

Absorbing docudrama deftly portrays apartheid era

By Kam Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Although Apartheid has long since fallen in South Africa, Johannesburg remains the home to some of the worst slums in the world. While the spirit of many shanty town dwellers might have been crushed by all the crime and absence of opportunity in the regions gritty ghettos, there's an optimistic group of blue-collar workers who have come to devote their Saturday nights to wearing their Sunday best.

These proud Zulu men refer to themselves as "The Swenkas." They stage beauty pageants in which they dance in flamboyant designer outfits in order to win the weekly grand prize. I must admit to



"The Swenkas" presents a sometimes pretty, sometimes gritty slice of South African life.

feeling more than a little uncomfortable watching this film in spots, because it doesn't paint a pretty post-colonial picture.

For instance, consider the scene where these deferential Africans are shown smiling and swaying in order to curry the favor of a White judge. This is reminiscent of how African-Americans here still straighten and dye their hair, ostensibly, for approval and acceptance from the descendants of slave owners, generations after their ancestors' emancipation.

Overall, "The Swenkas" is a super-realistic docudrama which walks a very, very fine line between fact and fiction.

Despite the debatable political perspective of the devotees of this unusual pastime, the movie is absorbing because of the obvious earnestness of the contestants, each of whom exhibits an endearing innocence not to be found in this relatively cynical culture. Whoever thought that independence would lead to former freedom fighters grinning from ear-to-ear while doing a Foxtrot in Pierre Cardin suits?

Liberation, Swenka style. Excellent (3.5 stars)

Tyra Banks day as obese lady painful

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Tyra Banks has gone undercover as a 350-pound woman. Banks wore the fat suit to experience what it's like to be obese.

"It seemed like the last form of open discrimination that's OK, and I decided to put on a 350-pound suit myself and live that life for a day and see what happens," the 31-year-old former supermodel told AP Radio in a recent interview.

"And it was one of the most heartbreaking days of my life."

Banks said she was shocked at the reaction.

"I started walking down the street and within 10 seconds, a trio of people looked at me, snickered, looked me right in my eye and started pointing and laughing in my face," the talk-show host said. "And I had no idea it was that blatant."

The segment will air Monday on "The Tyra Banks Show."



Tyra Banks as her alter ego.

Banks, who had a sonogram on her show in September to prove that her breasts are real, is also planning a Nov. 18 segment on pursuing "a beautiful booty."

She will reveal her own "dimpled butt" and receive non-surgical treatment on the set.

Jackson

(Continued from Page 8) the progress."

Meredith O'Sullivan, a spokeswoman for rapper Snoop Dogg, and Sonia Muckle, who represents singer R. Kelly, said those artists have participated in the recording sessions.

Jackson is the writer and producer of the track, Bain said. She added that Jackson has rewritten the song several times and is changing the title from the original, "From the Bottom of My Heart," to a new, undisclosed title. Jackson found he did not need as many artists to participate as originally planned, she said. The final tally will be about 12, she said.

Jackson's plan is to provide disaster aid through three funds: the Bill Clinton-George Bush Katrina Fund, the Push-Excel Hurricane Katrina College Relief Fund and a disaster fund set up by the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences.

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