

FEATURES

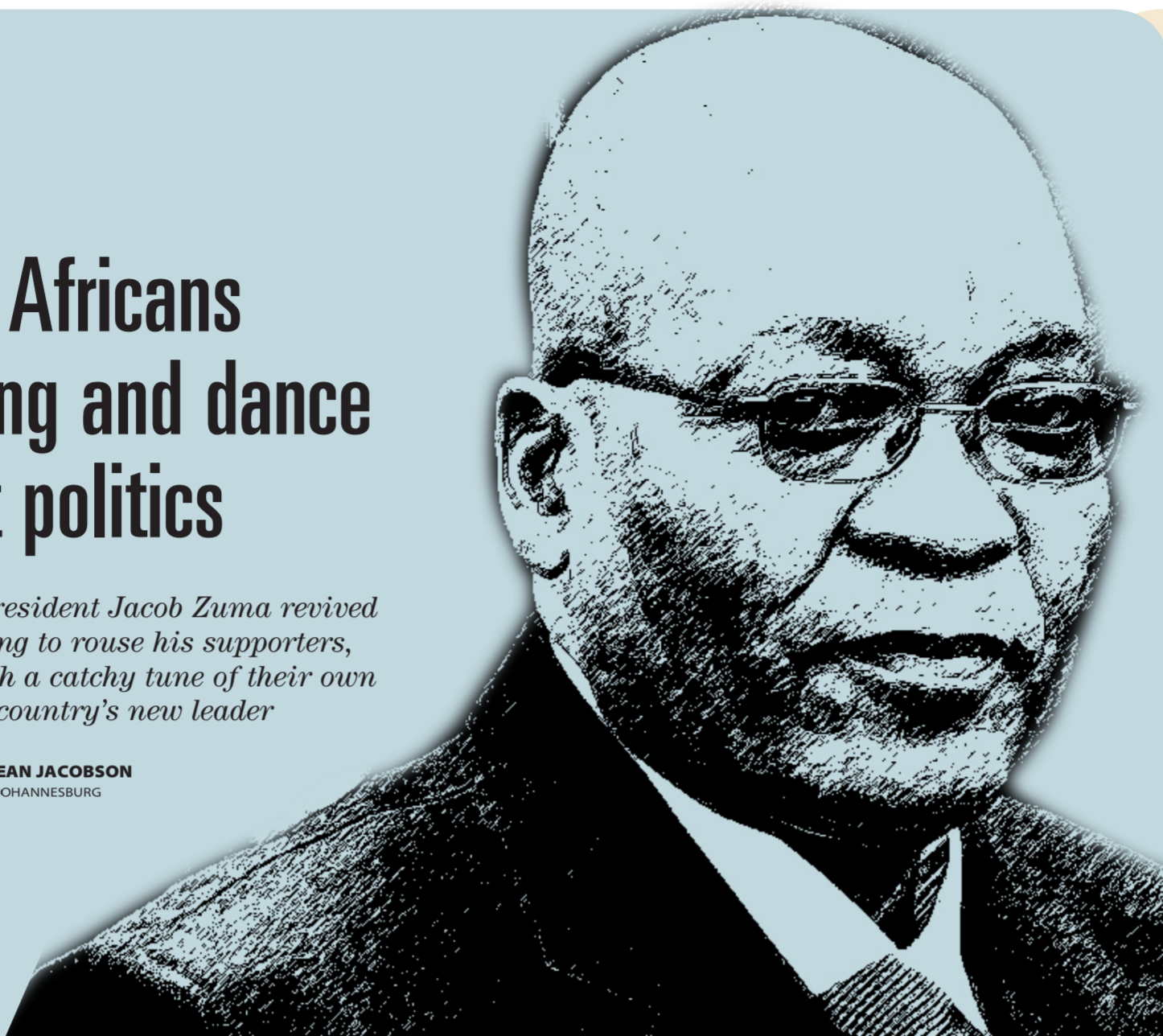
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South Africans make a song and dance about politics

