

Choreographer Thamsanqa Tshabalala returns with contemporary piece

Naledi Award Nominee, Thamsanqa 'Thami' Tshabalala, is back with another original contemporary piece titled *Isenyuso*.



Image by John Hogg: Thamsanqa 'Thami' Tshabalala

Tshabalala has proved to be a tour de force. He matriculated from the National School of the Arts in 2009 with full colours and graduated from the Tut in 2013 cum laude. He has been afforded tremendous opportunities to choreograph and dance for some of the industries' top theatres and dance doyens like Kelsey Middleton, Willie Venter and Dada Masilo.

His first choreographed dance piece, *Simon* received critical acclaim at the relaunch of the Dance Umbrella in 2019 and at several dance national festivals like the Pace Festival and the Solo & Duet Festival at the Soweto Theatre. It was nominated in the Best Contemporary/Ballet Production 2019 category at the Naledi Awards 2020.



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Since his return to South Africa in August 2021, after a successful Vienna-Austria dance tour of Dada Masilo's *The Sacrifice*, Tshabalala has returned to the dance floor with full force and is excited to stage his next new dance piece in Pretoria and in his hometown, Soweto.

Inspired by life, Tshabalala was moved by a painting at a gallery in France that depicted a black man, figuratively carrying his life on his shoulders; his inheritance, his ancestors, his families' expectations. This resonated with Tshabalala as he saw himself in this picture; being a queer man of colour living in a society of sometimes unreasonable expectations, but also trying to balance being true to his roots and the importance of tradition.



Image by Nduduzo Khoza: Thamsanqa 'Thami' Tshabalala in *Simon*

Commenting on this moment, Tshabalala expressed that he was “inspired from my personal experience to understand the trajectory of the man of colour; his insinuated association through indoctrination. In the process of conceptualising, I was moved by the painting.”

He was further influenced by the book *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

The story chronicles the life of Okwonkwo, an Igbo man and local wrestling champion in the fictional Nigerian tribe of Umuofia. He was empowered by the notion of superiority and toxic masculinity which became his downfall and led him astray from the genuine essence of being his true desired self.

Tshabalala added, “[Okwonkwo] was empowered by the notion of superiority, preserving culture and heritage, and resisting the world of the missionaries that invaded Africa. He foresaw the indoctrination and depletion of the people of the Igbo clan and their beliefs.”

And so *Isenyuso* was born.



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Isenyuso, a noun, is derived from the native isiZulu language meaning ‘ascension’.

This is a contemporary dance work with dialogue that details a global narrative of individual injustice, liberty, representation and the preservation of heritage.

“This global human pandemic is on its knees begging for acknowledgment in a world that guarantees life through sacrificing the innate being,” said Tshabalala.

The show will run at the Kucheza Festival at The State Theatre on 5 and 6 April from 7pm. It will also run at The Soweto Theatre from 5-7 May from 7.30pm. Tickets are R120 and can be purchased at Pick n Pay or through [Webtickets](#).

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