

Rebellion & Johannesburg to open Dance Umbrella

Romeo & Juliet: Rebellion & Johannesburg is to have its South African premier when it opens Dance Umbrella 2016 on 25 February, 2016, at the UJ Arts Centre Theatre, Kingsway Campus.

The full production will be staged in South Africa and the cutting-edge contemporary dance piece - choreographed to challenge perceptions about what it means to be young, African and kind of free in Johannesburg - is set to shift the dance scales.

Performed by eight dancers from Moving into Dance Mophatong (MIDM), it is a bold and provocative re-telling of Shakespeare's story, Romeo & Juliet, set to the backdrop of a transforming street subculture in Joburg. MIDM's Sunnyboy Motau collaborated with Nupen as choreographic assistant on the production.

This exhilarating contemporary dance-theatre piece taps into the unique spirit of the city and its changing cultural landscape by experimenting with dance forms such as skhothane pantsula, train surfing and sbujwa fused with contemporary dance.



South Africa's top talent

The production also pulls together some of South Africa's top talent, who collaborated to bring the production to life, including Spoek Mathambo, who created the original score, Anmari Honiball who designed the kaleidoscopic wardrobe, and photography and video artist Ed Blignaut.

Nupen pulled together the creatives to put into practice what the production preaches, by involving Joburg-based youths in the co-creation of the dance piece.

"Every day rebellion is on our minds and in our footsteps. Young people, with every movement they make, conscious or unconscious, are challenging the status quo and vying for a space in a city that both welcomes and discards them," said Nupen, who is originally from Joburg and has taken up permanent residence in Germany, but continues regularly to visit the home that inspires her work.

"Romeo & Juliet: Rebellion & Johannesburg is about that journey; the tension between belonging and doing battle."

The production is about revolution and the lack of freedom that persists because of economic exclusion.

The apartheid after-party

"Spoek Mathambo coined the phrase 'the apartheid after-party', and the piece reflects this in its own rebellious nature of dance battles and daredevil subculture born from the 'lost generation'," she added. "We're rebelling against our times. It's an endeavour to take some personal control."

Mooving into Dance's chief executive, Nadia Virasamy, said the company was looking forward to the honour of opening the prestigious Dance Umbrella. "This privilege is a testament of the growth of our organisation and the commitment of our dancers who have put their hearts into this piece.

"Rebellion & Johannesburg is an emotional piece for the dancers because, in essence, it is them. It's about their social reality laid bare - but in collaborating with Jessica, they are also unlocking a new method for self-expression which is going to change African dance as we know it," she said.

This world-class dance creation was recently named the best new discovery of 2015 by Amelie Deuflhard, the director of Kampnagel Centre of International Art in Hamburg, Germany.

Dance Umbrella 2016 is the 28th edition and includes five collaborations between South African and international choreographers, as well as works from Joburg-, Cape Town-, and Durban-based choreographers as well as young artists. It takes place at multiple sites across Joburg between 25 February and 6 March, 2016.

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