

# PROFILE OF KASI BALLET THEATRE



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## **Kasi's Mission**

Identify and develop young dancers from the townships in order to reach technical expertise and artistic depth. To create classical ballets that depicts South African stories and lives. To black Ballerinas who are surely lacking.

## **Kasi's Vision**

Create a standard that is the leading standard of dance nationally and internationally. The kasi (townships) is vibrant, diverse and awaiting exploration by the different art forms Kasi ballet aims to be the tool that creates this depiction of the kasi lives.

## **Kasi's Values**

- Mutual responsibility and accountability
- Life-long learning
- Partnering in sustainable development
- Integrity
- Relevance
- Sustainable social development

## **Kasi's Aims and Objectives**

The company aims to give people from the townships opportunities to realise their potential and enable them to become self sustainable. **Kasi Ballet Theatre** will make use of all the dance forms at one point or another with ballet being its basis.

**Kasi Ballet Theatre** also aims to be a truly South African company in that we want to include all dancers not only from the townships but grow to eventually include all South Africans. Give a home to dance audience members, choreographers and many more lovers of dance. We want to fully express the art of dance in every region of South Africa.

The company is focused on creating a clear public profile and distinctive style, as well bringing vital social interaction as a community. In order to achieve our objectives the company consists of three business sections:

## **INTRODUCTION**

Kasi Ballet Theatre is a dynamic and most importantly talented young dance company based in the township of Alexandra registered in 2005.

"Kasi" means home, referring to the township (Alexandra) is the place where we source our talent and train the talented dancers. Our company aims to take the dance styles of the township and fuse them with the classical ballet.

Through this fusing Kasi Ballet Theatre creates truly South African works. We not only perform in the classical ballet art, our dancers' training includes contemporary, afro fusion, Jazz, Hip-Hop as well as the new and old street dances such as Pantsula.

Kasi ballet theatre has a board of 7 members which include 3 females and 4 males who meet every 2 months to manage the company's affairs. We hope to grow this number to at least 10 members. We have office personnel who run the day-to-day running and an accountant who checks our books monthly.

## 1. KASI PROFESSIONAL ACADEMY

### 1.1 The Alexandra and Ennerdale academies

The Alexandra academy started in 2005. It is a very serious programme where the children train 4 times a week for 1 and a half hours in order to be the best in this art. We have 20 dancers in Alexandra girls and boys from 8 years old to 10 They are selected from 1000 children during auditions which takes place once a year from 13 schools. The academy has 2 performances a year one in June and another in December.

The Ennerdale academy that started in 2005 has 15 dancers from the ages of 8 to 17yrs. They train 2 times a week. It's out of the inspiration of this academy that Kasi Ballet Theatre was established and exists today.

After two years of training under Kasi Ballet Theatre, the best dancers are selected to work with the "*Johannesburg Youth Ballet*"<sup>1</sup> Dancers from "*Johannesburg Youth Ballet*" dance on weekends and have an annual performance in June. To date 4 of the 20 dancers in Alexandra and 4 from 15 dancers in the Ennerdale academy train there in addition to the training at Kasi professional academy.

Our professional academy is an initiative that makes sure that dancing is not only just for fun but one gets recognized internationally with the paperwork they present. The objective is to take kids from grade 1 right through to advanced level and to give them the opportunity to be professionals.

8 years old	Grade 1
9 years old	Grade 3
10/11 years old	Grade 4/5
13 years old	Elementary
15 years old	Intermediate
17 years old	Advanced

### ***NURTURE-DEVELOP-SUPPORT***

A training academy for girls and boys aged 9-14yrs accommodating all forms of dance. Kasi is focusing on technical training by progressive teaching methods. Kasi Ballet Theatre develops creativity through workshops and guest teachers, providing these lessons at no cost and totally dependant on funding.

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1976, the Johannesburg Youth Ballet is one of the oldest ballet companies in the South Africa. It comprises 28 company members made up of young dancers of diverse ages drawn from ballet studios in the greater Johannesburg area. These dancers are afforded the unique opportunity to work within the ambience of a professional company, taught by a variety of teachers and choreographers.



Because the Kasi professional academy just opens its doors, the level of our pupils is currently from grade 1 to 4.

Kasi ballet theatre works with the Cecchetti society (an Italian school that shares its syllabi with us and helps us get accreditation which is recognized internationally). Annually exams with certified teachers are in June. The dancers who have excelled through out the year also get to compete in the prestigious “Concour de ballet competition” as well as against other dance schools in surrounding areas.

