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Katlehong Cabaret

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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Peak Performances

12/13
SEASON

Montclair State's **Office of Arts & Cultural Programming (ACP)** presents and produces leading artists of the world in dance, music, theater, and opera. Under its signature series Peak Performances, ACP has produced works such as *Zinnias: The Life of Clementine Hunter* by Robert Wilson, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Toshi Reagon, and Jacqueline Woodson; *Dog Days* by David T. Little and Royce Vavrek; Harry Partch's *Oedipus*; and Ridge Theater's *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* by David Lang. In addition, ACP has commissioned works by Bill T. Jones, Kronos Quartet, Jan Fabre, Liz Lerman, Wayne McGregor, Laurie Anderson, Romeo Castellucci, Richard Alston, Susan Marshall, Fred Hersch, and David Gordon.

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American Premiere!

Via Katlehong Dance Katlehong Cabaret

March 16–24, 2013

Alexander Kasser Theater

Montclair State University

To view our complete season and for more information, visit www.peakperfs.org.



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Dr. Susan A. Cole, President
 Daniel Gurskis, Dean, College of the Arts
 Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

American Premiere!

Via Katlehong Dance Katlehong Cabaret

Artistic Director **Gabriel Sipiwe Nkosi**
 Conception **Hlengiwe Lushaba**
 Choreography **Vusi Mdoyi**

Singer **Nolwazi Ngidi**
 Narrator **Xolani Qwabe**
 Dancers **Mandlenkosi Fanie, Vuyani Feni, Lemi Fudumele,
 Mpho Malotana, Vusi Mdoyi, Buru Mohlabane,
 Thato Qofela**

Tour Manager **David Hlatshwayo**
 Stage Manager **Gauate Monchusi**
 Booking Agent **Damien Valette**, www.jgdv.net

Produced by Damien Valette Productions. Co-produced by Via Katlehong Dance,
 Peak Performances @ Montclair State (NJ), Théâtre national de Chaillot, and Scène
 nationale d'Orléans.

Supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Duration: 70 minutes, no intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic
 devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment
 are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted inside the theater.

PROGRAM NOTES

The roots of Pantsula can be traced back to Apartheid-era South Africa in the 1960s, when much of the country's black population was forcibly relocated to townships on the fringes of the urban zones, turning them into war zones, notable for overwhelming unemployment and a breeding ground for criminal activity. But out of this poverty came Pantsula, a culture of the streets based in fashion, music, and dance. Although many consider Pantsula a thug culture because of its popularity among the *tsotsis* (thugs) of the township, there was pride in representing the Pantsula culture of one's home township. As access to musical equipment was limited to very few, most of this competitive spirit was played out in the street. These self-styled gangsters would use Pantsula dance as a competition between themselves and other townships, with recognition going to those who dressed the most flamboyantly or had the flashiest dance steps. Pantsula therefore uses the street as theater to articulate the angst, joy, and issues of the townships, all coded in specific steps.

Gumboot dance originated in the early 1950s by African gold mine workers. The workers were forbidden to speak and, as a result, created a means of communication, essentially their own unique form of Morse Code. By slapping their gumboots (rubber Wellington boots) and rattling their ankle chains, the enslaved workers sent messages to each other in the darkness. From this came an entertainment, as the miners evolved their percussive sounds and movements into a unique dance form and used it to entertain, celebrate, refresh their minds, and prepare for the *toy toy* (protest). Via Katlehong has modernized Gumboot by combining tap, steps, Pantsula, and traditional dance (Gum-step-tap-pantsula). They are all performed at the same time using their different rhythmic languages and dance styles, making one energetic movement that creates a big rhythmic sound. Boots, hand clapping, whistling, singing, tap sounds... a lot of energy is demanded, and its interaction with the audience creates magic.

In the post-Apartheid era in South Africa, township dance and its accompanying music, known as *kwaito*, has slowly moved into the commercial arena, where it has been diluted by commercialization and now often appears less true to the survival spirit that gave birth to it. Only very few groups such as township-based Via Katlehong have managed to bring the creativity, sheer energy, and rebellious attitude of Pantsula and Gumboot dance onto the stage.

Katlehong Cabaret

This new piece combines the traditional repertoire of Via Katlehong with a cabaret format. The dancers are presented in virtuoso numbers mixing dance and play, tap, Pantsula (mime scenes of life in the townships), Gumboot, and traditional song. It is a celebration of life, but one that never forgets that, behind the scenes, life is never easy.

In collaboration with singer/performer/TV actress Hlengiwe Lushaba and comedian Sipiwe Nkosi, Via Katlehong has devised a cabaret that is "full of cool inventions, filled with African imagery."

(Adapted from a text by Philippe Noisette, published in the season program of the Théâtre national de Chaillot, Paris.)

Interview with Vusi Mdoyi

What is this new piece?

This piece speaks to us. We wanted to talk about our lives. We address everything that we as blacks of South Africa [experience] of the political, social, religious, cultural, traditional.... It is the nesting of these different dimensions that constitutes our experience and our identity.

Why cabaret?

Our agent proposed the idea. We accepted, because it seemed an interesting and different approach to our work. And most importantly, we can continue to be ourselves on the boards.

Why did you choose to work with two other artists: Hlengiwe Lushaba and Sipiwe Nkosi?

Hlengiwe is a woman, and Via Katlehong is an exclusively male group. She is a performer who has a different experience to ours, which has allowed us to work in new and unusual directions. Sipiwe is a comedian, actor, and singer with great experience, with a certain maturity that has helped us greatly.

How has your dance evolved? What are you looking for in your dance?

Every show has different themes with interesting challenges. Our dance or work should also allow us to be ourselves before

pleasing the next person. Coming from an underprivileged art background in South Africa or Africa, it has always been our mission to be the ambassadors of our continent by expressing deep truth through our craft. Our mission is to enrich everyone in all corners of the earth with our dance.

Do you still live in Katlehong? Is your work supported by the South African government?

We have been based in Katlehong all our lives. We have established an association that teaches dance to young residents of Katlehong and two neighboring townships. We try to support, as much as possible, talented young artists in our community, and we would like one day to create a school of Pantsula and Gumboot. It is true that we are confronted with issues regarding financing in South Africa. There are not enough large structures that support our projects. In general, there are so few opportunities for South African artists that many very talented persons are forced to abandon their work. As a group, Via Katlehong receives no government assistance, but this may change in the future. We are hopeful.

(Interviewed by Maxime Fleuriot for Théâtre national de Chaillot, Paris.)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The award-winning Via Katlehong Dance was formed in 1992. Originally a community troupe, the company is named after a notorious 1980s East Rand (Johannesburg) township war zone. Their mission has been to provide the local youth with an alternative to crime by uniting and educating them through dance. Led by Vusi Mdoyi, Steven Faleni, and Buru Mohlabane, Via Katlehong Dance now comprises a community school of dance and a professional 18-member troupe. They specialize in the South African township dance Pantsula and other neo-traditional forms such as Gumboot, tap, and "steps"—a township interpretation of Gumboot dance. They have won numerous awards including FNB Vita Dance, Dance Umbrella, Gauteng Dance Showcase, KTV Most Brilliant Achievement, and Gauteng MEC Development Award, among others.

They also recently participated in Step Africa, an international cultural exchange dance workshop involving South Africa, the United States, and Great Britain. They were recently involved in the cultural exchange dance educational workshops in Centre National de Création de Diffusion Culturelles Châteauevallon (France).