While South African President Jacob Zuma revived an anti-apartheid song to rouse his supporters, his rivals came up with a catchy tune of their own to ridicule the country's new leader

BY CELEAN JACOBSON
AP, JOHANNESBURG



South Africa's president rarely misses an opportunity to entertain supporters with a rousing, hip-swinging rendition of the anti-apartheid song *Bring Me My Machine Gun*. Not to be outdone, Jacob Zuma's rivals have come up with a catchy tune of their own. They've taken to singing that their party "has no machine guns." It also doesn't have any "showers," they chant, dangling their fingers over their heads to suggest running water. They're ridiculing Zuma, who in 2006 said he showered after having unprotected sex with an HIV-positive woman because he believed it would reduce the risk of being infected with the AIDS virus. South Africa's political scene has long been a raucous, musical affair but the tempo's been stepped up a beat with this month's elections.



South Africans sing and dance ahead of the inauguration of their country's president-elect Jacob Zuma on Saturday. PHOTO: AP

Old freedom songs that evoke the struggle against apartheid have been revived and newer ones have been composed to reflect the political battles of the day. The anti-Zuma song sprung up among members of a party that broke away from Zuma's African National Congress last year. "People are so creative," said Siphosiphiso Jantjie, who was among those voicing their support for the new breakaway Congress of the People (COPE) party at a recent rally in Soweto. "They are composing songs all the time." Songs long have been a powerful weapon of resistance in South Africa. During apartheid when

leaders were jailed and their voices silenced, songs became a rallying cry. They were sung at trials and on the way to the gallows. At mass funerals, thousands hummed mournful hymns as coffins were lowered into the ground. From across the borders came songs of exile and armed struggle. But as South Africa's past grows more distant, there was a fear that the songs were fading into the background. Zuma put the song and dance back into local politics with *Umshini Wami*, or *Bring Me My Machine Gun* — his call for that worldwide symbol of revolution — the AK47. The stirring Zulu song with its strong, soulful rhythm has become a national hit. It is heard in taxis, taverns and is sung by church choirs. It is even available as a cellphone ringtone.

Villagers in the Zulu heartland sang it outside the school where Zuma voted on April 22 and the song rang out at an ANC victory party in downtown Johannesburg a few days later. Still, critics say in a country with South Africa's violent past and where at least 50 people a day are murdered, the song is divisive and inciting. Strains of the song could be heard during the bloody anti-immigrant riots that swept South Africa last year. "The song recalls an earlier and more dangerous way of being," says Liz Gunner, research associate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research. In a paper published last year, Gunner traces the "life" of the song and its role in Zuma's rise to prominence.

The song has its roots among the ANC military training camps where frustrated guerrillas wished for weapons so they could return to fight apartheid. It was also sung by the students in the famous Soweto 1976 uprising, which drew world attention to the apartheid regime's violence and injected new life into the struggle to topple it. The brutality of the police response to the unarmed students sparked nationwide rioting in which more than 500 youths are estimated to have been killed. Thousands of others were maimed, disappeared into detention or fled the country to join the guerrilla fight. Like many "freedom songs," the authorship of *Bring Me My Machine Gun* is not clear and it has been adapted over the years.



Traditional dancers perform on Saturday before the inauguration of Jacob Zuma as president of South Africa. PHOTO: REUTERS

Today it has become the anthem of the poor who favor Zuma over his predecessor, Thabo Mbeki — who preferred quoting Yeats to singing and dancing. Zuma began singing the song about five years ago amid claims by him and his supporters that criminal charges against him were part of a conspiracy by Mbeki to thwart his ambitions. The claims and a bitter power struggle between Zuma and Mbeki for leadership of the party left many South Africans nervous about the future of their new democracy. Mbeki was eventually ousted by the ANC as president last year and Zuma was inaugurated on Saturday. Coming at a time of "national confusion and anxiety," Zuma's choice of song was "superbly timed," Gunner writes.

