

Modern Pied Piper fascinates wide-eyed squatter children

LIKE a modern day Pied Piper, a singing man in a mock Roman helmet ran through the Cato Crest squatter settlement outside Durban trailing hundreds of tiny children behind him.

It was an unusual scene — a white man with over-size foam hands imploring dubious shack dwellers to follow him up to a hill overlooking the settlement.

For the squatters, who had probably never experienced theatre before, the sight of Canadian director, Thomas Riccio, four ex-Kwasa students and a Danish percussionist was understandably a little bewildering.

The group form part of the Hlanganane Project — Napac's response to the needs of Natal's rural and township population where by theatre is made more accessible to the community.

The 50-minute play, a

By MEGAN POWER

traditional Zulu folk tale called Makhanda Mahlanu, espousing democracy, understanding and tolerance, relies mainly on public sponsorship.

It has so far been performed at Taylor's Halt, Tugela Ferry, Ladysmith and Harding.

Last week's performance at Cato Crest was at the request of an anonymous woman who paid R400 on condition the play was staged in the poverty-stricken settlement.

She couldn't have asked for a more appreciative audience.

Wide-eyed children, as young as two and three, watched the performance in rapturous delight while grey-haired men and old toothless women chuckled



COMMUNITY THEATRE . . . fascinated squatters surround cast members of Makhanda Mahlanu — an adaptation of a Zulu folk tale espousing democracy and tolerance
Picture: M S ROY

alongside their families.

The story which captured the attention of the audience for over an hour

was about an autocratic five-headed snake's search for the perfect wife.

The fearful snake — which sent screaming youngsters fleeing into nearby bushes — finds a bride in the human kingdom but she is unwilling to marry.

The bride's father decides to stand up to the snake king and he and his daughter plot to kill him.

As with all ancient folk

tales, the play has a happy ending — a human being emerges from the dead snake promising to be a good person in the future.

The group used minimal sets and props and no technology.

Mime, magic, percussion, music, humour and audience participation were the tools used instead.

Thomas, 38, a visiting director who studies indigenous theatre at the

University of Alaska, has worked with several indigenous groups across the world, including the Eskimos.

"The secret of this kind of theatre is that it's informal and interactive.

"So we try to be interactive with the Zulu culture in a contemporary form," said Thomas.

The tour will run until Friday. Organisations and companies interested in purchasing a performance can contact Jolah Mkame at Napac ☎ (031) 304-3631.

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