



Gregory Vuyani Maqoma

Dancer, Choreographer, Teacher, Writer and Creative Director

Born in Soweto, October 16 of 1973, Gregory Vuyani Maqoma became interested in dance in the late 1980's as a means to escape the political tensions growing in his place of birth. He started his formal dance training in 1990 at Moving Into Dance where in 2002 he became the Associate Artistic Director. Maqoma has established himself as an internationally renowned dancer, choreographer, teacher, author, director and scriptwriter. He founded Vuyani Dance Theatre (VDT) in 1999 when he was undertaking a scholarship at the Performing Arts Research and Training School (PARTS) in Belgium under the direction of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker.

Maqoma is respected for his collaborations with artists of his generation. In 2006 he worked with the British-based choreographer Akram Khan and the London Symphonietta to the music of Steve Reich *Variations for vibes, pianos & strings*. He also created *Neon Flight* for the South African Ballet Theatre, which premiered in Russia in June 2006.

He began his ongoing collaboration with theatre director James Ngcobo in 2008 with *The Lion and the Jewel* and Zakes Mda's *The Hill*. In 2009 Maqoma collaborated with Ngcobo on *Crazy for Jazz* and *Thirst*. His collaboration with James Ngcobo continued on the adaptation of Athol Fugard's *Master Harold and the Boys* produced by Theatre on the Square.

In 2009 for the opening ceremony of the 4th World Summit of Arts & Culture, in Braamfontein he co-created *3 Colours* with Cape Town theatre maker Brett Bailey. In 2010 he was head choreographer for the FIFA World Cup Kick-Off Concert held in Soweto. That year he choreographed the internationally acclaimed Hugh Masekela project *Songs of Migration* produced by the Market Theatre, directed by James Ngcobo. In 2010 he collaborated with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in *Bound* which toured Europe, Canada and USA as part of a double bill *Southern Bound Comfort*.

Returning to The Market Theatre in 2011 he collaborated with Ngcobo yet again on their version of *Sunjata*. In 2011 he won the Dance Manyano Choreographer of A Decade Dance Award. In 2012 Maqoma, with Ngcobo, was part of the creative team behind the ANC Centenary Celebration, Dance and Theatre Musical, *Tshhumbudzo* staged in Bloemfontein.

Maqoma is perhaps best known for producing trilogies. He first created the award winning *Rhythm Trilogy* (comprising *Rhythm 1 2 3*, *Rhythm Blues* and *Rhythm Colour*) followed by, respectively, the *Beauty Trilogy* - *Beautiful*, *Beautiful Me* and *Beautiful Us*. *Beautiful* (a duet with Shanell Winlock) premiered in South African in a VDT/ Moving into Dance Joint Season that took place at the Dance Factory from June 22 to 25 in 2005. After finalizing his extensive research on *Beautiful Me*, Maqoma took up residency at the Centre Nationale de la Danse, Pantin, outside Paris to prepare the South African premiere at the 2007 FNB Dance Umbrella. In 2006 and 2007 Maqoma won the Gauteng MEC Award for the group work *Beautiful Us* and solo *Beautiful Me*, respectively.

Maqoma's *Skeleton Dry*, a work with an original score exploring the liminality of human existence, the space between flesh and bone, was commissioned for the 2009 FNB Dance Umbrella, supported by the National Arts Council. Continuing his exploration of the human condition and our relationship to the earth Maqoma created *Four Seasons* in 2010 again with original music played live. This work articulated Maqoma's view on the moral degeneration of the human race and the detrimental effect it has on the world and dynamic Mother Earth.

In *Exit Exist (2011)*, collaboration with fashion designer David Tlale, singer composer Simphiwe Dana, male a capella quartet Complete and James Ngcobo, through choreography and ritualistic performance, Maqoma explores his historical roots by examining the life and fate of his ancestor Jongum-sobomvu Maqoma, the famous Xhosa chief. Chief Maqoma born in 1798 was arrested while requesting the liberation of Xhosa territories from the English colonists, imprisoned on Robben Island and was buried there in 1873. This master work toured in the United States, France, UK, Netherlands, South Africa, Greece, Australia and Belgium. Was at the Baxter theatre in Cape Town last in 2023 and to grace woofees in Stellenbosch as part of Maqoma route to retiring from dancing.

In *Kudu (2013)*, collaboration with French-Swiss Musician and Trumpeter, Erik Truffaz allowed Maqoma to see his work introduced to Jazz Festivals including Festival Jazz De Vienne played to 7000 audience members. *Kudu* marked Maqoma's return to Festival De Marseille where it had its premiere.

