

Regulars

ALL-STAR SHEBEEN BAND Fridays at 9, Madiba, 195 Dekalb Avenue, Brooklyn, 718-855-9190

745 Fifth Avenue, 750-7070. (Aletti)

LAURENT MILLET Like Zeke Berman, this French photographer fabricates and documents charmingly crude trompe l'oeil constructions, only in Millet's case the results are almost always sculptures masquerading as shelters. In half of the works, these fragile illusions of habitation, made from twigs and set on a deserted beach, have been photographed in black and white and presented as unframed diptychs and triptychs. Millet introduces color in the second series here, of even more ephemeral dwellings—also sited in sand and shallow water—that involve painted cardboard, shaped wire, found objects, and drawing in space. With their fine balance of simplicity and sophistication, Millet's photos must be seen to be believed. **THROUGH OCTOBER 26**, Robert Mann Gallery, 210 Eleventh Avenue, at 24th Street, 989-7600. (Aletti)

THEATER

'AMOUR' The hero of this new musical can walk through walls, which may be why its early previews were troubled by recalcitrant scenery. But director James Lapine's famous visual sense should have matters straightened out by now, so maybe we can hope that the authors of this Paris success, which features music by Michel Legrand, have captured some of the perky, sardonic humor in its source, Marcel Aymé's famous short story "Le Passe-Muraille." Lapine has at any rate captured a cast full of appealing actors, headed by Malcolm Gets and Melissa Errico, with John Cunningham, Christopher Fitzgerald, Norm Lewis, and Nora Mae Lyng among their more notable supporters. **IN PREVIEWS, OPENS SUNDAY**, Music Box Theatre, Broadway and 45th Street, 239-6200. (Feingold)

'DEBBIE DOES DALLAS' Strange things happen at the Fringe Festival. Sometimes, when discovered there by ambitious producers, strange things prove profitable. The Araca Group, which brought the commendable *Urinetown* uptown, is trying again with this stage version of a film that used to be famous—for qualities which you probably shouldn't expect to find in the stage version. What you will find, we're in no position to say, except that Broadway demi-diva Sherie Rene Scott will be in the cast. We suspect she won't do much singing in this one. Just to be safe, you'd better leave the kids at home—they need the time to read Dan Savage undisturbed. **IN PREVIEWS, OPENS OCTOBER 29**, Jane Street Theater, 113 Jane Street, 239-6200. (Feingold)

'DEVIANTS, ARISE!' Playwright Jack Bump, who's rumored to be either Tom Murrin or Thomas Pynchon, returns with another pleasing episode of Bad Taste Theater. Bump's previ-



SHEBANG! TONY CEDRAS AND HIS ALL-STAR SHEBEEN BAND

It's very late on Friday night at Madiba, and the chef is onstage doing a tribal striptease with the restaurant's house band. "You are a magician," a patron calls out to him. She points to her food, a plebeian plate of bean-rice mash he's somehow transformed into something palatable. As the chef reluctantly dances back to the kitchen to work some more magic, a teamwork-minded waiter has already hit the stage and is getting his own freak on with a gum boot go-go dance.

Madiba, New York's only South African restaurant, is a typical "shebeen" setting, a tavern/shack all puffed up with homespun pride—the walls themselves feature lots of animal prints and photos of Nelson Mandela, but Madiba's pièce de résistance is a chandelier made out of antique Coke bottles, which owner Mark Henegan started collecting when he saw *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

Shebeens sprang up when blacks were restricted from formal economic activity under apartheid. Cuttin' and contrivin' township folks sold home brew in their matchbox homes, and people gathered there to carouse, conduct business, debate politics, or bet on the next day's soccer match. The government quickly outlawed shebeens, too, though they flourished illegally as something like military-state movable feasts—you only brought in what you could pack out during a police raid. Even today, on Fort Greene's gentrified restaurant row, Madiba's fun-house version feels like it's getting away with something. In one way, it is: For three years, the place has been luring in New York's top South African musicians for its scandalously good Friday-night All-Star Shebeen Band.

The heart of the band is accordionist Tony Cedras, the man behind some of the best-known sounds from South Africa—he played those opening parallel chords on "Boy in the Bubble" with Paul Simon on the Graceland tour. The regular group is rounded out by Bakithi Kumalo, the uncannily gifted bassist who also played with Simon; Morris Goldberg, the saxophonist for Rosie O'Donnell's old studio group; and drummer Anton Fig from Letterman's house band. But the place is also the default after-hours jam for any South African group in town, so you never know when Ladysmith Black Mambazo will drop in.

They start around nine, playing folk songs as dignified dinner music. Seated chamber-style in a semicircle, the group strips an old Miriam Makeba tune down to lone voice with tambourine accompaniment; a melodically minded talking drum player strokes out the entire chorus to a carnival song. Cedras trades off on banjo and guitar, but it's his accordion that really defines the anthemic Cape Town sound; he masterfully reproduces the singing voices of South African chorales with his sustained chords. Throughout the night, rhythms become more insistent, and the kitchen and wait staff start making bird-whistles while they work. They gradually upgrade their participation to full-out dancing and drumming, and by midnight the chef himself is popping out of the kitchen for his saucy sideshow.

Henegan, who will sometimes drag shy diners onstage, is possessed by an almost scary commitment to celebrating South African culture. When the South African band Bongo Maffin came through town for an S.O.B.'s gig last month, the group stopped by and made a hostel out of Madiba's bed and breakfast. Bongo Maffin didn't have enough money to repair the starter in its bus engine, so the driver kept it running continuously for three days while he and Henegan tag-teamed on gas runs at critical moments. "It was totally worth it," Henegan said. "With all those musicians stuck here, Madiba's house band was really, really, exceptionally good that week." —MICHELLE MERCER

theater performer before *Batman* made him a television sight gag, not to overstay his welcome onstage. And if he should flub a line, he'll

in exile. His poetry reading promises to span, like all of his writing, the personal and the political. **SATURDAY AT 4**, Dia Center for the Arts, 548