

EN

PROGRAM

Voor Nederlands,
draai om.

DALILLA HERMANS



her(e)

NTGent

YOU MIGHT ALSO BE INTERESTED IN:

HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE II

FAUSTIN LINYEKULA

05.03–28.03

🗨️ FR, LINGALA 🇳🇱 NL, EN 📍 NTGent Minard

The world-famous Congolese choreographer and director Faustin Linyekula creates a performance in which he reflects on key moments in the history of theatre: the founding of the Zaire National Ballet in 1974, not long after the independence, when African countries were reinstating their own identity.



LAM GODS

MILO RAU

11.03–28.03

🗨️ NL, EN, GERMAN 🇳🇱 NL, EN

📍 NTGent Schouwburg

In the reconstruction of the Ghent Altarpiece on stage, a panorama of our present world emerges and at the same time a manifesto for art and spirituality in a human life.
'An instant classic.' (De Standaard)

INFO, TICKETS
& TOURDATA:

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DALILLA HERMANS

Image on cover: © Manoe Adusei-Owusu

 DUTCH  EN

Duration of the performance: 70 min Premiere: 04.02.2020



Please turn off your mobile phone during the performance.
It is not allowed to make audiovisual recordings.



For years I had the idea of bringing together the black women whose lives and careers I follow. Ever since Oprah Winfrey's Legends Ball. NTGent gave me the location and means to isolate myself with some of them for two days. And so the foundation of this theatre play was laid during a weekend in December in 2019 in Villa Hellebosch.

Performer Abigail Abraham, an amazing talent who I came across entirely by chance, has turned out to be my perfect right-hand woman. Together we sat down at my kitchen table, took an A3 sheet and a black marker. We wrote down the names of all those who had to be there. In the end we came up with just over forty women. Thirty of them showed up, even though there were only two weeks between the call we sent them via WhatsApp and the weekend. That says something. Getting people together who are so busy, on such a short notice, can only succeed if what you want to do is also important and necessary to them.

During the weekend we never really introduced ourselves. It became a running gag. We realised that what we do is not who we are. That our achievements were subordinate to the unity of our emotions. In this publication I won't zoom in on the track record of every woman who participated in this project, but on what they mean to me and why we invited them. ●

What did you think of the show?

#WE ARE HERE #NTGENT
#DALILLA HERMANS

This publication was printed
on recycled paper.



**CONCEPT & TEKST &
SCENOGRAPHY & DIRECTION**

Dalilla Hermans

PERFORMANCE & CO-CREATION

Abigail Abraham

**PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY
& AUDIOVISUAL DIRECTION**

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CO-DRAMATURGY

Eline Banken

Stefan Bläske

Kaatje De Geest

MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Willem Blontrock

SINGERS

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Prisca Agnes Nishimwe

Judith Okon

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PRODUCTION

NTGent

THANKS TO

Manoe Adusei-Owusu (Sunkwa), Lisa Akinyi May, Emma-Lee Amponsah, Anne-Sophie Chioma Opara (ANSO), Aïcha Cissé, Heleen Debeuckelaere, Aminata Demba, Renaldi Diombo, Noenah Ese (dj Black Mamba), Inès Eshun, Vanessa Gaudy (dj Vaneeshua), Melat Gebeyaw Nigusie, Sabine Ingabire, Hannah Kenyatah Opong, Rebecca Louis, Lisette Ma Neza, Kiangana Maputshi, Nefera Mavambu, Coely Mbueno, Marie Niase, Reine Nkiambote, Soe Nsuki, Stella Nyanchama, Dominique Nzeyimana, Lindah Nyirenda, Judith Okon, Martha da Rossa Canga Anthonia (Martha Da'ro), Colette Umuhoza, Aparecida Vi Baijot

You do realise we are here?
In these bodies big or small,
With these stories, we are here,
Shaking, doubting, alone in the desert,
Standing tall.
We are here.

