

# Prepare to be moved by *Mooi Genoeg om Engels te Praat*



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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In January 1995, I published my first story about contemporary dance based on an interview with Alfred Hinkel, who was then pushing the boundaries of dance through his work at Cape Town's Jazzart Dance Theatre. Growing up in the apartheid era my experience had been mainly classical ballet and modern dance and I had seldom seen dancers of colour performing anything other than traditional dance. All that changed rapidly once I moved to Durban and started covering dance for a local newspaper.

I met Hinkel there when he was guiding the launch of Siwela Sonke, a more racially balanced professional dance company than was the norm at the time, led by Jay Pather as artistic director. Siwela Sonke set out to challenge classical notions of dance, reach new audiences, gain acceptance in wider society, make political statements, and, through its training programme, create employment opportunities for dancers and teachers in the city. It's a philosophy that contributed to Jazzart's success during Hinkel's 24-year tenure and continues to uplift Garage Dance Ensemble since he established the company with John Linden in 2011.



## **Mooi Genoeg om Engels te Praat comes to Cape Town**

Hinkel was the first recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for Dance presented by the Arts & Culture Trust (ACT) in 2015. His ability to create emotive new work from carefully curated words, music and movement, performed by bodies of different design, capability and training, has had a tremendous impact on the South African dance industry – and on me. Given the choice between watching classical ballet and a production choreographed by Hinkel and Linden, they win every time.

Now we have an opportunity to admire more of their creative skill when Garage presents a short season of *Mooi Genoeg om Engels te Praat* at Cape Town's Magnet Theatre in February, with the support of the National Arts Council and the Department of Arts and Culture. Having been through various iterations that have toured the Northern Cape during the past two years, this will be the first time the work is performed in the Mother City. The tour will continue to Springbok, Steinkopf, Concordia, Upington, Port Nolloth, and Alexander Bay and proceeds from all performances will go to fundraisers in the various communities.





*Mooi Genoeg* is set to the poetry of [Ronelda Sonnet Kamfer-Trantraal](#), which Hinkel says lends itself to choreography. “I just love her use of the language. Our titles are always in Afrikaans, because that’s the community we serve, and we like telling stories. Ronelda’s writing is wonderful because some of it is just beautiful personal stories and some of it is heavily political and painful and dark and ugly. I can’t wait to take it to Cape Town because Cape Town will relate to it,” he says.

## Connecting mind, emotion, and body

Hinkel's style and method of training are drawn from South African communities and is strongly influenced by the Alexander technique, behind which is the idea that the mind and emotions are connected to the physical body. "I'm not interested in dance that's just about executing a step – the training is far deeper than that," he says. "If you only work with recognition (as in classical ballet), it reaffirms the prejudice that that's the way it should be. If I can get the dancers to experience the shift, their audience will feel it too. Their duty is not to affirm but to challenge."



He emphasises this vision repeatedly to the dancers in rehearsal. The choreography must pave the way for the delivery of some hard-hitting dialogue by actress Esme Marthinusa, a former member of Dawn Langdown's Namjive now working fulltime for Garage. "It's not pure entertainment," Hinkel tells them. "There's got to be a tension, an underlying sadness, a sense of pain to give it that edge."

Kudos to his dancers for never failing in that delivery over time. Those who get it, go the distance in their professional careers no matter whether they choose to focus on dance, teaching or choreography. "They need to be skilled, as skilled as they can get their particular body. Some bodies can take on more of that conventional dance skill, and others can't. But when they move they've got to inhabit their bodies. I've got to believe them. They've got to be real," says Hinkel.

"They've got to make us cry," I add. "Ja," he nods.





In rehearsal, my reaction is even more intense. It must have something to do with the stark environment, devoid of sets, costumes and theatrical lighting. The people and their passion move me every time. Audiences react differently to the work, but react they do. Good or bad, love it or hate it, this is the kind of theatre that leaves an indelible impression. Make sure you book early as seats are limited and tickets will sell out fast.

*Mooi Genoeg om Engels te Praat will be staged at Magnet Theatre in Observatory, Cape Town on 8 and 9 February 2019 at 8pm. Tickets cost R100 through Webtickets at [www.webtickets.co.za](http://www.webtickets.co.za) or at any Pick 'n Pay store.*

*Photography credit: Ruth Smith*

## ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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