

New benchmark for Romeo and Juliet

As a film and theatre lover, I can be as skeptical as the next person when it comes to critics' reviews. They represent individual opinions, educated or otherwise, and at the end of the day, people should make up their own minds. So in the preparation for my interview with Dada Masilo earlier this year, I was surprised to see how many rave reviews she had received for her contemporary version of Romeo and Juliet, the product of her 2008 Standard Bank Young Artists Award for Dance, which premiered at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

 By [Debbie Hathway](#) 30 Oct 2009



Now I know what all the fuss was about - kudos to The Baxter Theatre for bringing this brilliant piece of dance theatre to Cape Town audiences.

I don't even want to start trying to describe Masilo's talent, creativity, skill, magnetic performance ability and vision. She was 23 when she made this piece!

She says she prefers to dance, not choreograph, and doesn't like all the attention to be on her when she's performing with others. In Romeo and Juliet, she's part of a 12-member cast that holds their own but can't come close to matching her. That's just the way it is.

The piece is fun and lighthearted when it needs to be and gravely serious when tragedy strikes. It was so well acted by everyone in the key roles but I have to marvel again at Masilo. Her portrayal of giggly girlishness versus frantic distress - in her face and body and through the choreography was absolutely amazing; so refreshingly different and innovative.

The music by Vivaldi, Bach, Prokofiev, Philip Glass and Arvo Part was beautiful and uplifting; the scaffolding set not nearly as brash as I thought it would be. In fact, it's ideal.

Credit must go to PJ Sabbagha and Gregory Maqoma, who contributed to the choreography. The ensemble of young professional talent includes Songezo Mcilizeli, Gustin Makgeledisa, Bailey Snyman, Nicola Haskil Vishanthi Arumugam, Lesego Ngwato, Carlynn Williams and Nombulelo Mashiga.

People who don't know this classic story should be able to follow it easily; those who do should enjoy it even more! The majority of Thursday's audience was very young and readily gave the cast a standing ovation at the end.

Romeo and Juliet is just over an hour, with no interval. It's on at the Baxter Theatre until Saturday at 8pm w

a matinee that day at 3pm. Tickets range from R85 to R120. Booking is through Computicket. For discounted block, schools or corporate bookings, charities and fundraisers, contact Yandiswa on 021 680 3991, Sharon on 021 680 3962 or Taryn on 021 680 3993.

* Brief background on Dada Masilo: After writing matric at the National School of the Arts, Masilo spent a year with Jazzart Dance Theatre before being invited to audition for the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (Parts) in Brussels, where she was among 30 successful applicants from an international contingent of over 800. She is now based at The Dance Factory in Johannesburg.

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Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts. View my profile and articles...

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