



## **Featured Artists National Art Festival Grahamstown 2014**

The choreographers featured here are a selection from works presented on the National Arts Festival Main Stage from 1984 to the present. These works span a time period in South Africa's history which has been filled with fundamental shifts in politics and art. P(AR)take serves as an investigation of some of the key developments in these areas, and explores the connections between political and artistic development over the last forty years.

\* Written by Ester van der Walt

\* Edited by Jeannette Ginslov

### **#1 1984-1989 South Africa : Apartheid Peak State of Emergency 1985**

Due to cultural boycotts, many artists travelled abroad to learn new styles, which they included in their when back in South Africa. This resulted in Eurocentric dance forms alongside South African concerns. These formal and conceptual concerns were not always fully integrated, but rather functioned alongside one another. Van Tonder's work used the

balletic form with Limon and Horton inspired styles, whilst at the same time showing an attempt to recontextualise this form into the South African milieu.

**Tossie van Tonder** worked with Gill Scott on *Thabangita* 1984 and the Equinoxe Dance Theatre in 1982. She worked with a fusion of balletic and African dance aesthetics. Van Tonder is a qualified clinical Jungian psychologist and writer, as well as choreographer and solo performer, using African Ritual and female archetypes to inform her aesthetic.

**#2 1994-1996 South Africa :  
Democracy. ANC wins first non-racial election. Mandela elected president. Sanctions lifted.**

South Africa's radical political shift allowed choreographers to explore South African themes and attempted to identify a South African dance style. The new freedoms experienced through democracy created not only an interest in different cultures and their dance forms but also allowed for such explorations to take place uncensored by the government. One of the results of this interest was Afro-fusion, as seen in Mantsoe's work, a form which

explored the potential of mixing different traditional cultures and races. **Vincent Mantsoe** choreographed *Gula Matari* in 1996 and was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance that year. Vincent Mantsoe's style of dance is 'contemporary African fusion', a combination of African and Eater traditional dance styles. Premiered at FNB Danced Umbrella 1993.

### **#3 1996-1998 Uncovering Truth. Truth & Reconciliation Commission calls Apartheid a crime against humanity. New SA constitution**

Although there were many traditional dance styles that could be openly explored in a newly uncensored country, there were still contemporary concerns. One of the greatest concerns of this time was the aftermath of apartheid, which was an ever looming presence in the newly formed democracy. Some choreographers interrogated these concerns not only through the creative products of their work, but also in their methodologies.

**Debbie Rakusin & David Matamela** teamed up in 1994 and started the Vusa Dance Company. Rakusin and Matamela shared the

Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance in 1998 for their work with the Company. Rakusin and Matamela created work through collaboration, crossing the racial divide and in this way produced works that reflected the political climate and positive attitude of the time.

#### **#4 1999-2001 International Battles. SA imports generic ARV drugs & cleared of alleged corruption in 1999 international arms deal**

South Africa continued to build international relations after the lifting of the cultural boycott. This sparked a flurry of international cultural and artistic exchanges between South Africa, USA and Europe. These exchanges would leave an indelible mark on local choreographers and their artistic expression within a post-apartheid SA. The increased international interest in forms such as time art and performance art can clearly be seen in Orlin's work.

**Robyn Orlin** choreographed *Daddy, I've seen this piece six times before and I still don't know why they're hurting each other* in 2000. The work engages with the South African culture of dance as it adapts to a post-apartheid state.

Orlin was the first to bring a multiracial dance group to perform on the Fringe. First commissioned and premiered at FNB Dance Umbrella 1999.

**#5 2001-2002 Medical Issues.  
Acquitted - Dr Wouter Basson  
former head of SA's secret  
chemical & biological warfare.  
Public hospitals supplied with  
ARV drugs**

International technological advances allowed for new approaches to creating performance, and produced new subject matter for artist to explore. The development and distribution of ARV drugs and other developments in the medical community brought questions around mental and physical health issues to the forefront. In a post-modern community technology and health could be said to have become co-dependent. Ginslov's work interrogates this complicated interaction between technology, modern life and health.

**Jeannette Ginslov** Director of Screendance Africa (Pty Ltd) created *clinical capsule* in 2000. It is an immersive multi media digital collaborative dance work, based on the theme of schizophrenia as a postmodern condition. It

reflected the zeitgeist of South Africans suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome. Premiered at the Arts Alive Festival Johannesburg 2000, funded by CIBOC, France.