In *FullMoon (2014)*, Maqoma directed and collaborated with South African Youth Orchestra and co-choreographed with Luyanda Sidiya with music orchestration and composition by Isaac Molelekoa. In 2015 Maqoma celebrated his 25 years in Dance with a program produced by Vuyani dance Theatre, *Greg Maqoma & Friends*, featured artist included Sibongile Khumalo, Somizi Mhlongo, David Tlale, Bill Monama and Vuyani Dance Theatre, Complete Quartet and 70 Vuyani Outreach Children at The Lyric Theatre, Johannesburg.

In 2016 Maqoma continued his collaborations with world acclaimed artist Wouter Kellerman and Simphiwe Dana in *Joys of Sharing* produced by Vuyani Dance Theatre at The Lyric Theatre, Johannesburg.

In 2017 Maqoma premiered *Cion – Requiem of Ravel's Bolero (2017)* in association with Market Theatre, produced by Vuyani dance Theatre with music composition by Nhlanhla Mahlangu. This work continues to tour the world and has since appeared at the Joys Theatre (NY), Kennedy Centre (Washington), Holland Festival, Marseille Festival. In the same year he premiered *Via Kanana*, a work he created on Via Katlehong

In 2019 Maqoma collaborated with Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah in the production *Tree*, produced by Manchester International Festival and The Young Vic. Maqoma embarked on creating works for classical companies: *The Valley of Human Sound* was created on Opera Ballet De Lyon and premiered in 2021. *Black Sun* was created on UK based Ballet Black, premiered in 2022.

The pandemic provided Maqoma with an opportunity to lend his hand on creating and directing films. In 2021 during the height of Covid-19 he co-created a film *Untold Secrets of the Heart Chamber* with a poet, arts activist Marc Bamuthi Joseph, commissioned by ADF and DANCECLEVELAND. Maqoma was also commissioned by the Edinburgh International Festival to produce and direct a film *Retrace-Retract* which marked his going collaboration with poetry which was provided by poet and performing activists Jefferson Tshabalala. He is currently co-directing directing a

short film *The dream* with Lionfish Production in Cape Town. Maqoma is currently working with Bomb production for Shaka Illembe season 2 as a director of Choreography and Design.

"Joy Dancer" premiered at the 77th Edinburgh International Film Festival 2024, is a documentary that highlights the life and work of Gregory Maqoma. The film delves into Maqoma's journey in dance, his creative process, and his significant impact on both the South African and international dance scenes. Through interviews, performance footage, and insights into his choreographic works, "Joy Dancer" explores Maqoma's artistic philosophy and his commitment to storytelling through movement.

Maqoma's directorial and choreographic skills were further explored in 2022 with his offering, *Moya* a project with Simphiwe Dana, *Third World Express*, a jazz musical produced by Joburg Theatre and Shadrack Bokaba. Maqoma was part of the creative team for the *Mandela Musical* which premiered at the Young Vic in London in December 2022.

Maqoma was Associate Artistic Director of Moving Into Dance Mophatong 2002 - 2006 and for the FNB Dance Umbrella Festival 2010. He was Artistic Director of the Afro-Vibes Festival in the Netherlands and the UK from 2004 - 2010. Maqoma has served on the dance committee of the National Arts Festival 2011 - 2017 and curated the Main Dance Festival Program for 2017. He has taught at various universities in Africa, USA and Europe including, University of California (UCLA), Bates College (USA), Bennington College (USA), University of Minnesota Dance Department. He has created repertoire for Moving into Dance, Jazzart Contemporary Dance Theatre, South African Ballet Theatre and Cape Academy of Performing Arts, amongst others. He is the founding Chairperson of the Board of STAND (Sustaining Theatre and Dance) Foundation and currently serves as a board member.

Several works in his VDT repertoire have won him accolades and international acclaim. This includes FNB Vita Choreographer of the Year in 1999, 2001 and 2002 for *Rhythm 1.2.3*, *Rhythm Blues* and *Southern Comfort* respectively. He received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance in 2002. Maqoma was a finalist in the Daimler Chrysler Choreography Award in 2002 and in the Rolex Mentorship Programme in 2003. He is the recipient of the 2012 Tunkie Award for Leadership in Dance, which is presented annually to a South African who has elevated the standard and visibility of dance in South Africa. He served as a nominator in the 2016-2017 Rolex Arts Initiative. In 2017 Maqoma was honoured by the French Government with the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Knight of the Arts & Literature) Award.

Gregory Maqoma's choreography in the 2018 premiere of William Kentridge "The Head & The Load" powerfully interprets the experiences of African porters in World War I, blending African and contemporary dance to convey their emotional and physical burdens, ensuring the preservation of this overlooked history through evocative movement.

