HA'PENNY. We see from the mime that the present is substantial. It is in a box, and he opens it.)

You see what it is, a train, and lines for it to run on.

(he puts down the box, and takes out the pieces and fits them together. He winds up the engine and then he follows the train round the track with his eyes. HA'PENNY watches too, but he is watching SPONONO, with a look that of a mixture of pain and joy).

Now come on boys put down the lines. And here's the train. And you wind and wind.... Press the button and Tups! There she goes.

(they form a train and go round in a circle, while EHORUS sings CHU CHU. Suddenly WALTER stands in front of the train, and the game comes to an end.

WALTER

What's the game?

SPONONO

It's our game.

WALTER

What a hell of a game.

(he comes forward and kicks the imaginary train off the stage. HA'PENNY gets up and retires a little to stage left centre. WALTER sneers)

So you got your badge, your bumsucker's badge.

(he looks at it with contempt, as though he would tear it off).

I'll be reformed, meneer. I'll be good, meneer. I'll keep away from all bad company, meneer.

(he looks around him brutally. SPONONO watches him, not fearfully, but warily.)

When I want my freedom, I'll take it. I won't go bumsucking round any bloody lanie.

So you're going to be reformed, eh?

SPONONO

(defiantly)

Yes, I am.

WALTER

(he laughs loud and long. Then he turns nasty again)

You like the lanie?

SPONONO

Yes.

WALTER

I like him too. Like I like shit on my bread.

(he and SPONONO are standing dangerously near each other.)

Now listen to me. What about your chommies out there in Victoriatown? They're waiting for you, see?

SPONONO

Tell them, to hell with you!

(another reformatory boy SPIKE, about SPONONO'S height and size, intervenes. He is dressed in the reformatory uniform, but he has the gift of adding touches of gaiety to his clothes. He also wears the red badge of freedom. He tries to get SPONONO out of an ugly situation).

SPIKE

Ag, cut it out, Walter!

WALTER

What! For you, Spike?

SPIKE

We've had enough fighting round here.

WALTER

(coming nearer to SPIKE)

A real bumsuckers company, eh!

(throws him down. Picks him up contemptuously).

(to SPIKE)

Are you reforming too?

SPIKE

Yes, I am.

WALTER

(angrily)

You've got chommies out in Victoriatown too. They're waiting for you. There're jobs to do.

SPONONO

Tell them, to hell with them.

WALTER

(to SPIKE)
D'you say to hell with them too, Spike?
(no reply)
D'You know what I heard?
(SPIKE does not resist like SPONONO
I heard you were going to get married.
(his voice is terrible)
Now if you get married or if you don't get married, you still belong
to us. D'you know who told me that?

SPIKE

(he is frightened)
No.

WALTER

It was George.
(Crowd reacts).
(SPIKE flinches)
(He is suddenly very affable)
You know, George likes you, Billy Boy. He says he can't wait till
you come back. And he says don't try to forget us, Billy Boy!
(he goes, and as he passes HA'PENNY he makes a lunge
at him, and is amused to see HA'PENNY shrink. SPONONO
watches him go, but SPIKE'S eyes are on the ground, out
of fear and shame.)

SPONONO

(determined to cheer SPIKE)
Don't listen to all that bug. Everything will be O.K.
(excitedly)
D'you know? I've got special leave tomorrow. So we can go together.
We can walk round Victoriatown and show them we're together.
(no reply)
Don't you want to?
(no reply)
Ag, smile Spike, smile.
(a little peeved)
Ag, well, if you won't smile I can't make you.
(he is in good spirits himself)
Ha'penny, special leave tomorrow.
(he begins to dance a dance of anticipation. Music and
voices join in. SPIKE goes off gloomily, but HA'PENNY
watches fascinated).

CHORUS sings SPECIAL LEAVE -

(LIGHTS DIM)
