

National Arts Fest's main programme released

The lineup for the main programme of the National Arts Festival has been unveiled. The annual arts festival will be held in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) from 27 June to 7 July 2019.

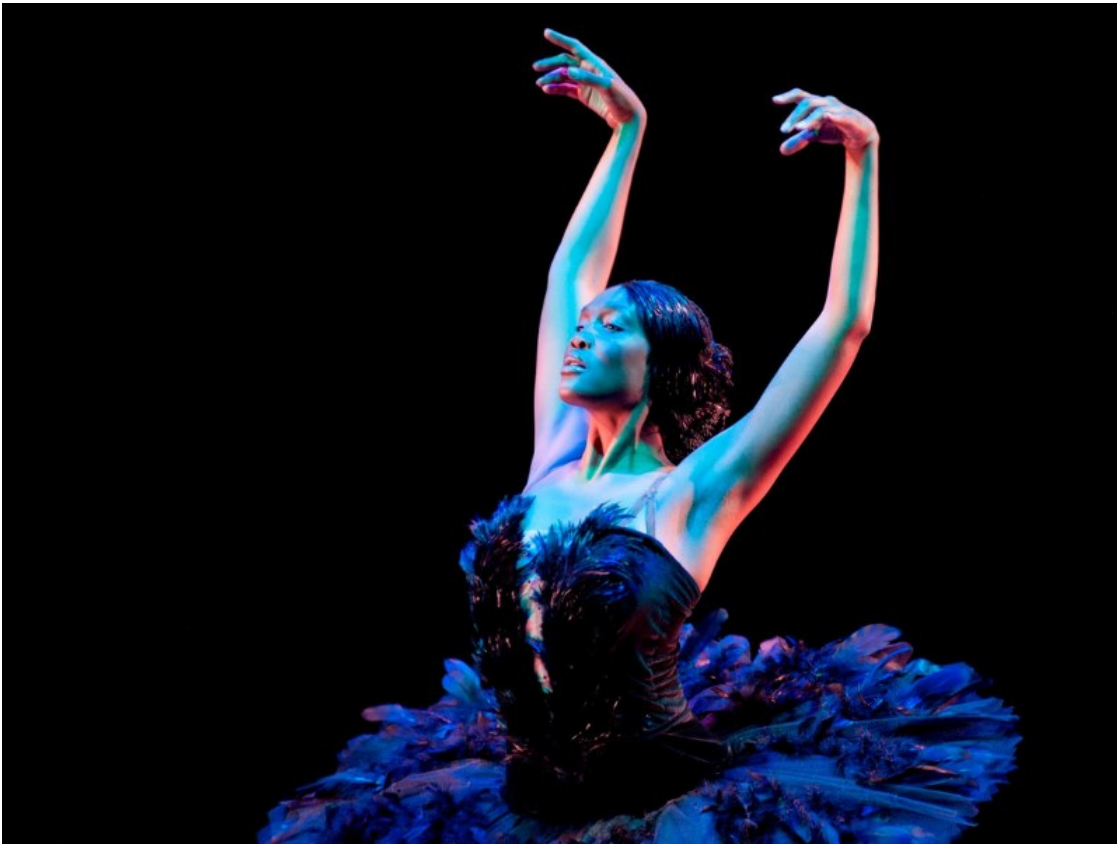
This year's main programme forms part of a much broader offering of uncurated, unsolicited works and multiple focus areas for discussion and experience. It is set to be a stimulating and thought-provoking journey through some of the issues at the top of artists' minds and makes for a deep dive into what South Africa is grappling with and can reimagine if it has the will.



Ingoraka Yiyo Soga

Afro-centric and Afro-celebrant

Core to the mood of the 2019 programme is a desire to reflect on identity. From the rich celebrations of indigenous African music and dance to reworkings of classical and contemporary pieces, there is a desire to explore culture and connection, land and belonging. As if a talisman for this journey, 2019 Standard Bank Young Artist for Dance Kitty Phetla has collaborated with 2015 Standard Bank Young Artist for Jazz Nduduzo Makhathini in “Going Back To The Truth Of Space” (dance); a submersion into ritual and a struggle for restoration that also merges the talents of two artists who are separate but connected through intention.