With salty sweat under our pits, bags under our eyes,
Bags under our arms, full of fear, hurt, regret,
We are here.
On the move to a place called 'us',
A place none of us have found yet,
For now: we are here.
Our names passed down from generations of broken,
We are the new, the here, the now, the awoken.

No mirrors, no reflections and still we see we,
No mirrors, no reflections, still learned to be me.

I am black. Yeah I said it.
I am black, dark, rich with melanine, daughter of the motherland,
Black, dark, woman, here.
And I never fit.

My skin feels too tight to hold it all in,
My family too complex, or not complex enough,
My voice too soft or loud or raspy or clean, or soulful or white,
Never at peace, at home, never quite right.

But
You do realise we are here?

text: Dalilla Hermans

Please dont tell me I'm magic,
Don't tell me I'm magic,
Don't tell me I'm magic,
If that's all you are willing to do.

Don't love my cool hair, don't try a quick feel,
Don't ask me how 'it works', don't ask if it's real,
Don't compliment my complexion,
Don't compare it to yours after a tanning session,

Don't call me guuurl and snap your fingers,
Don't sing along to Solange, Lauryn or any of these singers,
Don't rap along to Nicki, Missy or even Cardi B,
Don't get offended by that, so easily,

Don't ask about my headwraps, don't wish you had a 'fro,
Don't steal my contacts, or ask who all I know.
Don't put me on your cover to show diversity,
Don't use me on a poster for your white university,

Don't tell me you're excited about having me on your panel,
Don't say you wish there were more of me on your tv channel,
Don't tell me about your trip to Africa, or share the wisdom you took,
Don't say you understand now, don't recommend a book

Please don't tell me I'm magic,
Don't tell me I'm magic,
Don't tell me I'm magic,
If that's all you are willing to do.

If you won't march next to us in the streets,
Don't talk about the black man in your sheets,
If you stay silent while I'm being worn as a costume each December,
Don't think I won't remember,
Don't ask me how I season my words or my food,
If you still think you're just being misunderstood

Just because you say so, our struggle is not the same.
How can it be if you are not willing to take any blame.
Every single one of your problems is my problem too.
Every single one of your battles I have fought with you.
Where are you when we talk about the extra load on my back.
When I fear for my brother with an officer's knee on his neck,
Where are you when I am forced to take off parts of my outfit and identity,
Where are you when I am being stripped of my dignity?

Don't cry when I call you racist, your tears can get me fired,
Don't ramble on about a glass ceiling when we don't even get hired,
You are not woke, if I'm still broke.
Listen when I tell you I am in pain, I feel it just as much boo,
It's not that I don't like you, it's that I don't trust you.

Please don't tell me I'm magic,
Don't tell me I'm magic,
Don't tell me I'm magic,
If that's all you are willing to do.

Don't twerk with me if you won't work with me,
Don't sound like me, if you're not bound to me.
Don't talk sisterhood, till you're IN my hood.
Don't grow up with me then not show up for me.
I don't want you near me, until you hear me.

text: Dalilla Hermans



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MY SISTERS

From the notes of Dalilla Hermans

1. Vanessa Gaudy

Vanessa and I became friends when we were 20 dating was important and relationships were messy. I had the key to her studio in Ghent and I can't keep count of the days we watched reality TV with pizza and hangovers. Our friendship stood the test of time, even when I became a mom, she was a DJ, I was a writer and in the end she was a mom too. She was my first real black friend and one of the first people I interviewed about racism. That interview was the first time we explored that side of our relationship and it gave me a lot of insights.

2. Nefera Mavambu

Nefera is the godmother of my youngest daughter, her husband is the godfather of my eldest daughter. I often call their family 'family': family we chose ourselves. We got to know each other because our husbands are best friends. Nefera is someone who radiates peace, who can calm my turbulent head by listening and then asking the right, striking questions. Our conversations are often about motherhood, about marriage. I was curious about how she experiences

her double roots and I knew that this weekend would require her quiet, strong strength.

