

## Byron Klassen

Byron, a founding member of the Garage Dance Ensemble (established in 2011), has since distinguished himself as a notable dancer, teacher, and choreographer.

Born in Vier Kamp, O'okiep, Byron grew up in Eerste River, Cape Town, where he attended high school and studied Dance Studies as a matriculation subject. After graduating in 2009 with strong academic results, he faced two years of indecision about his future. During this time, he briefly worked with Namjive in O'okiep and Dance For All in Cape Town, which included a transformative two-week training program in New York under a variety of esteemed teachers.

Upon returning from the United States, Byron committed to the pioneering work of the Garage Dance Ensemble in O'okiep. Under the mentorship of John Linden and Alfred Hinkel, he flourished as a dancer, teacher, and choreographer, earning recognition as a consummate dance artist and a key contributor to Linden and Hinkel's productions.

Byron quickly developed a reputation as an accomplished instructor, skilled at teaching children, teenagers, and professionals. His teaching experience includes work at all thirteen Dance Focus Schools in the Western Cape, workshops for students and professionals at Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg, and instruction for interns at The Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative in Mpumalanga.

Byron plays a crucial role in the development of Garage Dance Ensemble's teaching methodology for dancers of all ages and skill levels. His choreographic journey was enriched by a three-year professional development program initiated by Georgina Thomson at Dance Forum, funded by the NAC and RMB. This program resulted in two short works, *I Don't, I Can't, I Won't* and *Elk Een (Each One)*, which were performed at The Baxter Dance Festival and The Dance Umbrella.

In 2019, Byron premiered his first major work, *Klomp Goed in My Tuin (Bunch of Stuff in My Garden)*, a site-specific production combining music, poetry, and dance at the Garage premises in O'okiep.

In 2021, Byron conceived and created a 45-minute film, *Gat Innies Grond, Wond in My Siel (Hole in the Ground, Wound in My Soul)*, which was featured at three online festivals: NAF, JOMBA!, and Woordfees on DSTV. The film, the culmination of a year-long research process under Janine Lange's doctoral thesis guidance, explores the socio-economic and cultural impact of copper mining on Namaqualand communities. This poignant dance narrative captures the spirit and struggles of the Namaqua people and was acquired by the Durban University of Technology as a teaching resource for theater students.

Byron has collaborated with several prominent South African theater makers and choreographers, including Heinrich Reisenhoffer, Basil Appolis, David Kramer, Robyn Orlin, Jason Jacobs, and Kirvan Fortuin.

In 2017, he received the Arts and Culture Trust's Impact Award, solidifying his reputation as a rising star in the arts.

Byron epitomizes the caliber of creative talent that Garage Dance Ensemble aims to nurture. Recognizing his potential, the ensemble's management is preparing him to take on a leadership role, ensuring the continued growth and success of the organization.