

# Sweet Revenge

By Gary Dauphin

*Hyenas*

Directed by Djibril Diop Mambéty

At the Public Theater

August 18 through September 3

The second film from Senegalese director Djibril Diop Mambéty, *Hyenas* (now in its first NYC theatrical showing after a festival swing) is an understatedly sinister comedy played out against the baked and dusty backdrop of Colobane, a small town just outside of Dakar. As in his 1982

*Touki-Bouki*, Mambéty's theme is the corruption of communal values by big city dreams. Getting from Senegal to France provided the action in *Touki-Bouki*, but here the outside world (in the form of "one hundred thousand million" Central African francs) comes to Senegal, attached to one Linguère Ramatou (Ami Diakhate), prodigal daughter, world-renowned prostitute, and millionaire.

The town of Colobane certainly *seems* to need Ramatou and her millions. Its only activity is the

watchful circling of vultures overhead and the aimless bustle of the jobless in Dramaan Drameh's (Mansour Diouf) dry goods store. When a band of drummers appears to herald Ramatou's return, the town fathers set to prying money from her using flattering anecdotes provided by Drameh, her childhood sweetheart. It isn't apparent at first that Drameh is also holding a secret about Ramatou's exile from the town, but that soon comes out, along with the underlying reason for her visit: If the town tries and executes Drameh for perjuring her 40 years before, she'll fill the town's public and private coffers.

In this adaptation of Durrenmatt's

*The Visit*, Mambéty is less concerned with the specifics of Drameh's guilt than he is with timing how long Colobane will dawdle before taking Ramatou upon her offer. The mayor and elders refuse at first ("We're not savages"), but it isn't long before beggars are innocently buying the best cognac on credit and the mayor is surveying plans for a new city hall.

*Hyenas* has a whimsical visual streak: As the townspeople spend their coming windfall, a fully stocked amusement park grows on the plain overnight as if from a bean, while Ramatou watches impassively with the vultures and hyenas. Her vibe is more campy than menacing, the bitterness of her waiting offset

by the Bond-ian excess of her gold-plated; artificial leg and arm. (Her entourage is similarly composed, including a hobbled Senegalese jurist and a cellular-toting Japanese lady-chauffeur.) The Dürrenmatt pedigree also makes the juxtaposition of foreign and local influences on Mambéty's comedy of betrays more layered and complex than it might seem at joke-level; As for Drameh, he meets his fate with an equanimity that will make you root for the impossible, but he's really the lucky one. Of all *Hyenas*'s characters, only Drameh is spared the vision of Colobane's future: a wasteland of skyscrapers, bulldozers, and screaming jets. ■