3. Aparacida Vi Baijot

Vi is one of the most honest people I know. Someone who dares to fail, discovers new hobbies and countries, throws herself fearlessly into love and is always sincere. Even when she is angry. And who then looks at herself, with an open mind, and dares to admit when she was wrong. And I learn from that. We have had deep conversations, about love and about our adoption. About doubts about our identity. I knew she would be an added value in conversations in which people have to dare to jump over their own insecurities. That's what she does all the time.

4. Aminata Demba

I sent her a message after a newspaper had offered to write an outraged review about a film she was played. The film had quite a few caricatural elements. But I decided not to do that and to meet her first. As we sat across from each other with a cappuccino between us, I soon felt a kind of

kinship. It's not easy to be under a magnifying glass in the media. She does it with grace and dignity.

5. Marie Niasse

When I was studying journalism, there was one other black student in my class. At the time, that was unique. We often got mixed up, even though we don't look alike. We didn't become friends, but there was a certain understanding between us. A nod, a wink in the hallway. Many years later, while tuning in on ATV, I saw a black woman presenting the news. The very first black news anchor in Flanders was my ex-classmate. We followed each other on Facebook. We liked each others posts. I wanted to keep her in my circle.

6. Coely Mbueno

Coely is raw talent. Her star rose quickly. I was instantly in love with her energy. Eager to learn, open mind, open heart. I saw her as a 'little sister'. Until I had to interview her for some project and we called for hours. And I felt her greatness, intelligence and depth. She is the little sister whose lap I want to lay my head on, to listen to her old soul.

7. Dominique Nzeyimana

In 2006 I participated in a program on TMF: *King of Festivals*. I was about twenty, young and reckless and especially there to party. The director of the program was a young, black woman, called Dominique. Seeing how she was in control of a team, how she was listened to, changed my life. I wanted

to be like her. And secretly, I still do. Dominique and I don't do smalltalk, we do 'real talk'. And I knew this weekend could use her common sense, steadiness and maturity.

8. Stella Nyanchama

I call Stella 'mama Stella' and I'm not the only one. I don't remember how or where we met, but from the moment I was actively engaged in anti-racism, her name came up. Stella has lived, has children about my age. Her honest stories give us insights. When I don't see the wood for the trees, she is one of those people who gives me direction again, with mildness and love.

9. Aïcha Cissé

Aïcha is one of those women who I had been admiring from a distance, for a long time now. Through social media I keep an eye on what she does and Abigail also mentioned her immediately. She's black, Muslim, a theatre maker, hilarious meme-sharer: an all-round interesting woman. I was very curious about her and knew she would be an added value. As it turned out.

10. Soe Nsuki

Few people understand the storm in which I have been as an anti-racism activist in recent years better than Soe. She is my phone call when I am overwhelmed by heaviness or fear in the middle of the night. I am hers. We were colleagues at *Charlie Magazine* and got to know each other better after she once called me in a panic, when racism knocked her down. When you

get to know someone that way, the relationship becomes real and close. Besides that, there's no one that I can laugh louder with than with her. In the white, über-male comedy world, she stands her ground. She just had to be there. Good humour is a form of intelligence. Soe is hyperintelligent and hilarious.

11. Renaldi Diombo

When Renaldi became my colleague at *Charlie Magazine*, I was intimidated by her. She radiated such power, such self-confidence that it made me quiet. She said to me: 'Before I knew you, I found what you wrote nagging sometimes, you pulled me out of my comfort zone.' It felt like a 'stamp of approval.' She became my very first 'manager' and taught me what it's like to grow up with black, African parents. Her fearless, self-assured spirit would prove to be indispensable during the weekend.

