

NORA CHIPAUMIRE



MIRIAM

produced by MAPP International Productions

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Written and choreographed by Nora Chipaumire

Directed by Eric Ting

Soundscore composed by Omar Sosa

Performed by Nora Chipaumire and Okwui Okpokwasili

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Heralded as a “formidable figure” whose dancing “hits you with a vengeance”, Nora Chipaumire’s work is defined by her dialogue with Africa – asking difficult questions, exploring new ways of seeing, hearing and representing - and her fierce desire to move people to action.

Now, with *MIRIAM*, her first character-driven dance/theater performance, Chipaumire turns her focus inward to explore the tensions between public expectations and private desires. Chipaumire draws inspiration from the life and persona of Miriam Makeba, the iconic South African singer and civil rights activist revered as ‘Mama Afrika,’ as well as from her own experiences and dreams as a self-exiled Zimbabwean who became a professional dance artist while living outside her native country. *MIRIAM* is an investigation of icon and fame, the burdens of objectification and representing a culture -- or an entire continent -- and the weight of resistance.

The work conjures the fantasies and often harsh realities of exile, freedom and success – of trying to stay connected to one’s own culture while living far from family. Chipaumire’s quest is to create a fictional work that both fathoms the complex life journey of Makeba and confronts her own struggles to assert and sustain her artistic voice, to proclaim her freedom and to envision something new. The script draws from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, interviews with Miriam Makeba, Christian prayers and original text by Chipaumire.

Reflecting the non-linear nature of the narrative, the music and stage environment for *MIRIAM* will be suggestive, rather than literal. Jazz and Afro-Cuban composer and pianist, **Omar Sosa**, will compose the soundscore; Long Wharf Theatre associate artistic director **Eric Ting** will direct; **Olivier Clause** will create the lighting and visual design; **Naoko Nagata** will design costumes; and **Okwui Okpokwasili** will perform the evening-length work with Chipaumire.

MIRIAM will premiere in Fall 2012. Co-commissioners include Brooklyn Academy of Music, EMPAC and Flynn Center for Performing Arts. MAPP is seeking additional co-commissioning and presenting partners. **Presenters of *MIRIAM* may receive up to 50% fee subsidy through National Dance Project Tour Support.**

NORA CHIPAUMIRE

Nora Chipaumire was born in Mutare, Zimbabwe during the Chimurenga Chechipiri, or Second War of Liberation. A self-exiled artist, she moved to the U.S. in 1989 and now lives in New York City. She studied dance formally and informally in Zimbabwe, Cuba, Jamaica and the U.S. A graduate of the University of Zimbabwe's School of Law, she holds an M.A. in Dance and M.F.A. in Choreography and Performance from Mills College (CA).

Chipaumire is a recipient of two New York Dance and Performance (aka Bessie) Awards: in 2005 for her choreographic work, *Chimurenga*, and in 2007 for her performances with Urban Bush Women, where she was a featured performer for six years (2003-2008) and served as Associate Artistic Director in 2007-2008. Chipaumire was honored with the 2007 Mariam McGlone Emerging Choreographer Award from Wesleyan University Center for the Arts, and a Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography 2007-08 Choreographic Fellowship.

Her works include *I Ka Nye (You Look Good)* (2010), created and performed with choreographer Souleymane Badolo and musician Obo Addy; *lions will roar, swans will fly, angels will wrestle heaven, rains will break, gurkurahundi!* (2009), created and performed with the legendary Zimbabwean musician, Thomas Mapfumo; an evening of solos, entitled *Poems* (2007); *Chimurenga* (2005), her first work to tour nationally; and *Dark Angels*, commissioned by Dance Alloy. She is also working on two collaborative choreography projects—*Kimya*, with the Kenyan ensemble JOKAJOK; and *visible* with Urban Bush Women premiering in October 2011 at Harlem Stage.

On film, Chipaumire is featured in the documentary *Movement (R)evolution Africa (a story of an art form in four acts)*, produced and directed by Joan Frosch and co-directed and edited by Alla Kovgan. She choreographed and appears in the award-winning film, *Nora*, directed by Alla Kovgan and David Hinton; and *Dark Swan*, directed by Laurie Coyle.

Chipaumire's work has been widely presented in NYC and nationally. Presenting venues include: 651 ARTS, Dance New Amsterdam, Dance Theater Workshop, Danspace Project, and BRICstudio (NY); Arizona State University (AZ); August Wilson Center for African American Culture (PA); CD Forum (WA); Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (MD); Cleveland State University (OH); Global DanceFest at North Fourth Art Center (NM); Idaho State University (ID); The Myrna Loy Center (MT); New Orleans Dance Festival (LA); ODC Theater and SUSHI Performance and Visual Art (CA); and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Summer Stages Dance, Williams College and The Yard (MA). Her works have also gone to Canada, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Kenya and The Netherlands. Chipaumire has taught students of all ages in community colleges, public schools, and recreational studios in the U.S. and internationally.

HER VOICE



I began as a choreographer making dances of deep sorrow and physical poetry. Watching in self-exile as my native Zimbabwe collapsed, I wanted to expose the realities of a family thrown asunder, matched by the will to survive. Negotiating expectations of family, Shona traditions, and modern dance, I created an overtly political body of work while hiding personal concerns behind big demons: colonialism, apartheid, globalization, racism. In recent years, I have evolved from a particular view of Africa and of my own experiences; from grief to rebuilding, sorrow to inspiration. MIRIAM is driven by this evolution, and by those hidden personal concerns. How much of the artist “Nora Chipaumire” has been made in the USA? How much in Zimbabwe? Being a dance artist is not the narrative I dreamt for myself as a young girl in Harare, and part of me rejoices at the “freedom” I’ve had to re-make myself in America, and in dance. But the choice between family and dance has been both an obstacle to proclaiming that freedom, and an opportunity through which I could envision, and start, something new.

