

What to expect from the 2021 hybrid Kucheza Afrika Festival

The 2021 Programme of Kucheza Afrika Festival will take place online and at the South African State Theatre (SAST) from 1 to 11 April. This year's programme boasts the dance fraternity's renowned dancers such as Vincent Mantsoe, Lulu Mlangeni, Bailey Snyman, Nicola Haskins, Ignatius van Heerden, Fana Tshabalala, Thulani Chauke, Mdu Nhlapo and more.

Like many other art events across the globe last year, the launch of Kucheza Afrika Festival was postponed due to the life-threatening Covid-19 pandemic. To comply with the pandemic's health and safety protocols, this year's festival will be a hybrid of online and live theatre, with selected shows only streaming online while some showcase for both live and virtual audiences.



The Kucheza Afrika Festival is a continuation of SAST's dance festival, which debuted under the name Dance Umbrella Africa in 2019. Inspired by the Swahili word for dance, Kucheza aims to be a platform that will help preserve dance in the country and the rest of Africa and ensure that dancers always have a home at the State Theatre. The festival is SAST's aspiration to continue serving domestic and continental dance communities, as well as a call to action for Africa to converge as one in its diversity.

Spearheaded by the SAST's artistic director Aubrey Sekhabi, Kucheza is an exciting new leaf for dance at the theatre.

“ We have intentionally and singularly curated an open programme – a platform to express the dynamism and uninhibited creative expression that Africa is known for,” says Sekhabi. “This dance festival also acknowledges our youth and their acute awareness of the challenges within society and their ability to narrate those stories, with their techniques and their interpretation of contemporary African dance. ”

The SAST will be home to dancers and choreographers hailing from all corners of the world to mark an optimistic era for dance in Africa. Kucheza's programme has been split into two categories. Namely, the main programme, which profiles experienced choreographers and headlining works, and the young artists programme, a bespoke platform for young dancers who are finding their feet in dance and taking up space in the dance community.

Main programme

In the main programme, world-renowned dancer and choreographer Vincent Mantsoe will take audiences through an abstract journey on loneliness in his new solo-piece called *Solididad*, which he says it is a slavish imitation of a great monk who is on a journey he is not intended at reaching its destination. It will show for live audiences on 8 and 9 April. The acclaimed *Nijinsky's War*, choreographed by Ignatius van Heerden, winner of 2017 Standard Bank Ovation Award for artistic excellence, will take centre stage on 3 and 4 April. The piece raises awareness of mental health through an adaptation of *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky* (1953), who was the greatest ballet dancer of the 20th century to struggle with mental illness. It will also show both on stage and online.



Nijinsky's War © Suzy Bernstein

Lulu Mlangeni, who is 2019 Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner, dispels gender stereotypes with a piece titled *The Encounter* on 9 and 10 April, live in theatre and online. The work sees a duet, featuring Mlangeni and Bafikile Sedibe, in a dialogue exploring subtleties that undermine the potential for a smooth flow of relationships between genders. Another work highlighting societal ills is *Slave* by seasoned dancer Levern Botha and Port of Expression Dance Company, scheduled to virtually premiere on 9 April at the festival. *Slave* is a research-based work aimed at creating awareness of modern-day slavery.

Concentrated on cementing a global position, Kucheza Africa Festival also invites dancers and choreographers from various countries in Africa and beyond its borderlines. Frances' choreographer and theatre maker Phillippe Baldini will showcase a piece titled *Vast*. The piece, which is yet to stream from 2 April, follows a story about a young boy from Nepal who was kidnapped and abused. Roger Sarr who hails from Senegal, choreographs a self-introspective piece called *Beyond An Appearance* showing online from 3 April.

Young artists programme

Like Sarr, Benin's dancer Serge Amoussou-Guenou is also featured under the young artists programme. The Beninese will do a virtual presentation of a tribute project called *Originally*. With it he pays homage to 'the most powerful king of West Africa during the late 19th century,' the King of Dahomey called Behanzin, who resisted the colonial invasion in his country. *Originally* starts on 7 April. Featured South African artists in the fringe category include Marcia Modise showcasing *Ten Minutes With A Refugee*, Kristi-Leigh Gresse with *Sullied* and production called *What Makes Us* by companies Geronimo Theatre Collective & Performance on Pointe, all showing online on SAST YouTube channel.

Dance companies Matchbox Theatre Collective and Performance on Pointe will present the 2019 Standard Bank Silver Ovation Award-winner *Lost And Found* in the theatre on 3 and 4 April. Choreographed by formidable dance scholars Bailey Snyman and Nicola Haskins, the work journeys through many trials of relationships- a sensitive, sensual and nostalgic reflection of time passing. It speaks to the notion of growing and the way we respond to different times in our lives.



Memoryhouse - Louise Coetzer © Oscar O'Ryan

Another company bringing work is Unmute Dance Company, which will be presenting a double bill titled *Trapped*. *Trapped* challenges the 'trapped mentality' that society uses to box someone living with a disability. In the piece, dancers use their disability as a catalyst for dialogue around questions of belonging and independence in a non-integrated and exclusive society for people living with disabilities. *Trapped* is bravely choreographed by Nadine McKenzie and Siphenathi Mayekiso who both have been people living with disability from childhood. It shows only on the SAST YouTube page from 2 April.

Online viewers can also enjoy work by Louise Coetzer in collaboration with Music Artists Brydon Bolton and Matthijs van Dijk titled *Memory* from 8 April. The piece immerses the viewer in a dreamscape where the tension between reality and remembering collides in an infinite loop.

The festival will draw to an end with Standard Bank Young Artist Award recipient Fana Tshabalala joining forces with Thulani Chauke to reimagine the late Themba Mbuli's renowned work *Dark Cell*. While celebrating and commemorating South African history, the piece is also embedded in the past as a mirror of contemporary society and a reflection of post-colonial interiorities. The duo performs for live audiences on 9 and 10 April. On the same dates, Naledi Award-winning choreographer Mdu Nhlapo will also stage his work titled *Magnificent 7*. The work is a mystical tale inspired by Antoine Fuqua depicting a turbulent journey of a group of individuals who are at the helm of an apocalypse. The works will also be

streamed on [SAST's YouTube channel](#) online.

Ticket information:

Main programme: R120

Young Artists Programme: R80

Online shows (ALL): R30.

Kucheza Afrika Festival tickets can be purchased from SAST's official ticketing service provider Webtickets, available online and over the counter at Pick n Pay stores nationwide.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>