12. Heleen Debeuckelaere

Co-author of *Zwart*, co-troublemaker, co-recalcitrant voice. We understand each other without too many words, know exactly when it is time to leave the party and go smoke outside. I recognised a kind of rebelliousness in her, a drive to walk our own path. I feel safe with her. She was the co-activist I needed, who showed understanding for the human side of the struggle.

13. Reine Nkiambote

Her name actually says it all: queen. She was one of those friend-of-friends I didn't really know but followed closely. I saw her on social media seemingly stringing together one success after another, effortlessly. Who was this *queen* who can wind the world around her finger? Reine is someone you unconsciously want to do things for. Her beauty, cleverness and eloquence shine so brightly, that it sometimes even hurts your eyes.

14. Anne-Sophie Chioma Opara

I met her through her alias Anso: a young, black, female illustrator. When I read the children's book she wrote and illustrated, I wanted to get to know her right away. I saw a sparkle in her eyes that made me curious. A sincerity too. I hadn't dared to dream how much she dared to share on the weekend, how she became an important part of it.

15. Martha da Rossa

Canga Anthonio

I didn't dare to see the film *Black*, in which Martha plays a leading role, for a long time. I knew some of the footage would hurt me. So when I met Martha, I hadn't seen the film. For me she was the lead singer of Soul'art. When I called her for an interview, I heard a very self-conscious young woman, one who made an impression on me. I watched it anyway. And I was amazed. So young, but with an amount of depth that many older



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people can learn from. As it turned out during the weekend.

16. Emma-Lee Amponsah

Emma-Lee is that kind of person who seemingly says what she thinks and does that fearlessly. The years before, she challenged me by taking a very critical look at what I wrote. She made me sharper. Her criticism was never on the player, always on the ball. She challenged me to look beyond my own eyes. I wanted her there, because she keeps me awake. With her among us, the weekend would be more than just a cuddly party.

17. Hannah-Kenyatah Opong

When I was pregnant with my third, and my first book was due to be published, one afternoon I was sitting on a terrace in Antwerp. The day before, I had bumped into the account of a young artist on Instagram. Turns out he was married to a black woman. I started following them both. Suddenly I saw them walk past the terrace from my online world. Impulsively, I called their names. The woman in question also turned out to be pregnant. Two weeks later they were at my book launch. A month later we took a picture of our pregnant bellies. I often joke that Hannah is my 'anger translator', she expresses the anger I sometimes feel, but have often suppressed, in a lovely, juicy Campine accent.

18. Lisette Ma Neza

When Lisette climbs onto a stage, the audience falls silent. With her fragile, sweet voice she urges everyone around her to remain silent and listen. Her slam poetry makes me cry. We were often invited to the same events, sometimes I was her supporting act, sometimes she was mine. If you can transform an audience at her age without raising your voice, you have something... I don't know what. I had to ask her to join us.

19. Judith Okon

I remember how I once heard Judith sing on an open mic. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. Her lips, her face, her literally wild hairs and then that amazing voice. I didn't know how fast to make her a friend. She blew me my socks off. And then she turned out to be the warmest woman I know. I followed her career and couldn't understand why she isn't world famous yet. Judith is our Aretha, our Whitney, our 'insert a souldiva'. With a heart of gold. Sisterhood in person.

20. Inès Eshun

I saw the short film *The Life of Esteban* before I knew who the filmmaker was, and I thought to myself: this masterpiece was made by a black woman. And so it turned out. It was Inès. I already knew her a little bit, and thought she was an elegant, sweet appearance and I was in awe of her. I'm on a pitch committee myself for

feature films and I get in touch with quite a lot of filmmakers. Rarely have I been so impressed by someone's talent and personality. I wasn't sure if she would want to join. She didn't know me, after all, but I definitely wanted Inès on the weekend.

