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## Walking next to our shoes...

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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## PROGRAM NOTES

“Walking next to our shoes...” is a traditional Zulu saying meaning “being poor.” But poor we are not. We continue to celebrate and express our state of mind. Need I say more? Thanks to everybody for their support for this production.

—Robyn Orlin

### Isicathamiya

Isicathamiya is a type of a cappella singing specific to South African Zulu culture. Isicathamiya choirs are always all male. The term derives from the Zulu verb meaning “to walk softly” or “trample carefully.” As they blend their voices into harmonious tones, the performers also carry out movements on tiptoe in a particular choreographic style. The origins of isicathamiya go back to the early 20th century, when Zulu communities started to migrate into urban areas. For a long time, Zulu travelers were housed in hostels where they were not allowed to make any noise—hence the need to walk on tiptoe. Gospel singing from the churches gradually came to influence isicathamiya. Today, these choirs compete against each other in contests organized on Saturday nights in Johannesburg and Durban.

Costumes also play an essential part. The men wear bright and expensive shoes as well as fancy suits that they absolutely cannot afford to ruin during the performances, thus the necessity for great care and attention. The song lyrics speak of subjects from daily life, such as nostalgia for homeland, women, the dangers of apartheid, or the gospel.

—Emile Soulier

### Swenkas

Every Saturday night, the swenkas turn up in the orange light outside the basement of Johannesburg’s Jeppe Hostel wearing white dustcoats and hats. Underneath their coats are stylish suits, with folded handkerchiefs showing from their top pockets. They are the supporting act for the isicathamiya competition. The swenkas spin on the leather of their soles and flash a broad smile. They raise their legs, pulling back their trousers to reveal their socks, which match their tie, handkerchiefs, and cuff

links. It is important that everything match—the walking style, the presentation, and the quality of their suits.

Swanking is believed to have developed when migrant workers, who mostly lived in city hostels, would return home for their Christmas holiday. To show their families that they had reached a certain degree of success in the city, the workers would parade their best clothes to the villagers. From then it became part of hostel culture in Johannesburg. As a preparation for going home, a man would practice and perform before a judge. This became a competition, with men putting on suits and competing. The swenkas’ passion for this art form is reflected in their conscientious attention to style and detail. The judge of the event has no contact with anyone. The organizers of the event go to great lengths to find an impartial observer. They select the judges randomly every week from the streets of Johannesburg and explain the rules, and then the fun begins. Today, in post-apartheid South Africa, swanking is very much accepted as part of the culture.

—Note provided by  
City Theatre & Dance Group

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Robyn Orlin**, born in 1955 in Johannesburg, South Africa, studied at the London School of Contemporary Dance 1975–1980. With the help of a Fulbright Scholarship, she completed her master’s degree in Fine Art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago from 1990 to 1993. Since then, she has been working consistently on her own pieces in South Africa.

Nicknamed in South Africa “a permanent irritation,” Orlin is well known for reflecting the difficult and complex realities in her country. Integrating different media (text, video, plastic arts), she investigates a certain theatrical reality that has enabled her to find her unique choreographic vocabulary. Her uniqueness is reflected in her entertaining titles: *If you can’t change the world, change your curtains* (1990); *The Polka Dot Lives On!* (1995) for the Soweto Dance Theatre; *Naked on a goat* (1996); *Orpheus... I mean Euridice...*

*I mean the natural history of a chorus girl* (1998), which obtained the FNB Vita Dance Umbrella award for choreography; *Daddy, I’ve seen this piece six times before and I still don’t know why they’re hurting each other* (1999); *F...(Untitled)* (2000); *We must eat our suckers with the wrapper on* and *The future may be bright, but it’s not necessarily orange* (2001); *Ski-Fi-Jenni... and the frock of the new*, a piece loosely based on the myth of Iphigenia, at Montpellier Dance Festival in July 2002; *Although I live inside...* in 2004, a solo for Sophiatou Kossoko; *When I take off My Skin...* in 2005 at MC2 in Grenoble. In 2005 she created a solo piece for Vera Mantero in Aix en Provence, *Hey Dude, I have talent, I am just waiting for God...*

In 2004, commissioned by INA and Arte, Orlin directed a short movie, *Beautés cachées, sales histoires*. She was in residency at Centre National de la Danse in Pantin/Paris from September 2005 to the end of 2007. While there, she restaged *Daddy...* and *We must eat ...*; she also created a piece in the neighborhood cafés and gave many workshops and lectures. Orlin directed Handel’s *L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* at the National Paris Opéra in April 2007. During the 2007–08 season, she created a piece for South Africa’s Via Katlehong Dance as part of Festival d’Automne in Créteil. In February 2008, she created *Dressed to kill... Killed to dress...* with the swenkas in Liège, Belgium. She was invited by Opéra Comique in Paris to direct *Porgy and Bess* in May 2008.

