

Edutainment with a lot of soul

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VERY few TV shows have been as successful as the social commentary programme *Soul City*, which returns to our screens for an incredible 11th season. While the writing is skilful and the acting unmatched, the reason this series is a success is that it raises issues we would rather not talk about.

At first it seemed the show only focused on HIV, but the truth is as we have progressed through the show's many seasons, its themes have evolved to include other subjects.

Take, for example, the role Leleti Khumalo plays in this season, where her character Grace is a woman who fails to live within her means. She has just been retrenched and has to flee with her daughter to another city to avoid her unpaid debts.

"Grace is a woman who is in her mid-forties with a teenage child she is single-handedly looking after," said Khumalo about her role.

She said the character's main flaw was spending money on things she could not afford and how that then put her in a tight squeeze with those to whom she owed money.

"She goes all out to look beautiful. Sometimes the spending habits are so severe she and her daughter go to bed without anything to eat," said Khumalo.

As you will see, the ageless Khumalo looks really beautiful in her role as she portrays the smartly

dressed Grace.

"She is in denial and I do not think she is doing all this for a man. She is not even interested in her ex, the man who fathered her child, as he has moved on, too," explained Khumalo.

For her, playing the character was not a hard thing to do as she had many references from which to draw inspiration.

"There are a lot of women like this in our society. If you are honest with yourself and look around, there are people you know, even those who are close to you, who live a Grace kind of lifestyle. So for me it wasn't hard to find people to draw this character's energy from," Khumalo said.

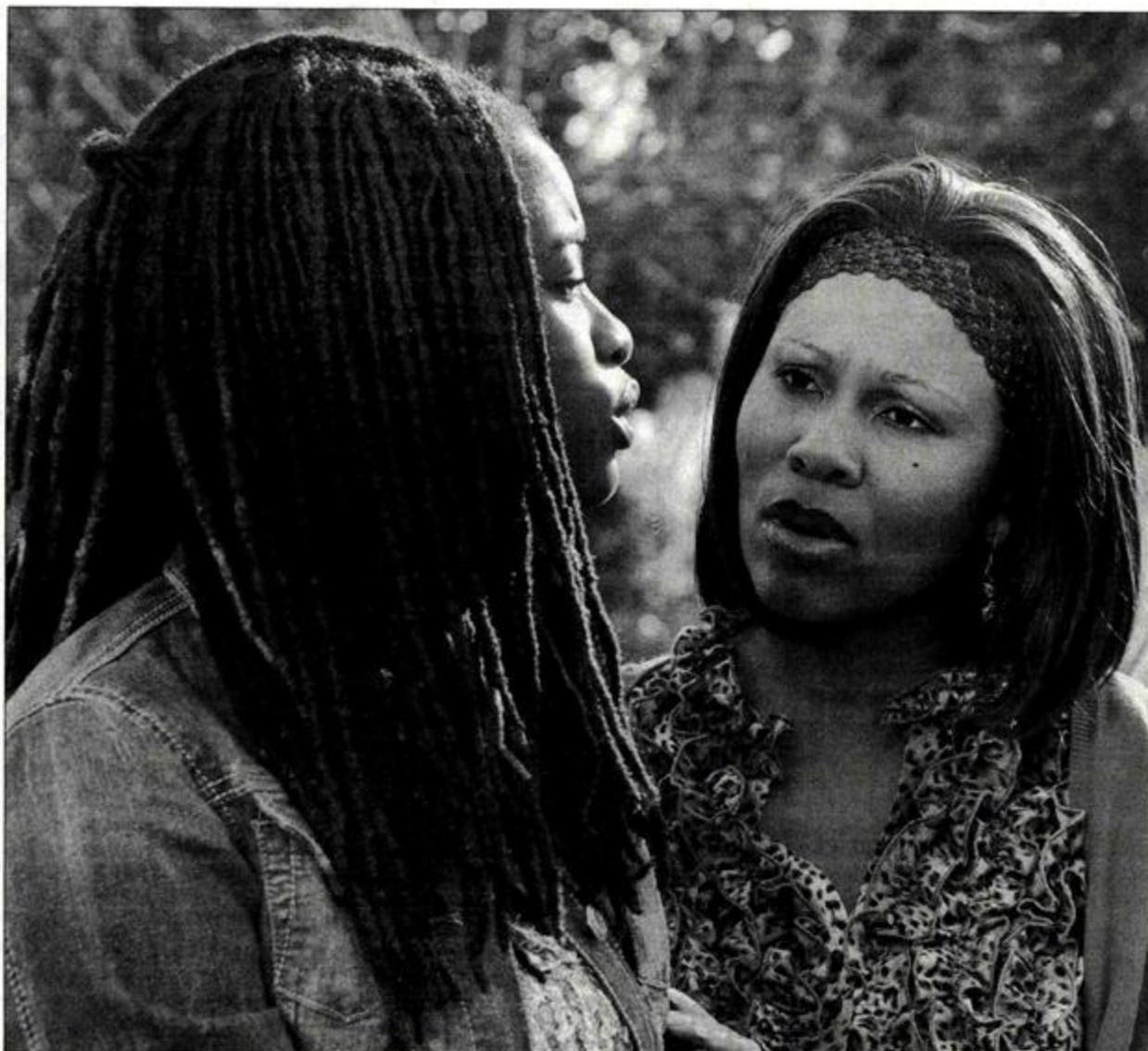
She went on to explain that she was drawn to the role because of the message the story told.

"Most of my roles have had messages behind them, and this was no exception. I feel this role will help people learn how to live within their means. We all may have had a situation like Grace's, so we can relate.

"Growing up in the townships I realised that as black people we were concerned about keeping up appearances at the expense of our needs. Behind closed doors in most homes people are struggling, yet out here they show different lifestyles.

"We need to change that kind of thinking," she said.

● *Soul City* premieres tomorrow at 8.30pm on SABC1.



HEART TO HEART: Grace (Leleti Khumalo) and Nkosazana (Samukelo Ndlovu) in *Soul City*.