

Byron Klassen

Byron is a founder member of the Garage Dance Ensemble since December 2011 and in this time has distinguished himself as a dancer and teacher of note.

Byron was born in Vier Kamp in O'okiep but he grew up in Eerste River in Cape Town, where he attended high school with Dance Studies as a matriculation subject. Despite the fact that he graduated from grade twelve in 2009 with sufficiently good grades to attend University he experienced two years of indecision, during which time he spent short spells with Namjive in O'okiep and Dance For All in Cape Town. The latter included a two week period of training in New York with a range of teachers.

On his return from America, he committed himself to the work that Garage was initiating in O'okiep. Under the guidance of Linden and Hinkel, Byron has blossomed as a dancer, teacher and choreographer earning a reputation as a consummate dance artist in Linden/Hinkel Productions such as 'Dansoppiepad' (Dancing On The Road), 'Dansmettieduiwels' (Dancing With The Devils), 'SEEP' (Soap), 'Pros and Cons of Hitchhiking', 'Mooigenoeg om Engels the Praat' (Good Looking Enough To Speak English) and 'Krummelpap Afval en Sunlightseepbaddens' (Crummed Porridge, Tripe and Cheap Soap).

At a very young age Byron has earned a reputation as an accomplished teacher able to impart appropriate skills to children, teenagers and professionals alike, having taught at all thirteen Dance Focus Schools in the Western Cape, to students and professionals at Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg and to interns at The Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative in Mpumalanga.

Byron plays an integral role in the constant development of teaching methodologies for children, teenagers and professionals at Garage.

On the choreographic front, Byron has benefitted from a three year Professional Development programme initiated by Dance Forum and funded by NAC and RMB. This has resulted in 2 small works, 'I don't, I can't, I won't' and 'Elk Een' (Each One) being performed at both The Baxter Dance Festival and The Dance Umbrella.

His first major work was 'Klomp Goed in my Tuin' (Bunch of Stuff in My Garden), a site specific music, poetry and dance production at the Garage premises at 50 Hibiscus Street in O'okiep in 2019.

More recently he has conceived and created a 45 min film that has been fligted on three online festivals namely NAF, Jomba and Woordfees on DSTV. This work entitled 'Gat Innie Grond, Wond in my Siel' (Hole in the Ground, Wound In My Soul) was the culmination of a yearlong research process under the guidance of Janine Lange as part of her Doctorate thesis and highlights the impact of copper mining in Namaqualand towns. It is a heart-wrenching dance narrative encapsulating the spirit, struggles and complexity of the Namaqua people and has been bought by the Durban University of Technology as a teaching tool for Theatre Maker Students.

Byron has worked for established South African Directors, Heinrich Reisenhoffer (Rust Coloured Skirt, Grahamstown NAF, Artscape), Basil Appolis (Keeper of the Kumm, Grahamstown NAF, Artscape) David Kramer (Langarm, Fugard Theatre), Jason Jacobs (Tjing Tjang Cherries, Woordfees) and Choreographer Kirvan Fortuin (Katrina Die Dansende Taal, Artscape)

He teaches his fellow dancers at Garage, children and teenagers and choreographs for all Garage community and professional productions.

In 2017 he was the recipient of the Arts and Culture Trust's Impact award.

Undoubtedly Byron is a shining example of the calibre of Creative Artist that Garage Management wishes to identify and develop. Accordingly he is being groomed to take the helm of the Garage Dance Ensemble.