

By John Musoke

The glittering lights of Kampala city's social scene converged on Theatre La Bonita for The Ebonies' red carpet premiere of *Vows and Vendettas* "Akabaddi" last Saturday. Helmed by the visionary director Stellan Nantumbwe, the production delivers an explosive, high-stakes melodrama that peels back the glossy veneer of modern Ugandan celebrity weddings to expose the raw, chaotic truths underneath.

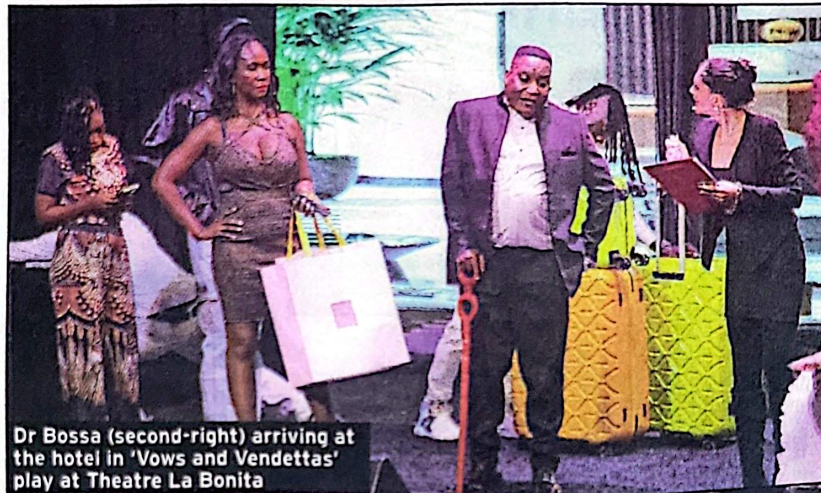
The stage design, with a backdrop reflecting a luxury Kampala hotel, is a visual triumph. It sets a grand stage for what begins as a beautiful celebration of love, but rapidly devolves into a gripping psychological battlefield.

At the heart of the story are Ssebalu (the groom) and Lynette Xen (the bride). In a commendable move, The Ebonies continue their long-standing tradition of nurturing raw Ugandan talent by casting these two first-time stage performers in the lead roles.

Vivian (Xen), already a household name for her work as a presenter on Bukedde TV's *Akayisanyo*, is an absolute revelation in her theatrical debut. Sharing the stage with seasoned actors like Dr Bossa (Sam Baganda) and Fauziah Nakiboneka is no small feat, yet Xen commands the spotlight with a performance that is both fiercely glamorous and deeply vulnerable.

Beside her, Ssebalu delivers a grounded, emotionally

THE EBONIES UNVEIL EXPLOSIVE WEDDING DRAMA



Dr Bossa (second-right) arriving at the hotel in 'Vows and Vendettas' play at Theatre La Bonita



Ssebalu (left) and Dr Gordon perform during the 'Vows and Vendettas' play

resonant performance as a man caught between the woman he loves and the shattering truth of who she might actually be.

What elevates *Vows and Vendettas* is its layered thematic depth. The play masterfully dissects three core societal realities.

Gender and accountability: In traditional Ugandan theatre, it is often the man who brings chaos to the altar through infidelity or deceit. Nantumbwe flips the script. Here, it is the bride who carries a devastating secret.

The play forces the audience to grapple with uncomfortable questions: How does a man

process betrayal when he is expected to be the pillar of strength? What does forgiveness look like when the

matriarchal expectations of grace are reversed?

The clash of class and culture: The production

brilliantly juxtaposes the two families forced to share a hotel for 48 hours. The bride's family is status-obsessed, while the groom's is a modest one. The resulting clash is incredibly funny, agonisingly painful and instantly recognisable to anyone who has witnessed a traditional wedding ceremony.

The panopticon of social media: In an era where lives are lived for the "likes," the play integrates technology into the plot. The characters do not just hide secrets from each other; they hide them from 3000 Instagram followers.

The highlight of the play occurs with the uninvited arrival of Mark, an old friend and ex-lover of Vivian, played with menacing charisma by Dr Gordon. In a tragic twist of dramatic irony, a clueless Ssebalu is so overjoyed to see his old friend that he asks him to step in as his best man.

What follows is an unforgettable sequence where past sins collide with present-day actions. As old secrets leak onto social media in real time, digital screens broadcast incriminating evidence of Dr Gordon and the bride having "a good time" in the past. The illusion of the perfect celebrity wedding is shattered into irreparable pieces right before the audience's eyes.

Xen playing her role