21. Melat Gebeyaw Nigussie

Melat also co-authored the anthology *Zwart*. I first saw her when we gave an interview about it. When I read her contribution about her relationship with her white boyfriend, I realised how much we have in common. It was Melat who, at an unguarded moment, reminded me of the story of Semira Adamu, a 20-year old Nigerian woman who had sought asylum in Belgium and was suffocated to death with a pillow by two Belgian police officers during her deportation. It was Melat who taught me that you can very well be very Flemish and African at the same time.

22. Lindah Nyirenda

I met Lindah in the Ghent nightlife. She was a bit older than us, but seemed younger, more open-minded. When I once saw her reciting a poem — conjuring and strong — my fascination grew. She resigned as a guide at the VRT because she could not ignore a very wrong opinion piece from the ombudsman. I like people with principles. Lindah is one of those people.

23. Lisa Akinyi May

I've been with Willem, the musical director of this piece, for eight years

now. But I also had a life before that. And it sometimes happened that a man found me interesting and turned out to have an ex who looked like me from afar. That's how I got to know Lisa: through a shared admirer. I found her more interesting than the man in question. I think that feeling was mutual. I followed her through social media and vice versa. Every time we saw each other, there was a warmth and connection, and we both seemed to consciously leave out the man who linked us. Friends without a doubt.

24. Noonah Eze

When the husband of Nefera founded *Bomboclat Festival*, I became a member of the team quite fast, as a host and consultant. An afro-festival with (inter)national acts, organised by family. Although I didn't go out anymore as a mom, I started following young, black, female deejays. That's how, much later than for the rest of Flanders, I came aware of my attention. I started following Noonah, the woman behind the title. Soon we started commenting on each other's stories. We seemed to be fans of each other. I wanted her there, to get to did.

25. Manoe Adusei-Owusu

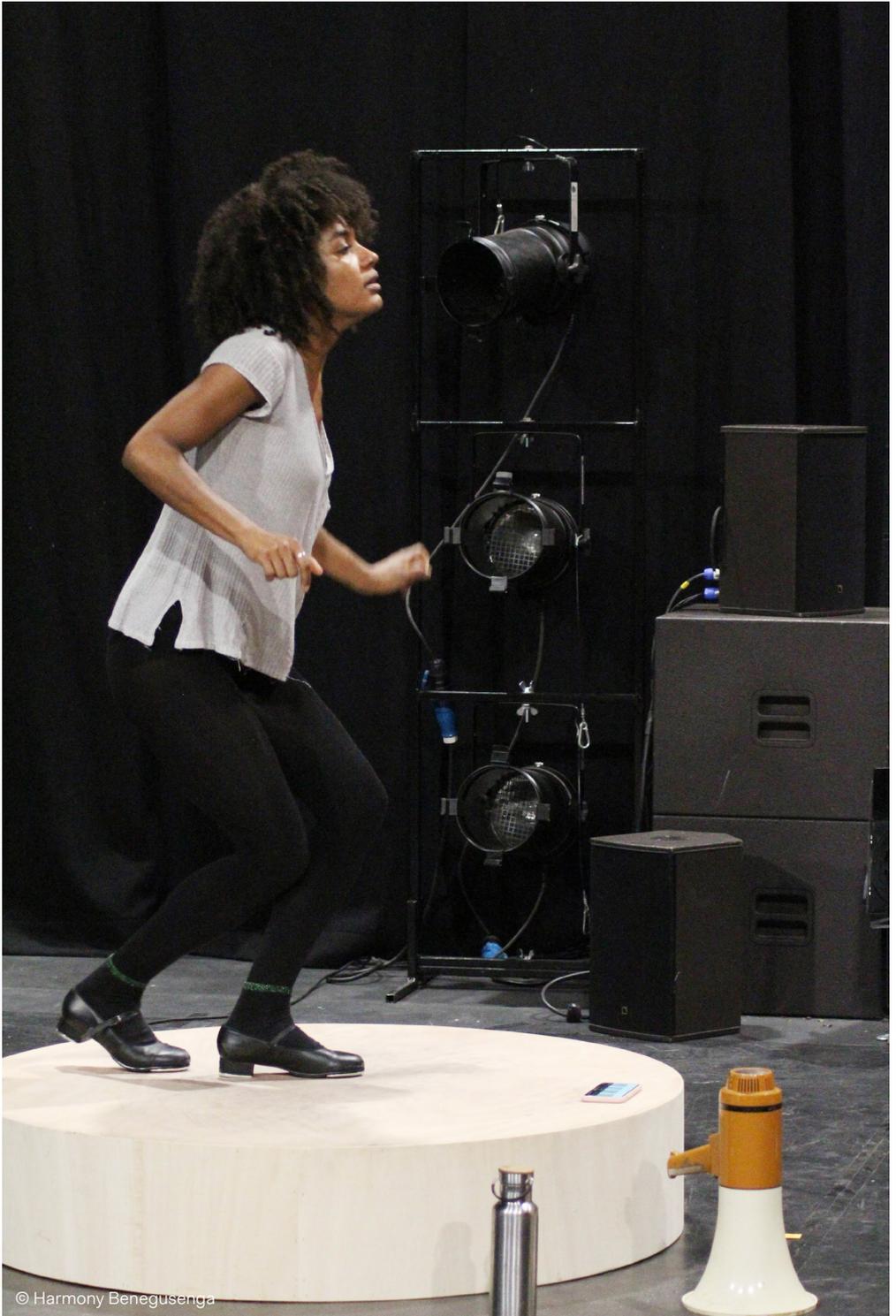
The first time I saw her was at a dinner party at my house. I loved her, although she didn't say much. Not much later I discovered her enormous talent for illustration. I bought a sweater with one of her designs and wore it several times on television. I asked her along on the weekend, because I wanted to