### 1.2 Contract agreement with Parents

Kasi ballet professional academy has a contract agreement with the parents and require as a maximum participation from the parents in terms of watching classes and performances. We work in underprivileged areas where only 5 of the 25 students can pay for their training. It is therefore essential that the parents commit to the programme. This helps balance the fact that they can pay. Kasi ballet theatre has put systems in place to ensure that the sponsored dancers have committed as well as their parents.

\* The parents are required to sign a contract.

\* It is compulsory for the parents to watch the class every two months.

\* Kasi Ballet theatre also visits the dancer’s homes to verify the situation.

### 1.3 Sustainability of Kasi professional academy

Kasi ballet academy sustains partially itself through registration fees, through sponsors from Canada and parents contribution which comes up to about 15%. We also have a programme called “the adopt a dancer programme<sup>2</sup>” which provides 25% of the funding which covers the

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<sup>2</sup> See our Website [www.kasiballet.com](http://www.kasiballet.com)

cost of 7 dancers. We still need to aim for the rest of the 60% to develop our sustainable school programme and to be able to provide all the dancers with the best training.

## 2. KASI PROFESSIONAL COMPANY

Kasi Professional Company has five (5) permanent professionals (see the CV in annexure) and has twenty (20) readily available free lance dancers to implement this following programme of performances:

- 2.1 Alexandra Heroes Night
- 2.2 Dance umbrella
- 2.3 Arts Alive

### 2.1 Alexandra heroes' night

Kasi ballet theatre professional company celebrates the Alexandra heroes by bringing a performance which includes a gallery comprising of the 3 heroes\role models and focuses on what they would have experienced in their lives in Alexandra. The show pays homage through contemporary ballet choreography.

This initiative aims at instilling pride back to the people of Alexandra and also celebrating and expressing their rich heritage.

The year 2006 September celebrated these 3 heroes and heroines. This show was attended by about a hundred people even though it was the first of its kind. This show is an annual event that Kasi Ballet Theatre hosts.

In 2007, the performance will celebrate. Mduduzi Nyembe, Mr Lekalakala and Mpho Molepo. This event will be happening on the 25 September (heritage day) at the Johannesburg college of Education in Alexandra. The ballet will be choreographed by various artists from the township of Alexandra.

The Alexandra heroes' night was sponsored in 2006 by National art council and by Telkom. Kasi ballet is looking for new sponsors for the 2007 performance.

### 2.2 FNB Dance Umbrella Festival

For 19 years, the Dance Umbrella has been presenting new contemporary choreography and dance. Choreographers and companies from all over South Africa show their works for the chance to be recognized and work internationally. This platform is made available to community and youth groups. The Chief objectives for the Dance Umbrella's Forum are to establish a space for new work and the development of South African contemporary dance.

Kasi ballet theatre made its debut on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March at the dance umbrella in 2007. The performance at wits was of called "sights and scenes" and 8 dancers interpreted a look at ballet in the township. We had an audience of 350 people.

### 2.3 Arts Alive Festival

Johannesburg hosted the beginning of the first held Arts Alive Festival in 1991, the month-long international Arts Alive Festival is now one of the leading cultural events on the African continent. It aims to present world class cultural performances and events as well as educational exchanges between overseas and local artists. It also involves professionals and non-professionals through its educational school touring programme, reaching out to previously disadvantaged communities such as Soweto and Alexandra.

The 2006 festival included performances by the Afro-Cuban All Stars, British DJ Mr Scruff and the Moving into Dance Mophotong Company.

Kasi Ballet will be performing from its repertoire in the 2007 Arts Alive Festival.

### 3. ART AND CULTURE EDUCATION

*"People say Black people don't like Ballet but how we can say that if they don't have the opportunity to be exposed!" Penelope Thloloe, Artistic Director*

Because Kasi Ballet is based in Alexandra, its main objective is not only to train and perform but also to give the opportunity to kids and community to appreciate dance. Kasi Ballet develops many programs to expose people to dance:

- 3.1 Educational school shows
- 3.2 Street talent search
- 3.3 Township workshops project
- 3.4 Nursery Programme
- 3.5 Outreach Projects with South African Ballet

#### 3.1 Educational school shows

Kasi Ballet Theatre places high value on audience development of dance and theatre. That is why Kasi ballet professional has created an energetic 40 min production socio-culturally relevant to our young South African audience. The show is taking dance to township, schools and giving an insight into the dance world.

This production is not only an entertaining activity for pupils (and indeed teachers) but also and educational one, which will facilitate growth in their creativity, their imaginations and their appreciation of artistic activities.

