

Mass Hysteria: an unprecedented success

 By [Johann M. Smith](#)

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For a long time in South Africa, comedians have had a firm grasp on rock-stardom status. But unlike the rest of the world, a super group line-up has rarely ever existed as in the case of Mass Hysteria, a performance boasting eight of our motherland's finest. What started as an attempt to mock current national leadership became the antidote to the perversity of politics and the complacency of culture, if only for a while.



After a one-night-only performance in Cape Town's Grand West Casino, standing inside the casino's exclusive "green room" (showbiz code for backstage) I spoke to John Vlismas alone about his reflections now that the show has finished. He appeared exhausted and relieved. John not only performed in Mass Hysteria, but also produced it.

He allowed me to hold his enormous penis - an intimidating floppy one-eyed dildo that he used to hit the stage with; it's veiny, muscular and thick like an athlete's calf, and the length of half an arm. According to John, it can turn inside-out into a lava lamp.

"The show was fantastic, thanks," I commented.

"You think so?" He asked humbly, seeming somewhat doubtful, frowning and tilting his head.

"Yes, you should be proud."

"We found the show was very well received. The audience showed quite a lot of love for this indie vibe."

Upon enquiring about the show's risqué contents, and despite being daring still containing the same tried-and-tested themes of race, crime and general observations of SA's strangeness, John replied: "We wanted the comments to be real commentary and just do something fucking cool and sexy - not just a watery image on a bad screen with a black fabric

behind everything."

He went on to explain the way that the eight comics love doing it translates back to the audience, and if you base it on the truth, you can get away with a lot more - instead of shocking for shock's sake. He gave an example: "Take the thing about race. There's so much of it in our comedy, but like Ndumiso Lindi said, we're all different and the sooner we get that, the sooner we can move on; instead of slamming this beige veneer over everything. It's better to point out our issues, and it's more honest."

No doubt, if anything, honest and true is what it was.

None of the actual magic can be realised here and a review would be quite useless. But in case you missed it, here is an attempt at recalling some of the most memorable moments:

Casper de Vries as Minister of Twitter

Mass Hysteria featured Casper's first performance in English. Rather aptly, he proceeded to give the crowd a lecture in linguistics. Like Noam Chomsky, but only a lot dirtier.

He got the hits, translating Afrikaans words like doos and steek using classic Casperian logic.

Removing his jacket sleeve, he revealed his wrist and hand in stitches.

"You see, in Afrikaans I can say: 'ek gaan my hand op steek.' And in English: I'm going to fuck-up my hand."

Tumi Morake as Minister of International Affairs and Pan African Children

From here on out it only got much better, or depending on your place on the conservative-Christian-macho continuum, much worse. The archetype of the opinionated soul sista may be a bit overdone, but Tumi's home-grown observations added a bit of spice to the mix. Her reflections on her marriage to a Ghanaian man were particularly tasty: "When I was pregnant I had to harbour a fugitive for nine months. And both times I had a caesarean section. Trust a foreigner to cut through the fence." It could only happen here.

She ended daring every man present to challenge her belief that white Afrikaans males are the ultimate men: "They can wear the tightest rugby shorts - it's practically hot pants - and not look gay. And you know how big they are? If they had to look down at me and say hey, I would just say 'ja baas okay baas ...' " and promptly threw in the 'K' word for extra measure.

Kurt Schoonraad as Minister of Flats, Boxed Wine and Wind

The battle of the sexes continued with the blue-eyed boy of Cape Flats comedy, although the Mitchell's Plain native and apparent heir to Barry Hilton's throne as Poet Laureate, was in an altogether more lavatorial mood.

Recalling a pre-1994 Patricia de Lille in dreads, Kurt quipped: "Full of kak in the PAC." And went on to complain about his wife's current attempt at being healthy: "When she says she's on a diet, that means I'm also on a diet." And how he gets heartburn and wishes that most pies came with a Rennie's tablet as standard, already inside.

He concluded to observe that all gyms smell like unwashed ass, Nik Naks and chlorine originating from the pool. And the dudes who visit them wear speedos so tight that you experience the sight of a moose knuckle - the male version of a camel toe; and that he would like the coloured folks, who visit Virgin Active in Mitchell's Plain, to realise that shower caps aren't meant for use in swimming pools.

Ag sies Kurt.

Marc Lottering as Minister of Interior Design

Having a go at the recent Olympics, Marc, a past master at class and colour juxtaposition, transported the dead-tired old Queen (pun very much intended) from Balmoral to Belgravia: "Oh, jirre, we just had the Jubilee."

Showing his age a bit, he reflected on the ridiculousness of acronyms like LOL and OMG. "Rolling on my back laughing whilst typing, how's that even possible?!"; and proposed a "gam's" take on the controversial bestseller 50 shades of grey that leaves the original looking tame by comparison.

Mark Banks as Minister of Environment, Bungalows, Pest Control and Barcodes

Juggling a raft of portfolios comes naturally to Mr Banks. His savvy scattergun style had him rip through several audience members, subjects and anecdotes. He doesn't always get big laughs, but oddball demeanour and eerie sense of the absurd makes him the connoisseur's choice.

He confessed that the lovely dark coat he was sporting is stolen goods, complained that performing after the interval sucks, and introduced Muslim tinted windows - "it comes with a clear strip in the middle".

A one-liner like that may look corny on paper, but Mark delivered it with all the timing and trickery worthy of Shane Warne.

Ending with a hilarious proposal for a Cape Town-based soapy, The Bold and The Bonteheuvel, he had the partisan crowd eating out of his hands. It is, after all, a travesty that Joburg is still the only setting for soapy shenanigans. The concept itself is good enough to produce. And the real joke is on the unimaginative bureaucrats at SABC who let life pass them by.

Earlier he announced that tonight would be his last show, and a standing ovation would warm the cockles of his heart. At the end he stood awkwardly mid-stage waiting for everyone to rise. After an enduring 10-second applause the audience remembered his dying request, not knowing whether to take him seriously - hilariously only half got up.

John Vlismas as Minister Who Swears To Tell The Truth

Observed our noticeable lack of expectation when it comes to miracles, recalling recent shark attacks: "A man gets his fucking legs bitten off and the doctor says he's fortunate. That's not fucking fortunate! Saying we swam all day, laid in the sun and went safely back home, that is."

How he doesn't appreciate old people: "I hate old people, they're always going on about how things used to be. Yeah, we created Google, what did you do? I remember being told: [Imitating a granny] 'if you eat seeds a tree will grow in your stomach.' I woke up one day with my first hard-on and thought it was some kind of weird hairy berry tree."

And elaborated on the silliness of race, explaining that Indians never get involved, and how these days' blacks hate blacks. And the experience of seeing really dark-skinned Africans: "When they walk into a room it feels later in the day. Like God gave them all the darkness he took out of albinos, and as babies they were breast-fed on beetroot."

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