

The Coloured Chameleon - it's about community

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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Desiré Davids and the Eoan Group Theatre Company present The Coloured Chameleon from 3 to 5 December at the Joseph Stone Theatre in Athlone.



The Eoan Group has been based at the auditorium since 1969; both are institutions within the cultural landscape of greater Cape Town. The Theatre Company, which is almost three years old, has a reputation for its dramatic contemporary dance performances creatively directed by Abeedah Medell and artistically imagined by her brother, Ebrahim.

In this collaboration, Ebrahim partners with his former Napac Dance Company and Playhouse Dance Company colleague, Desiré Davids, to present a short season of work that's described as "an exciting, engaging and thought-provoking dance programme, dealing with past histories and present realities in a South Africa where hope springs eternal".

Desiré is a graduate of the UCT Ballet School and a founding member of Boyzie Cekwana's renowned Floating Outfit Project. She was awarded the Most Outstanding Female Performer for her performance in Rona at the third International African and Indian Ocean Choreography Competition in Madagascar in 1999. Since then she has worked extensively in Europe, the US and Africa, but it's been many years since she's performed on home ground. She takes this opportunity to present the South African premiere of Coloured/Chameleon/Dance, which looks at the "place of the so-called coloured community in post-apartheid South Africa".

Changing colours

"The humiliation of being 'less than white' made being 'better than black' a very fragile position to occupy" is a comment by author and academic Zimitri Erasmus that informs Desiré's research. It was also fuelled by a statistic quoted in The Star on 21 March, 1986, that "more than 1000 people officially changed colour last year" - hence, "the chameleon dance".

"For a majority of this community, nothing has changed since the end of apartheid and, for many, life has become even more difficult. It is true that a part of this community in South Africa still find themselves hanging in the balance; then not white enough now not black enough," says Desiré.



Her need to question "our part, our decisions, our stance in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa" first took form in *Who Is This? ... Beneath My Skin*, a collaboration with French photographer Pascale Beroujon that premiered at the Jomba! Contemporary Dance Festival in Durban in 2010.

As the recipient of a residency exchange programme between Théâtres Départementaux de La Réunion and Centre National de la Danse, Pantin, Desiré began the process of creating *Coloured/Chameleon/Dance*, which premiered at Festival Total Danse in La Reunion, and was subsequently performed in France.

Having just completed a six-month fellowship at Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany, Desiré is excited about the opportunity finally to perform this work "in the community". Beroujon is assisting her with the background texts and visuals while David Johnson will accompany her once again on stage. He is the South African actor who played Dr Bennett, the love interest of Lois (Samantha Tyelbooi), in *Society*, the SABC1 drama series' season two, from 2009 to 2010.

Since graduating from UCT's Drama Department in 2005, David has entertained audiences in several television and stage roles, which include that of Dwayne in the SABC2 soapie *7de Laan*. His stage credits include the title role in *Hamlet*, *The Boy Who Fell from the Roof*, Fred Abrahamse's Maynardville production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Bacchus in die Boland*. He is also a director, musician and dance teacher, and is involved in the development of heritage sites in South Africa.



Powerful and emotive

The Eoan Group Theatre Company explores a similar theme in *Red*, choreographed by Ebrahim. It is accompanied by a stirring compilation of musical tracks, the selection of which contributes so much to the success and popularity of his work. Forced by circumstance to develop the piece on different continents via Skype, Desiré and Ebrahim have encouraged the young dancers to examine the notions of where they come from, where they are now and where they are going. It's typically powerful and emotive, and dance fans will be amazed at the technical dexterity that endures throughout this physically challenging work.

The Coloured Chameleon is on at the Joseph Stone Theatre in Klipfontein Road, Athlone, on 4 and 5 December at 8pm. It's easily accessible and there is plenty of off-street parking. Tickets cost R50 or R30 for students and pensioners. Book at [Computicket](#) or at the door.

Free schools performances are also scheduled from 3 to 5 December at 10am. Contact +27 (0)21 637 1268 for more information.

Images by Pascale Beroujon

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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