

On and off the Bench

 By Eugene Yiga

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Two petty thieves are planning one last job so that they can finally retire. But there's a twist on what could easily have turned into a rehash of every heist movie ever made. One of the guys starts having doubts about their latest scam. Can he go through with it or is it better for them to walk away?



Photo by Jonx Pillemer

"I was inspired by the story of two small-time crooks and curious about what motivated them," said writer Brent Palmer. "I wanted to peel back the layers to reveal two absorbing characters who, despite what they do, are able to hold up the mirror to all of us and reflect some of our own humanity; our aspirations and our disappointments - of course, with a healthy dose of comedy thrown in!

Palmer, who performs regularly as a stand-up comedian and has directed all Nik Rabinowitz's shows over the past seven years, plays one half of the crime duo. The other is played by Adrian Collins, who delivers a pretty convincing coloured accent even though he's actually a white guy famous for his roles in Shakespearean plays. "There is a fine balance between playing a character and becoming a caricature," Collins said. "In Bench, you've heard people speaking like this and you relate to it. It's a comedy, but you still have to be truthful. The more honest with the characters you are, then the funnier it becomes. That's where the funny begins."

Quick and witty one-liners

So, yes, Bench is pretty funny, especially because it manages to come across as spontaneous and improvised even when it's not. A few parts do go off on long tangents that don't have much of a point (perhaps just a reflection of conversations in real life), just like a few puns were milked for more than their worth. But it's mostly a case of quick and witty one-liners, some of which come so fast that you have to pay close attention to catch them all. (It's unfortunate that some jokes were missed because they were delivered before the continuous audience laughter died down.)

Beyond the humour, Bench also manages to be insightful. It seems that not all crooks and swindlers are proud of what they do. Many of them might be forced into this line of "work" because it's the only way that they can survive in an unfair world. As the story progresses and one of the characters begins to open up, the play takes on a more sombre tone. And by the time the ending comes - abrupt, unresolved, and a little sad - you can't help but ask yourself how far you'd go to build a better life for the people you love. After a seat on the Bench, the answer may surprise you.

Bench (PG-13) is showing at the [Kalk Bay Theatre](http://www.kbt.co.za), Cape Town until 7 October. For more information about tickets and discounts, go to www.kbt.co.za

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.
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