



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Bacchae: An African Choral Ballet

Joburg Ballet and UJ Arts & Culture join forces in a bold reimagining of the Euripides classic: The Bacchae

“Joburg Ballet’s 25th Anniversary Season promises a monumental year of dance with a range of exciting productions that will showcase the company’s rich history, artistic vision and its institutional growth”, said Joburg Ballet’s CEO, Elroy Fillis-Bell at the launch of Joburg Ballet’s milestone Silver Jubilee year.

This July, Joburg Ballet, in partnership with Arts & Culture at the University of Johannesburg, a division of the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture (FADA), proudly presents a *world-first* Choral Ballet that reimagines Euripides’ iconic tragedy through a uniquely South African lens - *The Bacchae: An African Choral Ballet*.

Premiering as part of Joburg Ballet’s 25th Anniversary season, *The Bacchae: An African Choral Ballet* runs from 3 to 12 July at the Joburg Theatre.

This groundbreaking new work has brought together an extraordinary team of internationally acclaimed South African creative giants.

Directed by the visionary Jay Pather, choreographed by the multi-award-winning choreographer Mthuthuzeli November, conceptualised and composed by the celebrated composer Neo Muyanga and featuring the powerful voices of the acclaimed UJ Choir and a live chamber orchestra, the creative team transforms Euripides’ tragedy into an urgent South African conversation about power, belonging, spirituality and communal rites, while making visible the consequences of excess.

“The Bacchae is a tussle between passion, excess, the irrational and allowing the irrational to run free, as opposed to order, moderation and restraint. That dynamic sets itself very well at this time in our history, where societies across the world are feeling that tension and that pull,” says Pather.

Muyanga's soaring score and intoxicating rhythm drive the emotional pulse of the work. He blends the powerful voices of the 80-strong UJ Choir with the orchestra, while Joburg Ballet’s world-class dancers bring a visceral force that speaks to both ancient myth and contemporary society.

“UJ Arts & Culture’s collaboration with Joburg Ballet reflects our commitment to fostering bold, interdisciplinary work that is both locally grounded and globally resonant,” says Pieter Jacobs, Head of UJ Arts & Culture. *“The Bacchae: An African Choral Ballet creates a powerful platform for artistic exchange - bringing together professional artists, composers, choreographers and our students in a shared process of innovation and learning. It’s especially meaningful to see our young creatives from FADA - the interdisciplinary programme that has students working alongside theatre professionals, contributing to a production of this scale.”*

Drawing from Euripides’ classic, the full-length ballet reinterprets the tale with a richness of movement, sound and choral tradition. The tragedy follows Dionysus, who arrives in a divided city promising freedom, ecstasy and spiritual awakening. As his intoxicating presence sweeps through Thebes, women abandon convention and a chorus of voices rises in ecstatic defiance. Pentheus, the rigid young ruler, vows to restore order and crush the growing movement; but curiosity and desire draw him dangerously close to the very force he condemns.

“This landmark production holds enormous potential for South Africa and beyond,” says Fillis- Bell. “With the collaboration of UJ Arts & Culture and the expertise of the incredible creative team, ballet, choral music, theatre and visual design have been woven into a tapestry that transcends artistic boundaries to create a truly immersive, multi-disciplinary experience. It reinterprets a European classic through African creativity, giving audiences a work of international calibre that reflects the richness of our voices and traditions. Not only will this production elevate ballet and dance on the continent but it will also stand as a symbol of innovation, resilience and artistic power in South Africa’s cultural history.”

At Joburg Theatre from 3 to 12 July 2026.

Friday 3 July - 19:00 | R125- R350

Saturday 4 July – 14:00 | R250 – R700

Sunday 5 July – 14:00 | R250 – R700

Wednesday 8 July - 11:00 & Thursday 9 July - 11:00 | R130

Friday 10 July – 19:00 | R250 – R700

Saturday 11 July – 14:00 & 19:00 | R250 - R700

Sunday 12 July – 14:00 | R250 – R700

Tickets can be purchased via Webtickets:

<https://www.webtickets.co.za/v2/seating.aspx?itemid=1588363434>

For more information about Joburg Ballet's 25th Anniversary Season, visit www.joburgballet.com

Keep up to date with Joburg Ballet online: Facebook: @JoburgBalletCompany | Instagram:

@joburg_ballet | X: @joburgballet | LinkedIn: @joburgballet

High-res images, accreditation, visits to the studios to watch rehearsals and interviews with artistic representatives and/or dancers are available on request. Please contact Di Sparks, Behind the Scenes Communications | 073 208 8483 | disparks@artslink.co.za.

