

Project Report

‘Differences’

A Contemporary Dance Choreography



The Amizero Dance Company
The Rebecca Davis Dance Company

1 December- 30 December 2009

By Celesta Duivenvoorde

- Project Organisations:** Amizero Dance Company
Rebecca Davis Dance Company
- Project Participants:** Wesley Ruzibiza – Dancer & Project Coordination
Rebecca Davis – Choreographer
Viateur Benimana – Dancer
Eugene Dushime – Dancer
Francine Nyirakobwa - Dancer
Celesta Duivenvoorde – Photography & Documentation
Emmanuel Munyarukumbuzi – Concept & Translation
Francine Baughman – Costumes
Steve Rukongi – Lighting Design
- Project Locations:** Theatre de Verdure, Huye (Butare), Rwanda
Ishyo Arts Centre, Kigali, Rwanda
- Project Dates:** 1 December 2009 - 30 December 2009
- Purpose of the Report:** This is the final report of the Differences project, which took place in Rwanda from 1 to 30 December 2009.



The 'Differences' artists from left to right: Viateur Benimana, Eugene Dushime, Rebecca Davis and Wesley Ruzibiza.

1. Project Description

Project background

The idea for the 'Differences' project was born in 2008 during a visit to Rwanda by an American choreographer, Rebecca Davis from the 'Rebecca Davis Dance Company'. During her visit she met several Rwandan dancers of the 'Amizero Dance Company' and this led to the wish to create a collaborative contemporary dance choreography, which would address the issue of differences between people and groups within a society.

Concept and objectives of the project

The concept of the project was to bring together artists from different countries for a mutual intercultural learning experience in which the artists could explore and translate their ideas on the meaning of differences into a contemporary dance choreography. The purpose of the final dance production was to address prevailing notions on the often frightening existence of all kinds of differences between people and groups, like religion, language, race, age, and gender, and to convey a message of tolerance and celebration of differences between opposing groups.

An additional objective was to explore the possibilities of building a strong ongoing partnership between the two contemporary dance companies and to look at ideas for working together on future joint projects.



One of the lifts during the 'Differences' performance in Kigali.

Project setting

Rwanda has a history of traditional dance, but contemporary dance forms are as yet undeveloped in the country. Dance is by origin a male activity in Rwanda and is not often professionally practised by females. Accordingly, the 'Amizero Dance Company' is the first African contemporary dance company in Rwanda and Wesley Ruzibiza is one of the first contemporary dance choreographers in the country.

The project had to take these circumstances into account both when planning the project and during the execution of the project. Choosing the dancers and anticipating how the dance piece would be received by the audience were specifically considered.

2. Activities

Ballet and choreography

On the first of December 2009, Rebecca Davis, Wesley Ruzibiza, Viateur Benimana, Francine Nyirakobwa, and Celesta Duivenvoorde arrived in Butare to commence the project. For the following 4 weeks, rehearsals took place 6 days a week from 2 December to 29 December at either the Theatre de Verdure in Butare or the Ishyo Centre in Kigali. All rehearsals were started off with a classical ballet class taught by Rebecca Davis to strengthen and train the bodies of the dancers for the new movements they would have to learn for the choreography. From the very first day, the project received a lot of attention from interested passers by and people who had heard about the project. Thus, the rehearsals were often viewed by a large group of spectators.

Rebecca had developed the choreography for the performance prior to her arrival in Rwanda and had selected the accompanying music to the dance piece. This choreography was adapted during the course of the project to take into account the skills, movement styles and input of the dancers.

During the first week of rehearsals the female dancer of the group encountered many difficulties with the contemporary dance movements and lacked the stamina and



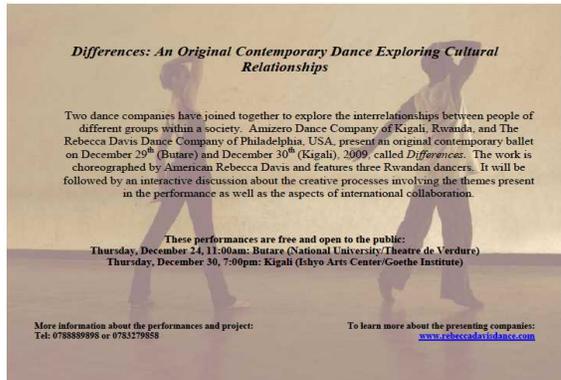
enthusiasm both male dancers showed in discovering and studying the new movements. When in the second week the rehearsals took place in Kigali, this offered the opportunity to meet the other dancers of the 'Amizero Dance Company'. In mutual agreement, the artists decided that the dance piece would benefit most from having the three strongest dancers available for the choreography and therefore the project continued with 3 male dancers, with Eugene Dushime as the third dancer.

The all male cast during the dress rehearsal of the performance.

The change of the composition of the group meant that the choreography had to be adapted to take into account the skill set of Eugene, the altered interrelations of the group and the modified story line of the piece.

Promotional activities

Several strategies were used to promote the performances in Huye and Kigali. First of all, a flyer was created in English and Kinyarwanda, that was distributed by email to our contacts in both Huye and Kigali. The flyer was also forwarded to the contacts of the American Embassy and the email lists of Global Youth Connect, Kigali Life, Loose Lips and the Rwandan Association of University Women. In addition, the flyer was posted on the Community Event Calendar of the Loose Lips Website¹. A poster advertising both performances was created by Kalaos Media and was posted at both performance spaces and throughout both cities.