The show has a narrator to guide the audience through the various styles on display, for example: ballet, neo-classical, partner work, hip-hop and other contemporary and street-style genres. The show celebrates dance and simultaneously challenges and engages the mind and senses. There also is an opportunity for a question and answer period where the audience can direct questions at the performances.

Kasi ballet has presently performed at 4 schools and this brings to a total of 1000 pupils who have seen this educational show.

The objective is to perform at an average of 10 schools per year so the estimated number of pupils reached would be 2500 pupils.

*Time projected:* from February to June and from August to October

*Areas:* Alexandra and Soweto

### **3.2 Street Talent search show**

Street Talent search show is a platform where street dancers can discover classical dancing. This is a show where street dancers from 5 high schools in Alexandra get the opportunity to get educated about dance as well as display their rich culture and talent the winners are offered training with the professional company as well as performance training.

Kasi ballet uses this event every August since 2005 to find talent and provide the training for the talented individuals.

The objective is to give 5 high schools in Alexandra an opportunity to learn about dance as well as display their talent with the hope of joining our academy.

Time projected: annual event in August

### **3.3 Township workshops**

This is a project where workshops to be done in underprivileged areas as well as rural areas to promote dance and assist in healing those facing and handling difficult situations e.g. orphans ,HIV/AIDS. Dance gives discipline, self control and also the obvious exposures to opportunities within theatre and the arts.

This workshop will include ballet, ballroom and contemporary, Kwela, Pantsula and some traditional dancing. Included in this workshop will be DVDs shown on dance and possibilities provided as well as a look at schools in Europe and America and the bursaries offered by them. There will be professional dancers who will be holding sessions on how they survive as dancers and will also have a question and answer sessions with the dancers and teachers.

We plan on going to Alexandra, Soweto, Thembisa, Mamelodi, and Diepsloot as our starting points in Gauteng. The workshops are designed to show children as well as their parents the possibilities in the dance industry and the immediate impact it creates. The areas we are targeting have no means of getting the exposure to the theatre or to Ballet, ballroom and other dance forms.

The idea is to go to an area book a hall that is accessible and have a work about dance for the 4 days in the area. The workshop is aimed at all those who want to learn about dance from the age of 8 to 18yrs and also to dance teachers.

### **3.4 The nursery programme**

Kasi Ballet works with the nurseries in Hill Brow and the surrounding areas. The nursery programme has 50 toddlers. The toddlers are taught dance appreciation and only get taught once a week. Each nursery has an "end of year" show. We currently teach at 4 nurseries around the Gauteng region.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

*"Kasi ballet theatre believes that these projects will not only benefit dancers but the communities and in turn the whole country. Dance has been something for the few members with extra money with these projects all this can change and dance can once again be enjoyed by all regardless of colour or financial status.*

*We have the talent in the underprivileged areas with your assistance many South Africans can realise their dreams. Our children are being preyed on by criminals such institution are vital in the safe keeping and educating of our future nation."*

#### Penelope Thloloe

Artistic Director **Penelope Thloloe** has been dancing for over a decade and is the director of Kasi Ballet Theatre. She has been nominated for the checkers woman of the year for years running and was a finalist at the Elle visible difference award. She has also won the Armstel's Salute to Success competition which is how she got funding to start the company. At the end of 2005 she was one of the cosmopolitan magazine's awesome women. In 2006 she was awarded the Mosadi wa Konokono award and called to represent Gauteng at the national finals.

Penelope attended the National School for the Arts. Her afternoon extra mural dance classes at the Ballet Theatre Afrikan Dance Academy consisted of daily ballet, modern and Spanish classes together with extensive rehearsals and performances.

Penelope has performed many soloist roles in classical and contemporary works in the company's repertoire. These pieces have been created for the company by many of South Africa's leading choreographers.' This talent was polished further by the London based Rembart school of dance.

She achieved a scroll at the National School of the Arts; Penelope has also presented choreographic works at two Dancecor Choreographic Workshops and choreographed a solo for her Dancecor Associate Exam. She has also choreographed some pieces for London based school Rembart School of dance

Penelope has been trained as internationally recognized ballet teachers in the Cecchetti Method. She in turn is passing her skills back to the communities with 250 young learners from Alexandra, Soweto and surrounding suburbs being trained at two satellite schools.

