



CAPTIVATING: the intense energy of a performer from the Eastern Cape is palpable

Cultural festival lifts spirit of offenders

By Estelle Coetzee

About 700 offenders from across the country descended upon the Olive Convention Centre in Durban for two days of vibrant song and dance in celebration of Heritage Month.

The offenders, amidst seamless security managed by DCS officials, demonstrated that they are not defined by their incarceration, but they are defined by their rich, diverse South African cultures.

Acting National Commissioner Ms Jolingana said, on 03 October, the second day of the festival, "We in DCS know that music builds character. By bringing these music groups here, we want to hear South Africans saying that they are ready to support such efforts and that they are ready to buy their CDs."



WE ARE GRINDING THE FLOUR: a youth offender from Durban-Westville Correctional Centre enjoys her moment on stage

Each performance session was led by poets who recited their poems in their home language, followed by either gospel renditions or classic ethnic moves ranging from the forceful, energetic displays by male dancers lifting their legs high to



JESUS IS COMING TODAY: an East London chorister belts it out.

stomp the ground, to the almost shy and modest 'Nama-stap'.

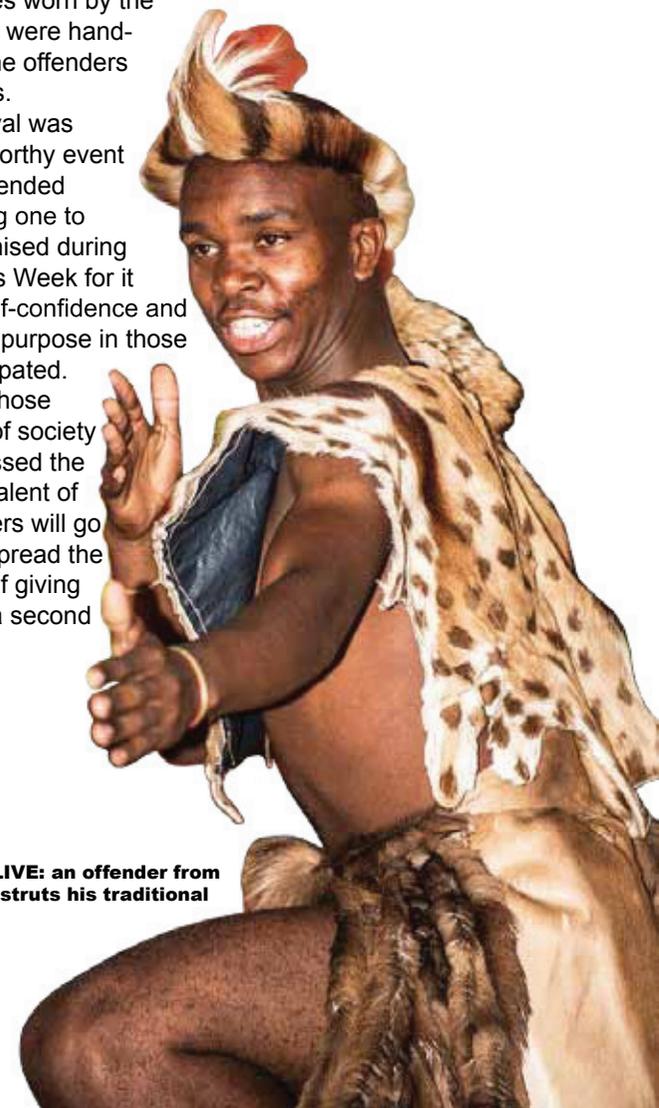
Seated in separate groups below large banners representing each region, the offenders' singing would reverberate through the hall when one of their own groups ascended the stage to perform, all the while edging them on to outdo the previous performers.

Sometimes the spirit would spill over onto the audience who would sway and ululate in unison with the choirs or dancers. At one point the master of ceremonies, DJ at Ukhozi FM, Ngizwe Mchunu got so excited that he joined a group from KwaZulu-Natal performing the Ukugida.

The choreography of some groups also drew the admiration of the audience with a number of them wondering how long the groups practised their routine and commenting on the dedication that was evident from both offenders and officials.

Ms Jolingana informed the audience that many of the attires worn by the performers were hand-made by the offenders themselves.

The festival was indeed a worthy event to have attended and a fitting one to have organised during Corrections Week for it instilled self-confidence and a sense of purpose in those who participated. Hopefully those members of society who witnessed the skills and talent of the offenders will go forth and spread the message of giving offenders a second chance.



CATCH ME LIVE: an offender from LMN region struts his traditional steps



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