Flyer that was distributed by email to advertise the performance.



Poster of the 'Differences' project.

To inform the audience of the background, the participants and the synopsis of the project, a 'Differences' program was handed out to all viewers of the performance in Kigali.

Professor in Literature at the Kigali Institute of Education and writer for the New Times, Frank Tanganika, was contacted to provide him with information on the 'Differences' project and to invite him for the performance in Kigali. His article about the 'Differences' project: "In search of Rwanda National Theatre" appeared in the New Times on 7 January 2010².

Huye performance

The performance of the contemporary choreography was planned for 29 December in Huye. Unfortunately, several problems arose with the performance space at the National University of Rwanda, where 'Differences' originally planned to perform and eventually it was decided to move the Huye performance to the performance space of Theatre de Verdure on 24 December.

The performance in Huye was attended by close to a hundred spectators and was followed by a lively discussion. This performance offered the opportunity to demonstrate what

¹ Loose Lips: the Kigali Community Newsletter (December 2009) at <http://www.kigalivibe.com/looselips/December2009_Part1/Community/EventCalendar/Index.html>

² F. Tanganika, 'In search of Rwanda National Theatre' (7 January 2010) *New Times* at <<http://www.newtimes.co.rw/index.php?issue=14133&article=24573>>

needed to be changed in the choreography, costumes and characters of the story to improve the dance piece for the performance in Kigali.

Kigali performance

On 30 December, the 'Differences' programme was performed in the Ishyo Arts Centre in Kigali and was attended by close to 300 people. During the seating of the audience, a picture slide show was shown on a large screen to illustrate to the audience the development of both the dancers and the dance piece. The slide show was followed by a hip-hop act of 5 very talented disadvantaged youth, 'Kids for Unity', who asked for an opportunity to perform two of their own creations. The main event of the night, the 'Differences' performance, was very well perceived and the audience was thrilled about the choreography, the dancers and the message delivered by the dance piece.

An interesting multilingual discussion in English, French and Kinyarwanda took place after the performance in which the audience could pose their questions and share their impressions, opinions and recommendations with the artists and the rest of the audience. One of the viewers expressed: "I am really impressed by what I have seen. I have never seen young Rwandese dancers dance in the way that you have. Really, I was very impressed. I really had no words for it, the lady next to me was surprised by me, because I uttered little cries, because what I was seeing was so amazing, so wonderful!"

3. Results

The project offered the artists an extraordinary opportunity to learn from each others' cultures, competences and dance backgrounds. The cultural diversity of the artists truly enriched the entire process of the project. Whereas the dancers learned a completely new dance style, Rebecca in turn learned a lot from the dancers: "I have taught in several different countries in the world and I am amazed at the talent in Rwanda, dance-wise, particularly with the superior use of rhythm and musicality".

The project has introduced traditional ballet to the dancers and has given them the opportunity to practise ballet with a professional ballet teacher for a month's time. This experience has taught the dancers excellent new dance techniques to strengthen, train and move their bodies, a practise they now intend to incorporate in their daily rehearsal schedule at the 'Amizero Dance Company'. When asked about his views on learning classical dance during the project, Eugene explained: "Diversity, for me, is a richness. I think it will assist me in communicating with my public and in bringing across the message". Wesley replied: "It gives me a certain discipline, a discipline in movement".

The message of the dance piece gave the audience the opportunity to contemplate their own differences and their behavioural responses when confronted with these differences. The choreography was able to address these often unconscious behaviour patterns and to bring about an important awareness in the way people perceive and behave towards each other.

Both dance performances in Huye and Kigali have demonstrated, considering the number of Rwandese spectators and the expressions of the audience, an increasing interest in contemporary dance in Rwanda. The project succeeded in bringing about interesting discussions and passionate statements for the need of a growing contemporary dance scene in Rwanda and the need to inspire and encourage the next generation of dancers.

An unanticipated, but no less significant result was that the Kigali performance, that was being watched by the young aspiring dancers of the 'Kids for Unity' group, had a chance to stimulate this new talent and to build bridges between these young dancers and the 'Amizero Dance Company'. The opportunity they were given to perform for a large audience boosted their confidence, gave them a belief in their own competences and a sense of empowerment.

The 'Differences' project has established the basis for a continuing collaboration between the 'Rebecca Davis Dance Company' and the 'Amizero Dance Company'. The companies are currently discussing a potential new project for the end of 2010. Any future potential collaboration would again address common concerns, themes or issues and will be expected to benefit the artists of both companies and to enrich both countries' cultures of contemporary dance.



Wesley Ruzibiza and Viateur Benimana fighting out their differences in the Kigali performance.

4. Conclusion

The 'Differences' project offered an unprecedented opportunity for artists from different cultural and artistic backgrounds to introduce Rwandan society and culture to a new dance style. The dance choreography showed the universality of the theme of differences between groups within a society addressed by the piece. Viewers from all backgrounds and nationalities were able to get an important message from the piece to celebrate their differences and to appreciate the gifts of living in multicultural societies.

www.amizero.com
www.rebeccadavidance.com