The enthusiastic and driven leadership of these outreach projects is provided by Penelope, being the Director of Kasi Ballet Theatre. Her roots in the Alexandra community are very strong: her mother, Mapula Thloloe, is a teacher at Minerva High School and her father Isaac Thloloe is Head of Department of Life Orientation at the Realogile High School and also chairperson of the Alexandra's Life Orientation Teachers' Forum.

She has identified a very strong wish in the community of Alexandra for the development of professional dancers, the in depth training required to transfer the skills needed for those wishing to make dance a career. This would result in the production of many self-sustainable dancers; dancers that can go out into the marketplace and earn their living from dance. It would also eventually result in a number of qualified teachers of dance from the community. This will require a great deal more input from both sides than the once a week recreational lessons, at present the only form of dance in the township. The training of a professional dancer requires many hours a week from both the teacher and the dancer and a commitment over many years. It also requires the support of the families and the community.

Ms Thloloe has already approached the schools of Alexandra and has had an overwhelming response, especially as the project would be based directly in Alexandra. As most children in Alexandra have no means of transport, it would be impossible to put in the hours of training unless the project was based within walking distance. She has therefore identified suitable

facilities at East bank Hall for the short term in the heart of Alexandra and is presently spreading the word at the schools.

Kasi ballet theatre was registered 2005 and she is presently working on the 3 sections the academy, youth dance company and the professional company. At present she is working on her own company Kasi Ballet theatre. Penelope is charming, communicates easily and shows a great deal of maturity. She is passionate about her dancing and is an extremely hard worker

#### **CURRICULUM VITAE OF THE PERMANENT DANCERS**

**Margarita Naydenova** was born in Bulgaria where she began dancing at the National Opera Ballet School. There she had the opportunity to do a 3 month exchange programme with The Bolshoi Theatre. In 1997 she immigrated to SA where she schooled at the National School of the Arts and danced in her spare time with Ballet Theatre Afrikan. After finishing school she excelled in various advanced examinations from the Royal Academy of Dance, Cecchetti and Dancecor methods. In 2002 she achieved the Cecchetti Associate Teachers examination and has been teaching in various outreach schools in Alex. In 2004 she resigned from the position as a soloist from Ballet Theatre Afrikan and has been dancing for various choreographers namely: Christopher Kindo, Adele Blank, Vincent Mantsoe, Natalie Fisher and David Matamela.

**Kristin Wilson** began dancing at the age of 5 in Ocean view Cape Town under her mother who taught ballet to young children on behalf of Coloured Affairs. She joined the Ballet Theatre African Academy and Youth Dance Company at the age of 15 and began performing with them locally and abroad, she went on to join the BTA Company as soloist where she worked until 2004. During this time she performed in national outreach Schools performances and choreographed works for the FNB Vita dance umbrella. She also acquired her RAD advanced Ballet qualification and her Cecchetti International Ballet Teachers.

**Siduduzo Sithole** He began dancing in the Township doing Indlamu (Traditional Zulu dance) , In 2004 he went to Fuba School of Drama and Visual Art where he was introduced to Contemporary Dance he was there for a year. In 2005 he joined Johannesburg Dance Foundation where he learned Ballet, Contemporary, Jazz, Tap-dance, Soft-shoe, Gymnastics and Yoga.

**Lerato Letlape** He began dancing Hip Hop 7 years ago, at the age 20 he started a local group D.T.D mainly dancing Hip Hop. Lerato has performed at various functions including Hora-Café, Alexandra Technical, Miss Maimane Phiri Beauty Contest and Slaghuis, at the age of 23 he joined Kasi Ballet Theatre where he is currently still dancing Hip Hop and contemporary as well as ballet.

**Bongani Nkabinde** He began dancing at the age of 19 with a local group D.T.D mainly dancing Hip Hop. Bongani has performed at various functions including Festival against Crime, Miss Maimane Phiri Beauty Contest, BTA Dance Contest, Rhema Church and Slaghuis. At the age of 20 he joined Kasi Ballet Theatre where he currently doing ballet and contemporary dance. He is greatly inspired by Wade Robinson and hopes to become an ambassador of dance, and to create a higher quality of dance in the townships and South Africa.

**Brian Mthembu** was born in 1987. He began dancing Pantsula dance at the age of 8. In 2003 Brian performed at various functions including the Durban Aids Festival, Mandela Square, Village Walk Street Carnival, Graham's town Arts Festival, and FNB dance umbrella. At the age of 20 Brian joined Kasi Ballet Theatre at the beginning of 2007. Where his currently dancing contemporary & ballet dance. He is inspired by Mduduzi Nyembe and would like to be a dance lecturer.