"The icon of the heroic guerrilla fighter was melded with that of the beleaguered senior politician," she says in her paper. But Zuma rivals are determined not to have their voices drowned out by his deep baritone. Sung in Sotho, one of the most widely spoken languages in the country, the "shower song" first captured attention at the breakaway party's launch in December last year. And it has caught on fast. At COPE's Soweto rally in February, a crowd of a few thousand sang the easy melody, repeatedly, each time with more gusto. "Today we are reviving the spirit you used to get in 1976," said Lloyd Phillips. "We are reviving the spirit of the songs."

[THE WEEKENDER]

Operatic tour de force

This month's opera smorgasbord continues with the NCCU 9th On-Site Artist Event, which opens on Thursday

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

The second program of the 2009 Taiwan Kun Opera Theatre All Stars (蘭谷名華2009崑劇名家匯演), performed on Friday, was a heartening example of the solidly professional productions of *kun* opera, or *kunqu* (崑曲), that are now available in Taipei. Comprising famous scenes from various operas, the show was designed to parade the talents of three performers from the Shanghai Kun Opera Troupe (上海崑劇團) who have become regular visitors to the capital, as well as members of a supporting cast drawn from the Taiwan Kunqu Opera Theatre (台灣崑劇團).

There were no bells and whistles, but the recital compared well with the higher profile Beijing opera program *Ghostly Stunts* (鬼·魂) performed at the beginning of the month, which was also designed specifically to showcase the skills of both visiting and local performers. A stripped down stage and the conventional "table and two chairs" setting was a sparse affair that focused attention on the artists.

The show opened with Taiwan's Liu Hsi-rung (劉稀榮) displaying his talents, which were more than proficient, as a drunken servant in a scene from *The Red Pear* (紅梨記). This was followed by guest star Liang Guying (梁谷音), who earned massive applause for her performance of the character Yin Guiying (殷桂英) bidding farewell to the sun before committing suicide after being jilted by her lover. The scene from *The Story of Burning Incense* (焚香記) is a set piece famously used to show off an actress' command of personifying despair. Liang proved she is very much at the height of her power as a performer. The two other guest stars also showed their worth, with Ji Zhenhua (計鎮華) putting on a magnificent show in the *lao sheng* (老生) role in the "beating scene" (打子) from *The Embroidered Jacket* (繡襦記), and Zhang Mingrong (張銘榮) in a comic sequence from *Pavilion of the Colored Clouds* (雲翠亭), was effortlessly proficient in this somewhat laborious finale to the program.

2009 Taiwan Kun Opera Theatre All Stars and *Ghostly Stunts* combined to create a tour de force in the presentation of fundamental physical and vocal skills for Beijing and *kun* opera. This is being followed up later this week with the NCCU 9th On-Site Artist Event (國立政治大學第九屆駐校藝術家), organized by the National Cheng Chi University (國立政治大學), which opens on Thursday with a panel discussion featuring Kenneth Pai (白先勇), novelist and producer of a young person's version of the *The Jade Hairpin* (玉簪記), opens in Taipei on May 21) that has already been met with huge success touring in China, and *gezai* opera (歌仔戲) legend Liao Chiung-chih (廖瓊枝). Liang Guying (梁谷音) will also be participating by giving a talk on the aesthetics of *kun* opera in relation to *The Western Chamber* (西廂記) on Saturday.

The On-Site Artist event aims to juxtapose *kun* opera with Taiwan's own *gezai* opera tradition, and will feature productions by the Suzhou Kun Opera Company (蘇州崑劇院) from China and a number of well-known local *gezai* opera troupes. Detailed information about the event can be found at the university's Web site at artist.nccu.edu.tw/98OSAE.htm.



Liang Guying bids farewell to the sun in *The Story of Burning Incense*. PHOTO COURTESY OF TAIWAN KUNQU OPERA THEATRE

PLANET POP

The soulful singer **Janiva Magness** won entertainer of the year at the 2009 Blues Music Awards in Memphis. The Michigan native also won best contemporary female artist at Thursday's show.

