

# ***MANDELA BEHIND BARS: AN EXCELLENT PLAY***

*Prisoner 46664* by Théâtre en Anglais traces Nelson Mandela's life showing that his strength and conviction extended far beyond the walls that imprisoned him, but what do we think about it, as spectators?

The 'Théâtre en Anglais' company in Nancy put on a powerful play about Nelson Mandela's time on Robben Island. 46664 represents much more than just a number; it embodies the pain, sacrifice, and unshakable hope that sustained prisoners under oppression. Through a remarkable performance and evocative staging, the play brings Mandela's struggle against apartheid to life.

## ***Actors***

First and foremost, the actors do a fantastic job. There is a recognisable South African accent that immerses us in the history of South Africa during apartheid.

It is truly magnificent, as we feel what Mandela felt. In fact, we see the pain of those close to Mandela, like his daughter or his wife. This adds to his ordeal. The play beautifully conveys these emotional struggles, offering an honest portrayal of Mandela's personal sacrifices for the greater good

## ***Songs***

I loved them, especially 'Sun.' The music bridges scenes beautifully, turning pain into hope. The repetition of 'We sing. And sing' is a powerful message of solidarity, emphasizing strength through unity in dark times.

The music was especially pleasant, easy to understand, and I even learned the lyrics. Another memorable song is "Free" with its powerful message: 'Free, free Mandela, free, we are the children of Mandela'. The lyrics capture the collective fight for justice and the ongoing legacy of Mandela's struggle.

## ***Message of unity***

What's more, I really appreciated how the play beautifully and clearly dealt with unity. In fact, Mandela, portrayed by Meledin Yacoubi, wasn't alone in prison. While we often talk about Mandela's achievements, we must not forget that many others were imprisoned alongside him in the fight for freedom. Many others, like his friend Walter Sisulu, played key roles in the fight for freedom. The play reminds us that the struggle for justice was a collective effort, with everyone, known or not, contributing to history.

However, although the Sharpeville massacre is mentioned, the account lacks depth. A wounded man mentions the number of deaths and speaks briefly, but this is not enough to convey the brutality of the event. The projected image of the wounded and bodies on the ground does not do justice to the scale of the massacre, which would have deserved a more powerful staging to convey the violence and suffering from the victims, such as the sound of gunshots and screams. The scene could have been more striking with sound or visual effects. This is just a minor detail and doesn't detract from the overall quality of the play. The rest of the production is simply indescribable. Indeed, the ending in particular is very creative: in scene 30, after Mandela's death, Walter is waiting for him in a place 'where there is peace'.

**In conclusion**, having seen many plays, this play stands as a sublime masterpiece, captivating both the heart and the soul, leaving an indelible impression long after the profound exchange with the students. I have just one word to describe this play: **exceptional** !



**Mandela and his close friend, Sisulu, endure gruelling hard labour in Robben Island, a symbol of their resilience and determination to remain unbroken despite the oppressive conditions. The costumes and sets are particularly well-chosen. They help us to understand this "torture" in prison.**