*Walking next to our shoes... intoxicated by strawberries and cream, we enter continents without knocking...* was created with the Phuphuma Love Minus singers and presented as part of Banlieues Bleues Festival in 2009. Orlin pursued the *Babysitting* series with another piece for the Musée du Louvre entitled *Babysitting Petit Louis*, commissioned by the Louvre and the Festival d’Automne in Paris. In January 2010, she presented her latest creation, *Call it... kissed by the sun... better still the revenge of geography...*, a solo for the French hip-hop dancer Ibrahim Sissoko with live graphic illustration by Maxime Rebière. In February 2010 she again presented *Daddy...* at Festival les Hivernales in Avignon.

In 1999 Orlin won the third prize at the African Rencontres Chorégraphiques and in 2000 was awarded the Jan Fabre Prize for the most subversive work at the International Choreographic Meetings in Seine-Saint-Denis. She won the 2002 Laurence Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance for the creative originality of her show *Daddy...* Orlin was made a knight in the French National Order of Merit by the French ambassador Denis Pietton, on February 28, 2009.

**Xolisile Bongwana**, from South Africa, is an actor, dancer, and singer. From 2008 to 2010, he appeared in the Off-Broadway production *Elephant*, directed by Ozzie Riley. International credits include *Aunt Rose* at the Port Elizabeth (South Africa) Opera House, *Birds of Good Hope* in the United Kingdom, and performances with the Eastern Cape Ensemble and the Uphondo Lwe Africa dance troupe.

**Vusumuzi Kunene** was born in 1974 in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, and works in Johannesburg. He has won a number of competitions as a swenka since he began swanking in 2003. In 2007 he participated in an audition Robyn Orlin organized at the Market Theatre and was cast in *Dressed to kill... Killed to dress...* for its premiere at Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg in 2008 and its European tour. Orlin also engaged him for her next piece, *Walking next to our shoes...*, for its 2009 Dance Umbrella premiere and subsequent European tour.

**Ann Masina** was born in 1978 at Witbank, Mpumalanga, South Africa. She started singing with Africa Sings Choral Society in 1994 as a soloist in the choir. She has participated in numerous choir competitions, including the Old Mutual/Telkom and Ikwekwezi choral competitions. In 1999 she became a choral trainee at Nico Malan Opera House, now known as Cape Town Opera House, under Professor Angelo Gobbato, and performed in operas including *Carmen* and *Aida*. Masina took vocal training with Pierre du Toit from the Pretoria Technikon Opera School. She is a co-founder of JOAT Opera, a self-supporting company that performs extracts from operas and musicals at various social and official events.

Masina sings in a variety of musical styles, including opera, gospel, and popular music, and she has toured various places and worked with top industry players around the world. In September 2002, she performed in the musical *Sauer Street* at the Wits Theatre. Other credits include performing with the JMI Orchestra at the Word on Music Concert in 2002, with the provincial and national champions of the 2003 South Africa Post Office Choral Eisteddfod Competition (SACMA), and traveling to Europe and Asia with the Soweto Gospel Choir (SGC). She performed with Robyn Orlin in the 2008 production *Dressed to kill... Killed to dress...* and in 2009 in *Walking next to our shoes...*, touring France with the production in 2010.

**Thulani Zwane** has been passionate about the performing arts since childhood. His love for singing started while he was in primary school. He was part of many youth clubs within the community, singing, dancing, and acting. His talents blossomed at Ikusasa High School when his principal and teachers inspired him to join the Volkswagen-sponsored music training program in 1997. He made his debut on the main stage at the Market Theatre and the Johannesburg Civic Theatre with the show *Wanna Be Gonna Be*. Graduating with a diploma in dance in 2001, he taught African dance at the National School of the Arts and choreographed for Dance Spectrum at the Wits Theatre in 2002 and 2003. He performed at the World Earth Summit in 2002 and toured Amsterdam with Vuyani Dance Theatre’s *Somehow Delightful*. Zwane is an artistic director, singer, and composer for Hlabela Ensemble. He toured and performed with African Footprints from 2003 to 2010 as a dancer and lead singer. He also performed at the opening ceremony of the 2005 FIFA Conference in Morocco. Recently Zwane has been performing in Robyn Orlin’s *Daddy, I’ve seen this piece six times before and I still don’t know why they’re hurting each other* and *Walking next to our shoes...*