Buddy Guy won three awards: contemporary blues album, contemporary male artist and album of the year for *Skin Deep*. Blues legend **B.B. King** took home two honors: traditional male artist and best



traditional blues album for *One Kind Favor*. **Eden Brent** won acoustic artist of the year and best acoustic album for *Mississippi Number One*. **Kenny Neal** won song of the year for *Let Life Flow*.

Actress **Mia Farrow**, ailing after almost two weeks on a hunger strike, announced on Friday that British billionaire **Richard Branson** would take over her protest in solidarity with people in Sudan's Darfur region. A spokesman for Farrow said her health had deteriorated in the past few days and her doctor requested that she end the liquids-only fast she began 12 days ago to protest at Khartoum's expulsion of more than a dozen aid agencies from Darfur.

Perhaps she could take a lesson from British actor **Christian Bale**, whose powers of persuasion are legendary. He forced a rewrite of upcoming action movie *Terminator Salvation*, because his star had

Mia Farrow has passed on the protest baton to Richard Branson. PHOTO: AP

grown too big for the small role of John Connor he chose, the filmmakers said on Friday. Director **McG**, whose real name is Joseph McGinty Nichol, said he had the disconcerting experience of going to England to convince Bale to play central character Marcus Wright in the man versus machines film, only to have Bale tell the director he wanted to play Connor instead. Fugitive film director **Roman Polanski** failed to persuade a Los Angeles judge on Thursday to formally reject an attempt to have a 1978 sex case against him dismissed because of misconduct by prosecutors. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Peter Espinoza said he could not consider the case unless Polanski, who fled the US for France after pleading guilty to rape, showed up in his court.

A civil jury says **Snoop Dogg** didn't hit a man who came up on stage during a 2005 concert near Seattle. The rapper wasn't in court Friday when the jury's verdict cleared him of civil assault and



Mickey Carroll, one of the diminutive Munchkins in the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*, died of natural causes on Thursday. PHOTO: REUTERS

battery claims. The jury did find that Richard Monroe Jr suffered serious injuries during the concert and awarded him US\$449,400 in damages to be paid by a record label, another performer and others involved in the concert. The damages awarded were substantially lower than the US\$22 million Monroe sought when he sued the rapper in 2006.

Jurors found that Snoop Dogg, whose real name is Calvin Broadus, doesn't personally owe Monroe anything.

During two weeks of testimony, jurors were repeatedly shown a video of a melee that Monroe said left him unconscious, badly bruised and nearly naked.

Monroe's attorney, Brian Watkins, said jurors did believe his client's contention that Snoop Dogg's people were involved in a savage beating.

"We're very pleased that the jury found that this incident was not something to be taken lightly," Watkins said.

Responsibility for paying the judgment falls on Doggstyle Records, which Snoop Dogg founded; rapper **Soopafly**, whose real name is Priest Brooks; and other unnamed parties. While Snoop Dogg was not present for the verdict, he attended part of the trial and testified, denying that he struck Monroe.

Monroe's attorneys contended that Snoop Dogg hit their client with a microphone during the scuffle. But a video shown during

the trial didn't show Snoop Dogg striking Monroe and the performer said he left the stage before the fight was over.

Actor **Ryan O'Neal** has told *People* magazine that his companion **Farrar Fawcett**, who has battled cancer for nearly three years, is now bed-ridden, bereft of her famous blonde hair and near the end of medical treatment. "She stays in bed now. The doctors see that she is comfortable. Farrar is on IVs, but some of that is for nourishment. The treatment has pretty much ended," O'Neal told *People* in an interview on the magazine's Web site on Thursday.

Mickey Carroll, one of the last surviving diminutive Munchkins in the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*, died of natural causes on Thursday in Missouri at age 89, a newspaper reported. Carroll, who stopped growing at a young age, was an entertainer early in life and befriended actress **Judy Garland**, leading to a role alongside her in classic *The Wizard of Oz*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported. —AGENCIES