

Foofwa and the making of spectacles

DESCRIBED as eccentric and inventive, Foofwa d'Imobilite was born Frédéric Gafner in Geneva in 1969, to parents passionate about dance and photography. He changed his name in 1995 after winning a prestigious dance award.

"After winning the award I found it difficult to perform, as I felt pressure to live up to it. Changing my name allowed me to be something that is not expected, and not to be pinpointed."

He explains that the name Foofwa really means nothing, the "d" in his surname is a play on nobility and this, coupled with "immobility", is a seriously funny name.

But his humour is not flippant. He has a serious attitude towards humour which reflects in his dance work.

"I love the festivity in humour. We can be laughing together and it's a celebration of life. It is a good way of looking at life."

Exploring

"I am not saying we must not see the reality. I don't like entertainment that diverts from reality. A whole audience can laugh together in celebration of our humanity and our condition. This is not always joyful, but if we can laugh we are able to get rest, peace and community."

"Laughter does this like dancing and music does. It is a way to spend time together and feel our humanity together."

Foofwa started exploring his own work in 1998, after having danced professionally with numerous noted dance companies, including the Stuttgart Ballet in Germany and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in New York.

Award-winning Swiss dancer and choreographer Foofwa d'Imobilite will be in Durban next week for the 12th Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience which runs from Wednesday until September 12 at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre and other venues. **Charlotte Fairfax** Skyped him in Berlin, where he is currently performing.

In 2000 he founded his dance company, Neopost Ahrrrt, in Geneva.

"I wanted to explore new territory, new adventures," he says. "I enjoyed working with other choreographers but wanted to do something else and see if anyone would be interested in following this new direction."

He has since created a fascinating body of work which breaks the rules and conventions of theatrical or staged dance.

The titles of his pieces say it all: *Media Vice Versa* (2002), dealing with digital images; *Perform.dancerun.2* (2003), focusing on relations between dance and sport; and *Injuria* (2004), centred on the precariousness of dancers' conditions.

Other works delve into out-of-body experiences, work with dancers or non-dancers, and explore rituals and primitivism, and the manipulated bodies of the entertainment business.

His *The Making of Spectacles* (2008), which will be seen at Jomba!, is a quartet asking the audience to construct the dance by voting in a public, democratic process. It is described as a "wry comment on the art form of choreography".



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In this dance theatre piece, the audience is invited to collaborate with the artistic team to compose a unique, one-off performance.

After playful, democratic voting, where humour is invited, the audience can enjoy the synthesis of their group decisions.

So remarkably different to the usual offerings of contemporary dance, Foofwa's work is almost impossible to label.

I ask him if he could classify it himself. Laughing, he replies: "I think it is more interesting when you cannot classify something – as

so much of life is like that. Nothing is fixed.

"I use humour as a way to find a relaxation, and create quality, between the performers and audience. We are not pretending to be any more than what we are."

"Sometimes the stage can be sublime and we become half-gods, but I like the idea that if you sparkle you can still be human and as simple as anybody."

Foofwa draws on many styles, concepts and media to create his dance work.

"I am foremost someone who loves dance. Both my parents danced, so I appropriated this legacy, and I wanted to dedicate part of my life to dance."

"Even though dance is my field, anything that can serve to create a concept – be it theatre, mime, *commedia dell'arte* or a one-man show – is welcome and useful."

"So I am open to anything that can serve the purpose of what I want to say. I don't think that things in life are so boxed in. For example, where does one thing start and finish? Dance, for example, is also music. Is not the thumping and breathing of dancers at once movement and music?"

The idea for *The Making of Spectacles* evolved from an idea Foofwa had to communicate with the audience, like in a one-man show.

Collaboration

His company did some studies to see how a work of art could go from audience to stage and they gauged people's reactions.

"The spectator always makes his own performance," he says, adding that it was Marcel Duchamp who said spectators complete the work of art: "They are the creators."

"We are all in fact 'spect-actors' when we watch something. Everyone is acting. The audience is not separate from the action, so we thought it would be interesting to involve the audience in collaborating with us. It is really about how we create our own worlds."

● *The Making of Spectacles* will be performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at 7.30pm on September 9 and 10. A discussion will be held after the Friday performance. Ticket prices for the Jomba! Festival cost R45 for adults, R30 for students, pensioners and block bookings of 10 or more. Booking is at Computicket.

