
Byron Klassen – Dancer. Creator. Voice of a Region.

Byron Klassen, a founding member of the Garage Dance Ensemble (established in 2011), has established himself as a powerful presence in South African dance—as a performer, choreographer, teacher, and cultural force. Born in Vier Kamp, O’okiep, and raised in Eerste River, Cape Town, Byron first explored his passion for dance as a schoolboy, choosing Dance Studies as a matric subject and matriculating in 2009 with strong academic results.

Over the next two years, he explored different avenues, working with Namjive in O’okiep and Dance For All in Cape Town. A transformative two-week training intensive in New York, guided by esteemed international teachers, confirmed his decision to pursue a professional career in dance.

Back on South African soil, he dedicated himself to the pioneering work of the Garage Dance Ensemble. Under the mentorship of John Linden and Alfred Hinkel, Byron flourished—growing not only as a dancer and choreographer, but also as a gifted teacher fluent in the language of movement. He became known for his ability to connect with dancers across the spectrum, from children and teens to professionals. His teaching footprint includes all thirteen Dance Focus Schools in the Western Cape, workshops at the Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg, and work with interns at The Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative in Mpumalanga.

Byron has played a central role in shaping Garage’s inclusive teaching methodology and outreach. His choreographic journey was further enriched through a three-year professional development program initiated by Georgina Thomson at Dance Forum, funded by the NAC and RMB. During this time, he created two notable short works, *I Don’t, I Can’t, I Won’t* and *Elk Een (Each One)*—both of which were performed at the Baxter Dance Festival and the Dance Umbrella.

In 2019, he premiered *Klomp Goed in My Tuin (Bunch of Stuff in My Garden)*—a site-specific production blending poetry, music, and movement at Garage’s premises in O’okiep. Two years later, he created *Gat Innies Grond, Wond in My Siel (Hole in the Ground, Wound in My Soul)*, a 45-minute dance film examining the socio-economic and cultural impacts of copper mining in Namaqualand. Developed under the guidance of Janine Lange as part of a year-long research project, the film was featured at the National Arts Festival, JOMBA!, and Woordfees (DSTV), and was later acquired as a teaching resource by the Durban University of Technology.

ONS/GISTER/DANS (2024) is a large-scale, site-specific production created in Sanddrift in collaboration with Nama Khoi Productions (mentored by the Garage Dance Ensemble) amidst logistical and interpersonal challenges. Byron led a month of community engagement—including film screenings, cultural storytelling, and youth skills training—culminating in a deeply moving performance. A documentary film was created by Faroll Coetzee.

In 2025, Byron recreated his movie: *Gat Innle Grond, Wond in my Siel*, a powerful outdoor site specific version featuring Miché van Wyk from Steinkopf. The performance, which deepened the emotional intensity of the original film, was praised for its raw physicality and poignant storytelling, reaffirming Byron's ability to translate urgent socio-political themes into deeply moving stage work.

Byron has collaborated with numerous renowned South African theatre makers and choreographers, including Heinrich Reisenhofer, Basil Appolis, David Kramer, Jason Jacobs, Robyn Orlin, and the late Kirvan Fortuin. His international presence has grown steadily—from *Krummelpap* in the USA (2023), to European tours with Robyn Orlin's *How in Salt's Desert is it Possible to Blossom?* (2024), and *Fables from the Earth that stood Still* at the Louvre Abu Dhabi (2025).

His most recent work, *Wonde van die Siel (Wounds of the Soul)*, takes a bold step further. Confronting the harrowing issue of South Africa's missing children, the piece is an urgent artistic response that challenges audiences to bear witness.

Byron was awarded the Arts and Culture Trust's Impact Award in 2023, in recognition of his artistic excellence and community engagement. In 2024, he was appointed Artistic Director of the Garage Dance Ensemble, affirming his place not only as a visionary artist but as a vital voice in South Africa's cultural landscape.