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use her talent for drawing to capture the weekend with her pen. And so she did.

26. Rébecca Louis

I didn't know Rébecca and I had to google her. That made it painfully clear how little time I made for cultural experiences in recent years. She turned out to be a great dancer, choreographer and thinker. On the weekend itself I couldn't keep my eyes of her.

27. Sabine Ingabire

Professionally, I often see a sounding board in Sabine, a response, a reflection. We are both the only black women in Flanders to have a regular column in a large newspaper. She *De Morgen*, I *De Standaard*. Ignorant people sometimes want to play us off against each other. Two black women doing pretty much the same thing, that was supposed to cause a stir. But we did the opposite. We became best friends, we shared everything together, we discussed our work together, read from our work to each other. Empathise. We are a mirror to each other, and we support each other through anything, even when we disagree.

28. Harmony Benegusenga

I've done many photoshoots. Too often I was gray, dreary, stripped of joy or colour. Serious gaze, neutral skin. When I discovered Harmony's work, it was a relief: she photographed black women with the richness of their

melanin at the centre, with brilliant smiles. When we met at an event for my children's book, I forced her to recite a poem. And I decided that I was going to love her. And I did. I couldn't leave her talent as a photographer and videographer behind during this process.

29. Carolina Maciel de França

I knew Carolina perhaps least of all the women. She was a friend of a friend, whom I fully trusted. She's a woman who I know doesn't get involved with nitwits. When I saw her lead a panel I immediately knew: I want to know her. She embodied control. A sort of control that I often miss in myself. I was so happy that she wanted to participate in the play.

30. Kiangana Mupatshi

I am always alert to everyone of colour in the media: I would be all ears and absorb the person on my screen extra well. That's how it happened with Kiangana, then Benny, Benoitte. I saw her flashing by on Ketnet but soon it turned out that the superficiality of the Ketnet figure did not match the thoughtful person behind it. As a creative jack-of-all-trades, I saw her launch one project after another. I saw her move to France, give birth to a son, start a clothing and shoe brand and release songs as a singer. One night, we met each other by accident and I was even more impressed by her calm determination. She had to be there.