

'Hola, welcome to the cradle of humankind'

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Thousands of children in animal costumes brought the Newlands turf alive with the sights and sounds of Africa during a spectacular dress rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the 2003 Cricket World Cup.

The Cape Times had the first glimpse on Wednesday night of what the opening ceremony will look like to the estimated 1,4 billion television viewers and 25 000 spectators expected to watch next Saturday's star-spangled extravaganza.

The shrill sounds of the African bush mix with sweet marimba notes as herds of prancing "springbok, zebra and baboons" set the stadium ablaze with colour in the opening safari-themed scene.

Four large watering holes magically appear on the covered pitch and giraffes stretch their necks to sip from the pools. Remote-controlled guinea pigs, with little ones in tow, scatter as crouching San hunters search for game.

'Hola, friends. Welcome to the southern tip of Africa' Africa's Big Five - lion, rhino, elephant, leopard and buffalo - enter majestically on stilts before master of ceremonies Marc Lottering, hunting rifle in hand, rides into the bush scene on a zebra-striped cart from which he points out the continent's wildlife wonders to a small group of tourists.

He greets them with the words: "Hola, friends. Welcome to the southern tip of Africa, the cradle of humankind, the economic powerhouse of the continent. Le amogetswe mo Afrika Borwa. I'm your official guide. Join me on a jol through the sights and sounds of South Africa. Come on."

The Newlands crowd and television viewers will then be taken through six lavish scenes, the first a safari landscape that is the setting for a mass display of traditional dance styles directed by Mbongeni Ngema of Sarafina fame.

The colourful Unity scene will feature rank upon rank of performers lining up to form a beaded African necklace.

This will be followed by Richard Loring - better known as Mr African Footprint - directing the tourists on a shebeen crawl that will feature a high-energy tribute to contemporary African sound and movement.

'Africa has had to beg, borrow and steal' magic from all over the country The Sea scene, directed by classical ballet choreographer Veronica Paeper, pays homage to the fragile nature of our marine and coastal reserves.

The fifth scene, Technology, is directed by Emmy award winner Doug Jack. It acknowledges South Africa's contribution to the world and reminds us why we are "Proudly South African".

In the final scene, called Protocol and directed by homegrown talent Raylene Plaatjies and Wendy Smidt, the 14 competing nations march into the stadium accompanied by the Cape minstrels and a host of international sporting and cricket greats.

Featuring Johnny Clegg, Leleti Khumalo, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, PJ Powers and other music stars as well as a cast of more than 4 500 extras, the production is the biggest to have been mounted in South Africa.

In the words of the executive producer, Penny Jones, Ceremonies for Africa has had to "beg, borrow and steal" magic from all over the country to conjure up a show that will truly make South Africa proud.