

ARTICLES ON: HATCHED ENSEMBLE

# Embracing Complexity and Identity in Hatched Ensemble



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*A majestic and passionate display of technique from the Hatched Ensemble performance. Photo: Mhlahli Mpendu*

## **By Vilia Dube**

Mamela Nyamza has long been invested in deconstructing the binaries of traditional African dance forms and Western balletic norms.

The original *Hatched* (2007) was a poignant and evocative work that addressed Nyamza's change in sexual identity and her role as an artist, dancer, and mother amid the traditional rites and rituals of marriage. At this year's Festival, Mamela brings it back with a twist, premiering it as *Hatched Ensemble* at the Guy Butler Auditorium.

The artistic movement is performed by ten ballet dancers, an opera singer and an African traditional instrumentalist. We are met with the bare backs of the performers, dressed in pegged tutus and shaking them off like birds while soft piano music plays in the background.

They continue in this fashion – jittering, shouting, and engaging in unconventional movements. Mouths are painted white, and pink ballet shoes highlight their dark skin, and their seemingly conflicted identities. One walks through a journey of self-discovery with each of them, of being born oppressed and finally... hatched.

The mastery of the performance is its contrast. With almost a full house in attendance, we are brought into different customs of ballet with a strategic use of various ballet styles building to a climax of traditional dance.

The dancers performing to Maskandi is a highlight of the performance, culminating in their *pointe* shoes all strung up on a line. It is a gesture of simultaneous release, freedom, and acceptance of their African identity and sexuality. Fittingly, it ends in a resounding standing ovation.

***Hatched Ensemble is on at the Guy Butler Auditorium until 27 June.***



*A striking solo section in Hatched Ensemble. Photo: Mhlahli Mpendu*

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ARTS FESTIVAL DAILY DISPATCH

## 'Hatched Ensemble' powerfully conveys challenging issues of tradition

Ten dancers trained in classical ballet, an opera singer and an African instrumentalist bring Mamela Nyamza's autobiographical piece to life on NAF stage

28 June 2023



DEEPLY MOVING: 'Hatched Ensemble' is motivated by Mamela Nyamza's highly acclaimed solo work 'Hatched' (2007),

an autobiographical work in which she reflects on her life as a black dancer.  
Image: ALAN EASON

## SIVENATHI GOSA

Incorporating classical ballet with contemporary dance, along with opera and African instrumental sounds, *Hatched Ensemble* brought the appreciative audience at The Guy Butler Auditorium to their feet on Monday.

### ADVERTISING

The insightful and thought-provoking production by choreographer and dancer, Mamele Nyamza, revisits her solo work, *Hatched*, which she first performed in 2007.

The autobiographical production depicts her life as an artist, the adversities and challenges she faced, and her journey to creating *Hatched Ensemble*.



**THOUGHT-PROVOKING:** 'Hatched Ensemble' is motivated by Mamela Nyamza's highly acclaimed solo work 'Hatched' (2007), an autobiographical work in which she reflects on her life as a black dancer.  
Image: ALAN EASON

"*Hatched Ensemble* speaks to anyone who has felt conflicted about their own identity and where they belong in the status quo," Nyamza said.

"The ballet shoes worn in this piece represent colonialism, the Western world, confinement; they are like tools of oppression.

“The white tutus represent marriage, the ballet world in general. How black ballet dancers could not fit in on that ballet stage.”

The one-hour and 40 minute-long production takes the audience to two different worlds of dance, powerfully portrayed by a cast of 10 dancers.

The first half depicts how black dancers were oppressed in productions they performed and, judged on their skin colour and bodies.

Nyamza said the piece conveyed deeply personal and challenging issues of tradition and artists’ evolving place within the creative industry.

“We are making our own ballet world as black dancers that can fit us, and be free in it.

“We are trying to make a statement,” Nyamza said.

With the classical vocalist angelically crooning, and calm classical music playing in the background, 10 ballet dancers, wearing only white tutus, decorated with pegs, elegantly move on pointe across the stage.

The pain and hardship depicted in the initial classical ballet piece then changes in rhythm with the introduction of traditional African music and dance moves.

Appreciative audience members burst forth with ululating sounds as the now-energetic dancers stomp their feet on stage to traditional African rhythms.

“The parts where the dancers took off their ballet shoes and were able to freely move all over the stage describes freedom. It is about the expression of identity.

“The dancers have different body types, some are short, others are tall, some are muscular, yet others are lean.

“I wanted to show that anybody can dance, regardless of the production they want to be a part of,” Nyamza said.

Though a commentary on the challenges faced by ballet dancers, it also relays a message to the audience on the need to free oneself from oppression and “hatch out” in your true identity.

Nyamza said: “I appreciated how the audience joined in towards the end, it clearly showed that they understood what I was trying to portray throughout the production.

“It showed how they [the audience] related to the trials and tribulations a dancer had to face in those previous years. But now we are free.”

Nyamza’s talented dance troupe hail from all over the country, but are mainly based in Johannesburg, where they rehearse at the Market Theatre.

Nyamza, whose career as a dancer spans more than three decades, is formally trained in ballet and attended the Alvin Ailey New York School of Dance as a visiting scholar.

*Hatched Ensemble* has finished its run at NAF.

**DispatchLIVE**

# MAKHANDA MAGIC

ATCHED Ensemble is staged by Kamela's Artistic Movement at the National Arts Festival currently on in Makhanda (Grahamstown).

HE National Arts Festival (NAF) has returned to Makhanda, its hometown in the Eastern Cape, and is currently showcasing a variety of artistic performances that ends on July 2.

MAKHANDA MAGIC