Kitty Phetla

The louder voice of Afro-centric and Afro-celebrant themes is echoed on through numerous works such as Jefferson Bobs Tshabalala's *Ekasi Lam – An Ode To Kwaito, Un-Owed To Kwaito* (theatre), which takes the audience into the heart of township life, and “Amawethu” (dance) that challenges slave-era stereotypes of traditional African spirituality as demonic and asks that we reconnect with our true culture.

Nowhere is this growing affirmation of African culture and identity louder than on the music programme, which is filled with music from the African continent and a blending, remixing and repurposing of Western, contemporary or classical music into this landscape. From “Ingoma Ka Tiyo Soga”, a collaborative exploration of the 160-year-old works of intellectual, composer and evangelist Tiyo Soga by visual artist Sikhumbuzo Makandula and singer/songwriter Mthwakazi to “Eastern Cape Divas” with Afro-acoustic, indie-folk singer Nombasa Maqoko and jazz/performing artist Titi Luzipho.

The divas are joined by the Kwantu Choir, a combination of Rhodes students and the voices of the residents of Makhanda's Rhini and Joza townships. The Eastern Cape Philharmonic Orchestra will present the gala concert and the symphony concert. Also among those taking to the stage are South Africa's globally recognised performers Ladysmith Black Mambazo, The Drakensberg Boys Choir, Mafikizolo, the Springbok Nude Girls and Freshlyground, to name but a few.



Mafikizolo

Moving to find the humour in our very unique circumstances, South African comedians will sound out our nation’s psyche in “The Very Big Comedy Show”, hosted by Rob van Vuuren and featuring Loyiso Madinga, Tats Nkonzo, Mojak Lehoko and more.

Continuing Conversations (visual art) challenges notions of who sees art and where, and considers the juxtaposition of power and powerlessness, identity and body politics, perceptions of the other and the exotic, memory and the masks we wear. The exhibition is made up of about 40 works that have been selected from the extensive collections of the University of Johannesburg and MTN. Artists on show include Gerard Bhengu, Reshada Crouse, Wilma Cruise, Phillemon Hlungwani, Maggie Laubser, Judith Mason, George Pemba, Cecil Skotnes, Irma Stern and Edoardo Villa.

Featured Artist 2019 Berni Searle will bring a number of works to the festival as part of this spotlight on the career of an extraordinary South African artist.



Berni Searle is the 2019 National Arts Festival featured artist

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The contemplative and emotive voices of our storytellers resonate throughout the programme with personal stories of pain and resilience. From 2019 Standard Bank Young Artist for Theatre Amy Jephta’s haunting time-travelling journey into the memory of displacement and the restitution in *All Who Pass* (theatre) to a story of searing grief and silence through two characters in Gopala Davies’s *Moonless* (theatre). Former Standard Bank Young Artist for Theatre (2018) Jemma Kahn takes it left-field as a scientist befriends a virus in *Cellist With Rabies* (theatre).

Literature, history and iconic people have caught the imagination of many artists as they tackle some of the big themes these events and visionaries have given us: from Magnet Theatre G7’s raw and emotional retelling of the country’s excavation of secrets at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in *Okwe-Bokhwe* (theatre) to *Angola/Camp 13* (theatre), a brave and unflinching look at the abuses of power and human rights within the heady times of uMkhonto weSizwe’s training camps, written by Sello Maseko.

Artists on the Arena explore the works of Kafka in UJ’s play *Metamorphosis* and timeless playwright Zakes Mda’s *The*

Mother Of All Eating with Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi and Luntu Masiza. Mda also inspired award-winning playwright and director Thembela Madliki's new play, *Where She Walked*.

Brett Bailey's much-anticipated *Samson* (theatre) puts the biblical story of Samson through a sensational treatment, bringing it into the 21st century to explore the global underbelly of political extremism, inequality and violence.



