

## FIRST NIGHT REVIEW

Hatched Ensemble review — strikingly original piece opens Dance Umbrella

This scaled-up production of Mamela Nyamza's *Hatched* features ten dancers, a vocalist and a multi-instrumentalist on the Barbican's vast main stage

[Donald Hutera](#)

Thursday October 10 2024, 12.00pm BST, The Times



Hatched Ensemble is part dance, part art installation  
MARK WESSELS

Spread across more than half a dozen venues, the 46th edition of the London-wide Dance Umbrella festival is a relatively small but highly varied selection of mainly internationally sourced performances and talks. (There is also an online strand, with pay-what-you-can digital passes starting at just £5.)

The accent is on artists new to, or little-known in, the UK. First up, and honoured with a four-day run on [the Barbican's main stage](#), is a panoramic, poetic and visually arresting work by the South African choreographer Mamela Nyamza.

*Hatched Ensemble* grew out of *Hatched*, a solo that Nyamza performed on a Dance Umbrella double bill in 2011. This scaled-up production is a striking and original piece for ten dancers, one operatic vocalist and a discreetly placed but ace African traditional multi-instrumentalist.

Free of any side or back curtains, the Barbican stage looks invitingly vast. Initially the dancers and singer gather at the centre. Clad in long white skirts to which clothes pegs have been attached, porcupine-style, their lips have been whitened too. Shedding their tops, they settle on the floor to don pointe shoes. Once that task is finished this small group slowly migrates across the stage, gradually rising to their feet and jiggling or swaying in small, quick steps en pointe to the gentle strains of Saint-Saëns's *The Dying Swan*, played on repeat. They also carry with them neat white wire sculptures of trees, farm animals or old-fashioned wind turbines — all symbols of a colonised rural community on the move.

*Hatched Ensemble* is as much art installation as dance performance, with communal liberation its chief underlying theme. After the tantalising opening section this dream-like, ritualistic journey shifts in both its costuming and musical pace. Think pink tulle headdresses and reddish skirts that transform into long coats, and correspondingly more feverish, even desperate movements that include the cast attaching themselves to a clothesline stretched across the stage. Eventually the pointe shoes are ditched, allowing the cast to slide-step back and forth to more natural rhythms. Perhaps not all Nyamza's artistic intentions are crystal-clear, but her work is imbued with delicacy, scope and a strong authentic intelligence.

★★★★☆

**70min**

**To October 12, [barbican.org.uk](http://barbican.org.uk). Dance Umbrella continues until October 31, [danceumbrella.co.uk](http://danceumbrella.co.uk)**