

# Arts&Leisure On the Stage

MARY JORDAN

**T**HRILLER LIVE, at The Teatro at Montecasino until September 5, does exactly what the billboards promise. It is a concert spectacular, celebrating the greatest entertainer of all time, and featuring the songs of Michael Jackson and the Jackson Five.

But Adrian Grant, original creator, co-producer, executive director and Jackson's personal friend, has delivered a whole lot more than that. First combining the immediacy of video footage on huge screens, with giant figures in silhouette bopping to the beat on enormous lighting panels

that stretch from roof to stage, and introducing a swirling array of lasers that shoot out into the auditorium, his tribute show is all about rhythm in dance, music and song.

Yet Grant has infused the brashness and immediacy of the special effects with a sense of transience, indicating that while Jackson was a visionary who saw that technological advance was unstoppable, he was also a sensitive artist with beautiful ideas, who saw our differences as cosmetic, who saw his history as a search for the self hidden behind the mask, and who knew fear.

It is a privilege for loca' fans to watch overseas performer. in their startlingly innovative areas of expertise. This production, brought to us by Hazel and Tony Feldman, comes directly from London's West End. Jordan Bratton plays the 11-year old Jackson with his piercing

lead vocals. His brothers, who provide the precision harmonies in I Want You Back, The Love You Save and I'll Be There, then take turns in the role. They track his development from Jackson Five member to solo star until, in collaboration with the legendary Quincy Jones, he arrives at his own clarity in Billie Jean, Man in the Mirror, Dirty Diana and Thriller.

Here is the floating moonwalk, Jackson's zoot suit and one-gloved hand, intricate choreographic patterns and inspired dance sequences, and the sound that confirmed the centrality of black music in the 1980s.

## TAMMY BALLANTYNE

**J**OBURG dance audiences have been served up a few versions of the famous ballet, Carmen, in the past year — Dada Masilo's mindblowing take on the

fiery gypsy temptress debuted in Grahamstown, and Mzansi Productions jumped on the World Cup bandwagon, transferring the ballet to modern-day Joburg with a soccer theme.

South African Ballet Theatre (SABT) has brought Veronica Paeper's CARMEN - THE BALLET to the Joburg Theatre until August 29. SABT has been under siege and threat of closure unless sufficient funds were found to keep it going — patrons and companies have rallied round and, this season, SABT has received sponsorship from the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund and the National Arts Council.

It is a brave effort and the production is above par but the cracks are showing, with a reliance on imported male guest artists to swell the ranks and take on the principal roles. Adam Thurlow (previously Australian Ballet) is a

tame, pliable Don Jose, who simply cannot resist the rough Carmen, danced to perfection by a sassy and rude Burnise Silvius.

It's great to see Robin van Wyk again (on loan from Cape Town City Ballet) in the role of Escamillo, and Jacob Mosetha makes the Madam of the cigarette factory his own. The girls from the cigarette factory are suitably bawdy and tough, while Thabani Ntuli provides a lovely spark, particularly in the final act.

Paeper's choreography and staging is smooth and picturesque. Chase Bosch's choreography of the Spanish dance is atmospheric and eye-catchingly lit and performed. It's a privilege to enjoy the gorgeous score performed by the SABT Sinfonia conducted by Timothy Roberts. Costumes (originally by Peter Cazalet) are vivid and colourful, while the set comes up rather drab and sparse.