Brett Bailey's *Samson* - ©Nardus Engelbrecht

Merging and blending of genres

The continuing merging and blending of genres and the growing influence and creative possibility of technology are evident through an exciting streak of productions running through the programme, some of which form part of the Creativate Digital Arts Festival – which runs throughout the festival this year.

DEURnis/Uzwelo (theatre) is a highly experiential piece of theatre between one audience member and one actor. Audience members spend 20 minutes in each room of the piece for a total of 100 minutes of immersion. “Swarm Theory” is a playful investigation into the possibility of a collective human intelligence and will take place as public art on the streets of Makhanda.

The old power station will be utilised for *Arcade* (performance art), a durational, live-art performance curated by Gavin

Krastin that sees audiences interacting with the performances as they happen. UK creative company Curious Directive brings *Frogman* (performance art) to the festival – a coming-of-age thriller within a 360° virtual reality environment that will take audiences into a new era of theatre.

South African born Mira Calix returns to the country to present “In Situ” (music). Calix sees music and sound as sculptural material and, in this work composed of two pieces, uses data to inform musical composition.

International contributors

Among other international contributors to the festival are Irish comic Dylan Moran, who holds the festival’s record for selling out his show in the fastest time. He returns to town with a new work, “Dr Cosmos” (comedy). Described as a comedic Oscar Wilde, his acerbic wit will be a tonic for many of us. *I Am Somebody* (performance art) by Swedish company Sirqus Alfon is a “high octane, electro clown ride through a bizarre post-internet world”.



Dylan Moran

American actor and playwright Stephen Fales brings *Confessions Of A Mormon Boy* (theatre) to the festival. Inspired by his own true story, it follows the experience of a sixth-generation Mormon who is excommunicated from the church when he comes out as gay. Sexuality and acceptance are also in the spotlight in “Pink Money” (dance), a collaboration between Swiss, Dutch and South African artists.

Both of these works will resonate with the exciting new South African voice at #NAF2019 – the winner of the Distell National Playwright Competition, Koleka Putuma, who will interrogate structures and beliefs through her first adventure into playwrighting in *No Easter Sunday For Queers* (theatre).

German-Chinese choreographer Hannah Ma explores rituals that transcend cultural boundaries in “Wanderer” (dance) and also brings a light-hearted, poetic interpretation of the ballet *Les Sylphides* in *Sylphides* to the main dance programme. Nigerian dancer, choreographer and activist Qudus Onikeku presents “Spirit Child”, another piece inspired by a literary work – this time Ben Okri’s classic, *The Famished Road*.



Wanderer by Hannah Ma/The People Unite

A journey across time and place

The main curated film programme, selected by Katarina Hedrén, is a journey across time and place. Many of the films on offer are African in both content and origin but otherwise tackle multiple ideas and stories. A series of musical documentaries include a fascinating look at the life of Afrobeat creator Fela Kuti in *Finding Fela* (2014) and *Gimme Shelter* (1970), labelled ‘the best rock film ever made’. Classical fans will enjoy contemporary films of the exquisite productions of *Faust* and *The Taming Of The Shrew* from the Royal Opera House Collection. The first ever Sarah Baartman Film Festival will host workshops conducted by filmmakers from 1 to 5 July and the young residents of Makhanda will enjoy the Noluthando Bioscope – showing current favourite films for small people.

The student theatre programme again creates a space for the critical outputs of student theatre-makers with a strong offering from several South African institutions and private colleges.

“I would venture that festival-goers are going to be challenged, amused and inspired by this year’s programme with its many layers and textures. Many of us will find ourselves meandering between ‘then’ and ‘now’ with a combination of past reflections and the unsettling present as we try to figure out what is next for humanity and the country we call home. We are proud to be presenting such a carefully selected programme with different shades and textures covering such range – from entertaining to thought-provoking – creating a holistic experience. It’s an experience I look forward to sharing with you,” says acting executive producer of the National Arts Festival, Nobesuthu Rayi.

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