This theme—of a woman finding her voice—demands a new form from me; thus, in my first project as playwright, I seek to answer the “who/why/what/when/how” through the written word, then words will become dance. This is an exciting (and scary) reversal of my familiar choreographic process. Typically, I become passionate about an idea and respond physically, then do the intellectual research to connect my kinetic passion to the larger world. My artistic vision for MIRIAM also springs from my desire to evolve a form of African “total theater”—a complete integration of physical elements (scenery/light/ costumes) and of bodies in this space (dance/voice/music) with energy and spiritual presence.

-Nora Chipaumire

COLLABORATORS

ERIC TING (Director)

Eric Ting is Associate Artistic Director at Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, CT. Recent directing credits include world premieres of Aditi Kapil's *Agnes Under the Big Top* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea* (which he also co-adapted), both at Long Wharf; Anna Deavere Smith's *Let Me Down Easy* (American Repertory Theatre); and Donald Margulies' *Shipwrecked! An Entertainment...* (Shakespeare Santa Cruz). Upcoming: *Macbeth 1969* (Long Wharf) and the world premiere of Jackie Sibblies Drury's *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation...* (Victory Gardens). Recent developmental workshops include Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *Appropriate* (Vineyard Arts Project), Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's *A Soldier's Tale* (Marin Theatre), as well as workshops and readings at ACT, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, the LARK, and the Public Theater among others. Ting's work has been presented internationally, including France, Canada, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Bali. He has taught acting, directing, mask, and puppetry in various workshops across the country; and is a founding member of the artists' collective INTELLIGENT BEASTS. Awards and grants include a TCG New Generations Future Leaders fellowship and a Jerome & Roslyn Milstein Meyer Career Development Prize.



OMAR SOSA (Soundscape Composer)

Cuban composer and pianist Omar Sosa is one of the most versatile jazz artists on the scene today. He fuses a wide range of jazz, world music, and electronic elements with his native Afro-Cuban roots to create a fresh and original urban sound – all with a Latin jazz heart. Omar Sosa's musical trajectory has taken him from Camagüey and Havana to touring in Angola, the Congo, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua in the 1980s; to a sojourn in Ecuador in the early 1990s; to an extended presence on the San Francisco Bay Area Latin jazz scene; to his current engagement with artists from France, Cuba, Brazil, and several North, West, and East African nations. Sosa received a lifetime achievement award from the Smithsonian Associates in Washington, DC in 2003 for his contribution to the development of Latin jazz in the United States. He has received six GRAMMY nominations, as well as two nominations from the BBC Radio 3 World Music Awards, in 2004 and 2006. In 2003 he received the Afro-Caribbean Jazz Album of the Year Award from the Jazz Journalists Association in NYC for his recording *Sentir*; and a nomination from the Jazz Journalists Association for Latin Jazz Album of the Year in 2005 for his recording *Mulatos*, featuring Paquito D'Rivera. Omar Sosa has received orchestral commissions from Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and the Oakland East Bay Symphony; the city of Girona, Spain and the Festival de Músicas Religiosas y del Mundo de Girona; and from the Barcelona Jazz Festival to present a tribute to Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue* recording, featuring Afro-Cuban interpretations of the seminal Davis work on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.



OLIVIER CLAUSSE (Lighting and Visual Design)

Olivier Clause lives in Le Mans, France. Clause's career in lighting started in the cinema where he worked on feature-films with Philippe de Broca, Jacques Audiard, Philippe Harel, Pierre Salvadori, Raul Ruiz, and Olivier Marchal, among others. In 1996 he collaborated with the performing artist Stefan Fortin, for *El Amor Es Ciego* and in 1999 with Abdel Baybay for *Au Hasard des Oiseaux*. From 1999 to 2001 he was the resident lighting engineer/designer of the Tapis Franc Company (street arts) and is currently the lighting engineer/designer for Têtes d'Atmosphere. In 2001, Clause founded Baltringos - a collective of builders and plastic artists. Since 2005, he has worked with choreographer and performer Florence Loison and her company, Zutano Bazar, as a videographer and lighting designer.

OKWUI OKPOKWASILI (Performer)

Okwui Okpokwasili's credits include "Leda" in *Sounding* at HERE Arts Center, "Goneril" in Young Jean Lee Theater Company's *LEAR* at Soho Rep, "Joan" in *Joan Dark*, a co-production of the Goodman Theater and the Linz 09 European Culture Capital. With the early support of 651Arts & FUSED, Okpokwasili premiered the 2010 Bessie Award winning *Pent-Up: a revenge dance* at PS 122, an original work made in collaboration with and directed by Peter Born. She recently completed a tour of Ralph Lemon's latest piece, *How Can You Stay In The House All Day And Not Go Anywhere?* and together they were a featured duet at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. For her performance in the third installation of Ralph Lemon's *Geography Trilogy*, *Come Home*, *Charley Patton*, she received a 2005 Bessie Award for Performance. Okpokwasili has worked with Annie Dorsen, Richard Foreman, Josh Fox, Melanie Joseph, Richard Maxwell and Dean Moss.



NAOKO NAGATA (Costume Designer)



Naoko Nagata started her career as a biochemist in Japan. Her evolution into costume making is a long story. Working closely with collaborators, Naoko helps bring to life what she herself calls, "the creation of a shared dream."



*Dancing is for me a primal means of self-preservation,
self-assertion, self-determination: this is always the intention
behind any and all the work I have created in my life.*

- Nora Chipaumire