

Set in Motion shines a light on living with purpose



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

10 Jul 2023

Figure of 8 Dance Collective, helmed by co-founders Grant van Ster and Shaun Oelf, premiered *Set in Motion* at The Baxter Golden Arrow Studio in Rondebosch, Cape Town, and is running until Saturday, 15 July 2023. Billed as a theatre dance production, *Set in Motion* explores the quandaries that often prevent us from realising our full potential, living life to the fullest, fulfilling a dream, or listening to our inner voice.



Image supplied

Van Ster and Oelf have a knack for connecting with dance and theatre fans through their ability to take dominant themes out there in the universe, affecting so many of us, and presenting them in a down-to-earth, accessible format for analysis, introspection, and hopefully action. It's an award-winning method that is anything but formulaic.

Their choreographic style is instinctive, workshopped over days and weeks until it settles into muscle memory, often enabling emotive execution enhanced by carefully curated music and text. Even if you have no idea what the piece is about beforehand, their delivery is so visceral that you can't help but be drawn in on some level.

I consider myself privileged to have seen this duo hone their craft since the start of their careers, training under living legends Alfred Hinkel and John Linden and watching them take that learning and evolve it for the benefit of their company, their students and their audiences. The guiding principles are unmistakable, their passion ever-present, their influence clearly evident on youth hungry to learn how to communicate through "the language of dance... to become more self-aware, to rise above, and have the freedom to dream".

Set in Motion features Oelf, Ockert Prins, André Maarman and Lisa Nongqongqo, directed by Van Ster. They are a cohesive unit, timing movement and manipulating props to the microsecond in a piece that immerses them, body and soul, in the choreography demanding a level of trust that leaves us gasping, screaming or weeping as the mood grabs us.

That mood has a lot to do with musical choice (or sound design), for which Oelf once again has control, in collaboration with Original Music by Franco Prinsloo. Nico Scheepers provides the text for selected voiceovers. The latter wasn't always easy to distinguish from where I was sitting in the front row. Perhaps it has something to do with where one is listening from (is it more apparent at the back, near the sound desk, for example), but this extract from the programme notes is an example of the poetic nature of the Afrikaans script – you really don't want to miss a word.

“Ek maak my met ‘n naald. In en uit. Op en af duik die ding in my vingers deur die branders van my vel soos ‘s staal dolfyn, of ‘n klankgolf-klein stekies wat my lippe heg, borduurwerk op my agterkant in goue gare: ek het jou lief, my lam.”

Kudos to Carin Bester for set and costume design and Andi Colombo for lighting, which all have an essential part to play in the piece's success. I loved how the swathes of fabric were used in different sequences to convey various moods, from playfulness and possession to seduction and despair.

The extract accompanying the above-quoted text, featuring Oelf and Nongqongqo, was an audience favourite, but something this group does so well (like their contemporaries who have been similarly trained) is use their own voices. What they say to each other, how they say it, how they laugh, and freestyle (which in Oelf's case is a must for die-hard fans) is immensely valuable in drawing the audience in. It makes them relatable, reinforces their connection with each other, and makes us eager to catch every nuance of their dialogue.

The closing sound sequence stays with me, unexpectedly turning towards the spiritual in a series that covers a range of genres. For me, it was the most transformative. Reminiscent of Gregorian chants, it takes the energy and momentum of the piece onto another level, inviting those on and off stage to lose themselves in the moment.

“Ek sal dans tot ek dood gaan, een voet voor die ander...”

Set in Motion is on at *The Baxter Golden Arrow Studio* in Cape Town until July 15. Booking is through *Webtickets*, online at www.webtickets.co.za/baxtertheatre or any *Pick and Pay* store.

ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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