

Last two days of Baxter Dance Festival

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

12 Oct 2012

The eighth annual Baxter Dance Festival at the Baxter Theatre ends on Saturday and there are two more programmes to see. This platform for established and emerging dancers and choreographers this year comprised 50 pieces of varying dance styles performed by about 300 dancers.

The festival featured invited guests from Joburg's Vuyani Dance Theatre (VDT), who performed work by the internationally acclaimed Gregory Maqoma and Luyanda Sidiya. There was a commissioned work by Ananda Fuchs, as well as performances by former Alvin Ailey dancer Bradley Shelver and artists from Namaqualand and around Cape Town.





Sidiya's Umnikelo (Offering) and Maqoma's Mayhem were shining examples of the best of African contemporary dance, choreographed for an "articulate, strong and clean" result - so succinctly described by Fuchs. Sidiya used three musicians and eight dancers to enact surrender to a god of worship. The outcome? Powerful voices; percussive foot action; polished performance.

Impress with dramatic skill

Meanwhile, Maqoma's cast of nine dancers excelled in their interpretation of Mayhem, a piece set in a mental institution. They were able to build on sound technical ability to impress with dramatic skill that made the work thoroughly believable, yet still unpredictable with an interesting twist at the end.

Fragile Falling, the commissioned piece, featured every night of the main programme. Fuchs focused her theme on the "personal, cultural, social, emotional, psychological and inherited histories" caught up in hair. Her cast ranged in age - and those who have given decades of their lives to their art thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to perform again.



Her choreography was effective through its simplicity, inviting competent execution by the artists, and cleverly incorporated audio-visuals that used different filmed contexts to lead the performers onto and beyond the stage. At one point, an oversized mirror was lowered as a backdrop to the action, serving to reflect the seated audience and turn what was literally

a dream sequence for Fuchs into reality.

Another programme incorporated Alfred Hinkel's Bruin (Garage); Abeedah Medell and Ebrahim Medell's Dead Man's Tale (Eoan Group Theatre Company); Steven van Wyk and Kristina Johnstone and Cilna Katzke's You Were Meant for Me (Underground Dance Theatre).

Bruin was performed by three dancers; a contemporary work-in-progress with great potential. It's set to a soundtrack that reflects life in a community where poverty and hopelessness lead to ignorance and gangsterism.

A solid technical base

The Medell siblings created a piece representative of their quirky style on a solid technical base while Underground Dance Theatre produced some entertaining physical theatre.





Mzo Gasa and Mziyanda Mancam choreographed for Jazzart Dance Theatre, the one as frenetic as the other was slow. The latter work, entitled Years Later, impressed mostly with Mancam's beautifully made duets.

Tonight and tomorrow, Shelver's and Fuchs' work will be featured with Yuhl N Headman's Internal Finding / KwetAba (Sibikwa Arts Dance Co), Grant van Ster and Marlin Zoutman's Duo, Themba Mbuli's Dark Cell (Broken Borders Arts Project) and Nicola Elliott's Keepsake (Nicola Elliot and Underground Dance Theatre).

Tickets are R80, with students paying R72 for 8pm shows until the final performance on Saturday, 13 October. Tickets are R30 for Saturday's fringe programme at 2pm. To book, call Computicket at 0861 915 8000, online at www.computicket.com or at Shoprite Checkers outlets.

Images by Fragile Falling

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