**#6 2002-2005 Reminders of Apartheid. Right-wing extremists charged with plotting against the state. ANC wins wit 70% of the vote.**

Ten years after the first democratic elections, South Africa was still dealing with the consequences of apartheid. South Africans were making decisions based on their history rather than their immediate situation and were fearful of the overwhelming support for the ANC. This fear spread amongst right wing extremists as the ruling political party was not proving as effective as hoped and it was feared that there would be a return to another form of supremacy. **Gary Gordon's** work investigates the extremes individuals experience, and could be said to use this very particular case as a metaphor for a more widespread attitude in the country. Gordon's *The Unspeakable Story*, (2004) a physical theatre work, explored

the possibilities of presenting a narrative through different media in a thought-provoking way.

Gordon was the first to receive the Young Artist of the Year Award for Dance in 1989 for dance outside the classical ballet idiom.

### **#7 2005-2008 Political**

**Struggles. Zuma fired from ANC on corruption charges. Later acquitted of corruption & rape charges. Then reinstated as deputy & chairman of ANC.**

**Mbeki resigns.** South Africa entered a period of political confusion and unrest. With so many political upheavals, some artists, like Maqoma, returned to an exploration of pure form in their work. The political situation in the country created the necessity for art to remove people from their daily struggles and allow them to engage with a different manner of thinking and different subject matter to interrogate, free from the anguished past. **Gregory**

**Maqoma** is artistic director of Vuyani Dance Theatre, which he formed in 1999. *Beautiful Us* was choreographed on 2006, after Maqoma won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance in 2002.

**#8 2008-2011 Political Shifts.  
Zuma elected president 2009.  
Lindiwe Mazibuko elected  
leader for DA in govt. FIFA  
World Cup 2010. World  
economic crisis.**

The political shifts in the country were not the only fundamental changes taking place in South Africa. The global economic crisis created difficult living and working conditions for most South Africans and prompted a reevaluation of priorities within individuals and in the country generally. Artists such as **Jay Pather** realised the importance of education and development of young performers at this time, as well as the value of self-investigation and memory through the body, during a time of crisis. Pather choreographed *Body of Evidence* in 2009. The work reflects Pather's interest in a body which can hold and express memories. Pather is the artistic director of Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre, which is dedicated to promoting dance education, development and performance. First commissioned by FNB Dance Umbrella 2009.

**#9 2011-2012 Trouble in the  
ANC. Julius Malema suspended  
for 5 years when charged with**

**money laundering. Zuma re-elected as ANC leader**

Continued turmoil in the government, with a political party fraught with suspicion of criminal activity, and at times charged of such activities, artists created works which investigated these issues which should be consuming the leadership, rather than their own agendas. This encouraged black female artists, such as **Mamela Nyamza** to create works that were politically and personally driven, to expose serious concerns about sexual orientation and corrective rape for example. Nyamza, Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner for Dance, created *Isingqala* in 2011. This is an intimate work with an introspective creator and dancer. Nyamza trained in a variety of dance styles, is known for fusing these styles in non-traditional ways.

**#10 2011-2013 Extreme Events. Mandela admitted to hospital numerous times. White extremists found guilty of plotting to murder Mandela. Madiba dies 05 December 2013.**

Nelson Mandela served as the South African icon of unity and forgiveness, freedom and

democracy throughout his lifetime and South Africa's political transformation. His influence on the transition from an apartheid state to a South African democracy, is best expressed through an appreciation of his personal struggles and his ability to enact forgiveness on an individual level. It still serves as an example for the South African public by which to live by.

Mandela's personal journey is a vital part of South African history. But his personal story is one of many many important stories. Art creates an opportunity for personal histories and experiences to be explored and expressed in such a way that not only the individual benefits, but the society in which they are given birth, learn from. **Fana Tshabalala** was the Standard bank Young Artist of the Year for Dance in 2013. His work, *Indumba*, engages with notions around cleansing ceremonies and rituals. Tshabalala's work engages with a very personal journey, and includes his artistic exploration of self and culture. He works for the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative.

Through dancing, moving, shifting  
and sharing stories, dreams,  
weight, power, space and time,  
South African choreographers  
have worked within a context of  
the personal and the political, en-  
framing each other: context and  
content, form and emotion,  
techniques and aesthetics,  
reflecting and investigating,  
accepting and refusing,  
questioning and probing the time  
and place in which they lived and  
worked, over the last forty years,  
South Africa.