16. July 2024

5th Edition of the Dance Life Festival featuring performances from Kenya, Tanzania, and Germany takes place at the Kenya National Theatre

- *The Goethe-Institut and Adam Chienjo organize a dynamic 2-day festival aimed at showcasing the diversity and quality of dance in Nairobi and beyond*
- *Variety of contemporary dances including a unique depiction of classical ballet, a celebration of culture, and dance as political activism featured in this year's edition*
- *Curator, Adam Chienjo shares his motivation for connecting dancers, choreographers, and audiences on a global scale and challenging Kenyans to view dance as a dignified profession*

Frozen Power by Ian Mwaisunga ©Humphrey Gateri

On 13th and 14th July, dance enthusiasts converged for the annual Dance Life Festival at the Kenya National Theatre. This year, 6 performances featuring international dance groups, amongst them African Roots Dance Group and Muda Africa from neighboring Tanzania, and Forward Dance Company from Leipzig, Germany graced the stage. From dancers within the country, the crowd enjoyed 3 originally choreographed pieces from Nairobi, Kisumu and Tana River.

The diverse programme also incorporated musical interludes by the talented artists Akoth Jumadi and Ambasa Mandela.

"My role is to ensure representation; from genres to genders and backgrounds", discloses the curator of the festival, Adam Chienjo. "With this festival, I connect dancers to other dancers, choreographers, dance festivals, and new audiences every year. My goal is to challenge how Kenyans view dance, to create an opportunity for them to consume dance as an art form and a profession."

With the performance *'Sulle Sponde del Lago' – 'On the Shores of the Lake'*, choreographer Alessando Schiattarella and Forward Dance Company by LOFFT took a critical look at one of the most famous works of classical ballet: Swan Lake. Swan Lake is representative of a certain idealized body image and continues to shape our perceptions and our expectations towards dance to this day. Together with the dancers, who have different backgrounds and physicalities, the company's artistic project director, Gustavo Fijalkow and choreographer, Alessandro Schiattarella question such aesthetically and discursively established mindsets and power relations and create unexplored dance vocabulary.

The artistry of the African Roots Dance Group in their performance *'Madaraka'* served as a vibrant storyteller and catalyst for social awareness. The performance bravely portrays the transformative power that arises when people channel their energy collectively to dismantle the shackles of bad leadership.

With *'Nyawawa- Spirits of the Lake',* Paul Muiruri explored the phenomenon, around the concept of spirits of the dead believed to originate from the Lake and the cultural practices, involving household instruments implored to ward off these spirits.

On the final day of the festival, Jackson Atulo started off the festival by taking us through the various iconic rites of passage of the traditional rituals within the Pokomo community with his performance *'Ma'adha'*; while Marion Munga explored conversations in, of, and around the womb with her piece *'Kike'*. The colourful festival was wrapped up by MUDA Africa under artist Ian Mwaisunga, the creative director, with his latest act *'Frozen Power'*. Inspired by Tanzanian ruler, Litti Kidanka, who used bees to protect her land from colonial forces, the contemporary dance flavored with Tanzania's unique Taarab and urban music styles exhibits one woman's fight to keep her land in the hands of her people.

"The Goethe-Institut Kenya is grateful for the long-standing collaboration with Adam Chienjo. By connecting Kenyan audiences both with Kenyan and international choreographers and dancers, we provide a glimpse of the power, the aesthetic wealth, and the beauty of contemporary performance arts," says Cristina Nord, director, Goethe-Institut Nairobi.

"It is a first for us to host a company with diverse dancers and different physicalities that question the aesthetically long-established worldviews, power relations, and body images. In addition, this is the first time that we have commissioned local choreographers to create pieces with dance groups in and outside of Nairobi, namely Tana River and Kisumu", adds Susanne Gerhard from the Goethe-Institut. "There is plenty of talent and creativity outside the capital, and with this edition we tried to also make this accessible for the audience. Together with the two dance groups from Tanzania, we hope that not only the audience finds inspiration in the performances but that also the network of the dancers expands beyond national boundaries."

Dance Life Festival this year is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, Fachausschuss Basel and ProHelvetia, the Swiss Arts Council.

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About the curator – Adam Chienjo

Adam Chienjo is a contemporary dancer, poet and emerging choreographer from Nairobi, Kenya. He is co-founder and Artistic Director of Choreographic Conversations, an initiative aimed at offering a platform for dancers to create, discuss, improve and perform their work. He is also co-founder and choreographer at Uwezo Mix Dance Group, a performing group comprised of both people living with disabilities and those without disabilities.

About the Goethe-Institut

The Goethe-Institut is the Federal Republic of Germany's cultural institute, active worldwide. It contributes widely to the promotion of artists, ideas and works. In Nairobi, the Goethe-Institut connect with partners across the country to foster Kenyan-German cultural and educational exchange through cultural projects and events such as concerts, film screenings, exhibitions, literary events, festivals, and many more artistic gatherings. In addition, the institute offers capacity trainings, co-productions, school collaborations, information and knowledge platforms as well as German language teaching.