**Phuphuma Love Minus** is a flamboyantly Afro-centric music ensemble specializing in isicathamiya music, rooted in Zulu history, culture, tradition, and values, yet responding to the influences of modernity in a big city. Phuphuma Love Minus originates from rural South Africa, Kwa Ngabayela-Umsinga village in KwaZulu Natal. This powerful ensemble was formed in 2002 by the late Khethyakhe Ngidi with an aim of teaching the important lessons of cultural identity and restoring the legacy of South African oral history. He believed that the art of music could be used as an instrument of change, sustainable development, socioeconomic empowerment, and personal independence in the community of Umsinga and South Africa at large.

The group started by performing at traditional events such as weddings, harvest celebrations, and many community gatherings in Umsinga village. In 2003 members of Phuphuma Love Minus moved to Johannesburg and became affiliated with the national Iphimbo Isicathamiya music organization led by Simon Ngubane. Under this organization, Phuphuma Love Minus won more than 11 provincial and national competitions against other isicathamiya music groups. Within the same period, the group recorded two successful albums, *Imfihlakalo yezulu* and *Yithi Ojikelele*. In 2010 Phuphuma Love Minus was nominated in the National South African Traditional Music Awards.

In 2008 Phuphuma Love Minus met Robyn Orlin, who created the unique opportunity for the ensemble to take isicathamiya music to another level, working in a theatrical environment. Together they created *Walking next to our shoes... intoxicated by strawberries and cream, we enter continents without knocking...*, which has been touring Europe for the past few years.

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Theater

Theater

Theater

Dr. Susan A. Cole, President  
 Dr. Geoffrey W. Newman, Dean, College of the Arts  
 Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

Peak Performances @ Montclair presents:

American Premiere!

City Theatre & Dance Group | Robyn Orlin

*Walking next to our shoes...  
 intoxicated by strawberries and cream,  
 we enter continents without knocking...*

A Piece by **Robyn Orlin**

with

**Xolisile Bongwana, Vusumuzi Kunene, Ann Masina,  
 Thulani Zwane**

and

**PHUPHUMA LOVE MINUS**

**Amos Bhengu, Busani Majazi, Mlungiseleni Majazi,  
 S'yabonga Majazi, Siyabonga Manyoni, Jabulani Mccunu,  
 Saziso Mvelase, Mbuyiseleni Myeza, Mbongeleni Ngidi,  
 Mqapheleni Ngidi**

Costumes **Birgit Neppi**

Lighting **Robyn Orlin, Denis Hutchinson**

Videography **Philippe Lainé**

Songs composed by **Khethayiphi Ngidi** and **Nhlanhla Mahlangu**,  
 with additional arrangements by **Nhlanhla Mahlangu**

Sound Manager **Gladman Balintulo**

Video Operator **Thabo Pule**

Tour Manager **Denis Hutchinson**

Assistant Director **Nhlanhla Mahlangu**

Sound Consultant **Boris Vukafovic**

Booking **Damien Valette**

Coordination **Daniela Goeller**

Co-produced by City Theatre & Dance Group, Festival Banlieues Bleues, Théâtre de Saint Quentin en Yvelines-Scène Nationale, and the Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg. Additional funding provided by Conseil Général de Seine-Saint-Denis and the Goethe Institute, Johannesburg.

Travel support to the U.S. provided in part by CulturesFrance.

City Theatre & Dance Group thanks Mr. Simon Ngubane and Mr. Adolphus Mbuyisa from the Iphimbo Isicathamiya Association where Phuphuma Love Minus is based.

All props and costumes for this production are fully recyclable.

Duration: 1 hour, 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.

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**American Premiere!**  
**City Theatre & Dance Group | Robyn Orlin**  
***Walking next to our shoes...  
 intoxicated by strawberries and cream,  
 we enter continents without knocking...***  
**February 10-20, 2011**  
**Alexander Kasser Theater**  
**Montclair State University**