He commenced plans for his retirement from dance stage performances in 2023 with programmes running until 2024, or upon request or demand. He will continue making work in choreography, teaching and directing. The GM50 programme in partnership with Joburg Theatre, arts alive international festival 2023 and City of Johannesburg's Art, Culture and Heritage, saw a double launch of Maqoma's *Story* in two books and launched his 3rd book in 2024 to complete his book trilogy for the coming generations :

- The Joy Dancer (2023): A picture children book written by Maqoma with Dr. Gcina Mhlophe. A captivating inspirational story of a boy who found the love of dance and through his extraordinary life, a multi award visionary has emerged. This book allows you to feel the magic of his craftsmanship.
- My Life, My Dance, My Soul (2023) - The Story of Gregory Maqoma co-written with Lorato Trok. A dazzling memoir that encourages young adults to embrace their passion, overcome obstacles, and believe in the strength of their dreams. It is a testament to the extraordinary heights that can be reached when one dances to the rhythm of their own soul.
- One step at a time (2024) – tells the inspiring story of Gregory Maqoma, a renowned dancer and choreographer. A descendant of Chief Maqoma, Gregory blends his artistic talent with his rich heritage, offering young readers a journey through his life of dance, creativity, and purpose.

A bespoke performance of Greg Maqoma and Friend's was held on the 15th of October 2023, a black-tie affair honouring Gregory's Birthday in partnership with Joburg Theatre and City of Johannesburg Arts, Culture, and heritage. This was an all-star intergenerational evening of performances including award winning Dr. Madala Kunene, actors, directors and dancers just to mention the representation of the years Maqoma spend in beautiful and impactful collaborations.

In 2023 Maqoma was honored by Joburg theatre as one of the first cohort of stars in their 60th anniversary celebration. He received an Encore Fleur Du Cap Award (2024) for his contribution to theatre exemplified in his production of *Exit/Exist*, and his masterful integration of contemporary dance with indigenous movement and for the indelible mark he has made on the country's cultural narrative. He won the Creative and Cultural Industry awards for Outstanding Dance Production Award.

This is a testament that Maqoma continues to play an important role in transforming the artistic landscape in South Africa through the newly formed corporate entities Gregory Maqoma Industries and Vuyani Dance Company. Maqoma is regarded as a visionary for the advancement of artists and dance in the continent. He is one of the featured social entrepreneurs in a book *'The Disruptors – Social Entrepreneurs reinventing business and society'*.

Awards and Accolades

- **1993:** Dance Umbrella Pick of Stepping Stones Choreography Award for Where, Here and There
- **1994:** Dance Umbrella Fringe Choreography Award for Heaven and Earth
- **1997:** Phillip Stein Young Choreographers Grant
- **1988:** 1 Year Full Scholarship to study at Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (PARTS) in Belgium by the Flemish Ministry
- **1999:** FNB VITA Choreographer of the Year for Rhythm 1.2.3
- **2000:** FNB VITA Most Outstanding Presentation of an Original Contemporary Work for Rhythm Blues
- **2001:** FNB VITA Best Choreography for Southern Comfort
- **2002:** FNB Vita Choreographer of The Year for Southern Comfort and Ek se...Hola
- **2002:** Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance

- **2004:** Finalist – Daimler Chrysler Choreography Competition
- **2004:** Rolex Mentor & Protégé Finalist
- **2005:** Gauteng MEC Award - Choreographer of the Year for Beautiful Us
- **2007:** Gauteng MEC Award – Best Choreography in a Contemporary Style for Beautiful Me
- **2007:** Gauteng MEC Award –Most Outstanding Presentation of a New Work for Beautiful Me
- **2011:** Dance Manyano Best Choreographer of the Decade Award
- **2012:** A Silver Standard Bank Ovation Award for the work MAYHEM
- **2012:** Tunki Award for Leadership in Dance
- **2014:** New York City Bessie Award for Dance – Outstanding Music Composition in a dance production Exit/Exist
- **2017:** Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Knight of the Arts & Literature) Award
- **2019:** Holland Festival Audience Choice Award for Cion: Requiem of Ravel's Bolero
- **2020:** Naledi Theatre Awards – Best Dance Production for Cion: Requiem of Ravel's Bolero
- **2020:** International Dance Day Author
- **2021:** New York City Bessie Awards for Dance – Outstanding Production and Outstanding Music Composition for Cion: Requiem Of Ravels Bolero
- **2022:** Joburg Theatres Diamond Walk of Fame
- **2022:**The Simon Nkoli Feather Award (LGBTQ Humanitarian award)
- **2023:** The Artfluence Human Rights Champion in recognition of his remarkable career, courage, and commitment to social justice.
- **2023:** Business and arts south Africa featured artist.
- **2024:** Olivier award Nominee Best Dance Production.
- **2024:** Encore Award at the Fleur Du Cap Theater Award for Exit/Exist
- **2024:** Creative and Cultural awards Outstanding Dance Production

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