Notes for Editors

Joburg Ballet

Joburg Ballet’s repertoire includes full-length productions of major classical works, as well as shorter ballets, including original works created for the company by South African and international choreographers. The company presents three major seasons a year at Joburg Theatre and also tours to other regions in South Africa and internationally. The company provides a high standard of training for students via Joburg Ballet School and Academy, plus a comprehensive programme of community-based development and outreach work via its Satellite Schools, with emphasis on historically disadvantaged communities. Joburg Ballet is committed to openness, wide-reaching engagement, accessibility and inclusivity, and to sharing its energy and creativity with audiences, dance teachers and arts practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa and abroad. It is dedicated to the growth and revitalisation of the great legacy of classical ballet and to the development of new choreographers, new works and new audiences from across South Africa. The company’s Chief Executive Officer is Elroy Fillis-Bell.

UJ Arts & Culture

UJ Arts & Culture, a division of the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture (FADA) produces and presents world-class student and professional arts programmes aligned to the UJ vision of an international university of choice, anchored in Africa, dynamically shaping the future. A robust range of arts platforms are offered on all four UJ campuses for students, staff, alumni and the general public to experience and engage with emerging and established Pan-African and international artists drawn from the full spectrum of the arts. In addition to UJ Arts & Culture, FADA (www.uj.ac.za/fada) offers programmes in eight creative disciplines, in Art, Design and Architecture, as well as playing home to the NRF SARChI Chair in South African Art & Visual Culture and the Visual Identities in Art & Design Research Centre. The faculty has a strong focus on sustainability and relevance, and engages actively with the dynamism, creativity and diversity of Johannesburg in imagining new approaches to art and design education.

Jay Pather

Jay Pather is a South African choreographer, curator and academic whose interdisciplinary practice bridges dance, performance, architecture and visual art. A professor emeritus at the University of Cape Town and founding director of the Institute for the Creative Arts (ICA), he is also the artistic director of Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre. Pather's work explores postcolonial identity, urban transformation and the politics of space, often staging performances in unconventional sites such as museums, public squares, and historic buildings. His choreography - seen across Africa, Europe and the Americas - blends classical Indian, contemporary and African vocabularies into a richly layered aesthetic. A curator of major festivals including *Infecting the City* and the Afrovibes Festival, Pather is widely recognized for advancing experimental performance in South Africa. His visionary approach continues to challenge boundaries and reimagine how art engages with social change and public consciousness.

Neo Muyanga

Neo Muyanga is a South African composer, librettist and sound artist whose work traverses opera, theatre, and contemporary performance. Co-founder of the a cappella duo *Blk Sonshine*, he blends African musical traditions with classical, jazz and experimental forms. Muyanga's compositions have been performed internationally by major ensembles and in landmark institutions such as the Tate Modern, the Venice Biennale and the Centre Pompidou. His operatic and choral works often interrogate histories of colonialism, migration and resistance, situating African narratives within global contemporary discourse. Deeply engaged in education and cultural activism, Muyanga co-founded the Pan African Space Station with Chimurenga and continues to mentor young artists across the continent. Through his dynamic practice, Muyanga challenges conventions of genre and form, using music as both a site of beauty and a vehicle for social and political reflection.

Mthuthuzeli November

Mthuthuzeli November is an award-winning South African choreographer and dancer celebrated for his emotionally charged and visually striking works. Born in Cape Town, he trained at Dance For All before joining Ballet Black in London, where he is now a leading dancer and resident choreographer. His choreography fuses classical ballet with African dance idioms, jazz and contemporary forms, producing a powerful movement language that speaks to identity, belonging and transformation. November's acclaimed creations - such as *Ingoma*, which won the Olivier Award for Best Dance Production - have toured internationally and earned praise for their narrative depth and cultural resonance. Committed to expanding ballet's inclusivity and relevance, he continues to create works that bridge continents and traditions. Through his artistry, November embodies a new generation of globally recognised African dance makers.

UJ Choir

The University of Johannesburg Choir stands as a beacon of musical excellence. It consists of eighty students from the university that study a range of qualifications, excluding music. Excelling in both Western and African choral repertoire, the choir prides itself in artistic innovation and musical integrity. UJ Choir has won numerous awards and continues to fly the University of Johannesburg flag with pride.