

“We embody contradictions”.

Panel Discussion with Composers Neo Muyanga, Bode Omojola and Charles Uzor on Production Conditions of Operas in the African Diaspora

Lena van der Hoven

The conference *THE “AFRICAN OPERATIC VOICE” - Opera and Music Theatre in Africa and the African Diaspora* took place at the Institute of Musicology of the University of Bern from 8 to 10 September 2023. Opera productions from eight African countries were discussed. On the second day, which focused on notions of genre and opera institutions in Africa and its diaspora, a panel discussion was held with South African composer Neo Muyanga and Nigerian composers Bode Omojola and Charles Uzor on the conditions of opera production outside Africa. Neo Muyanga regularly produces opera in Europe, Bode Omojola is the Hammond-Douglass Five College Professor at Mount Holyoke College and the Five Colleges in the United States, and Charles Uzor moved to Switzerland as a child, where he now works as a composer. All composers were asked by the convenor Lena van der Hoven ahead of the conference to prepare statements on the topic, as on opening for the panel discussion among them and the audiences started.¹

Transcribed and edited by Lena van der Hoven

Charles Uzor:

These days have been very moving. I came to Switzerland about 55 years ago when I was a child, and I have turned white as you may see, but inside there's still some Blackness. Maybe you can understand, in this situation – it's a hybrid situation – I am trying to dig for some roots while avoiding pulling them out. Not that I would feel unhappy in the white world. I love to be here. Some of the best culture for me is Renaissance painting and Renaissance music. But still, there's an urge to dig for some Blackness. And these days, as few other moments give me the opportunity of sharing real Black thought with real Black women and men, which again makes me understand the difference between what I represent for others and what I feel I am. This is true especially today when I listen to the interesting papers and discussions, that should be continued. Moreover, I am struck by the fact that not only me is trying to find a path, but Africa as well is trying to find one. I am rather thinking of Africans than Afro-Americans. Afro-Americans seem to have come to belong to a different home. They seem to have found a home, but Africans are still trying to find their identity, also through the arts.

When I compare this with what my colleague Josuha Tolulope David tells us about Nigerian opera in Lagos, I feel so amazed and worried at the same time because even in Lagos they play Mozart, whom I love. But still, why do they play Mozart and try to turn him into a Black face, or try to turn Black faces into Mozart, which can never succeed? It makes me feel that our roots are missing there as well as some important subversive elements. In a theatre that still plays for an elite (copying white faces, attitudes and gestures) Blackness will be lost. And even though it's important to give people access to this kind of culture, be it with cheap tickets, with reversed symbols and metaphors, it will still be a white world if you don't change the stories and the way they are told. I think there should be research for a solution out of this abyss. I may be wrong, maybe it's my personal problem, but I can sense a deep mistrust of African identity there and a fear of a new identity that could be more subversive, prouder and more political, hence less subservient to white aesthetics. As I said, I am the white guy here, and this all may sound like a contradiction, but I don't think it is.

Lena van der Hoven:

It is very interesting to hear you address questions of identity, and I would like to bring this back to the topoi of opera production outside of Africa. I'm curious to know more about how you see yourself as a composer who is here in Switzerland, you mentioned this "whiteness" in you. I would like to ask if in the production processes in Europe maybe not your whiteness but also your Blackness was sometimes perceived and if this might have made it more difficult in a way to produce something.

Charles Uzor:

I think it's the other way round, at least for me. This is a bit dangerous to say, because it can be understood in the wrong way – but I think for me it's somehow easier to have access and to be produced and to be played than for you or any white person. I think this started some years ago, when a positive notion of Blackness and political correctness started to overwhelm the discourse, maybe out of bad conscience of the whites, maybe by the sheer abundance of Black composers. For me, it's becoming almost dangerously accessible to have a podium and to be listened to. It doesn't mean that it's easy for all Black people, and there are many pitfalls in being privileged. Anyway, I am personally not discriminated in the musical scene. The bigger question is whether I can truly show anything meaningful and worth sharing and whether my music is performed the way I want it to be performed. This is more crucial than the open door to festivals and commissions.

The second difficulty comes when I try to be radical. Then the doors suddenly shut. As a practical example, at the moment (actually since many years) I'm working on an opera on Leopold II, King of Belgium. You may be laughing because you know what's coming. The doors won't open for such a plot! But for me it is very important to tell the story. I really want to stage it and not only in front of the audience, but also in front of the masks and statues in an African museum, with the masks and statues as witnesses. I want to show the connection between the theft and the murder of Africans in colonial times, not only in Congo, but everywhere in Africa. To stage this, I am facing a lot of obstacles, which may be helpful because it will make me want to do it even more and better, and I think I'll succeed eventually.

Neo Muyanga:

Where I would like to start is where I'm based. I mean I'm very consciously, very deliberately based in South Africa and I work in the opera community here, which is on the wrong side of the street. By that I mean I work with people who have operatic voices, but not all of them have had

access to operatic training. And one might ask how that happens. And it's partly to do with what we touched on yesterday, the history of the choral movement, the history of disseminated recordings, mimicry have all played a role in some people wanting to profile themselves and to give voice in that way, partly because of associations with ideas of sophistication, erudition a sense of progress, partly also because they just enjoy it, because they are able to do it in the choir and they enjoy being able to perform in that way as a collective.

The community of opera singers that I'm working with is sometimes a very distinct group of people from the opera membership that goes to Cape Town Opera, which tends to be the elite, the white audience that has bought membership or at least they used to buy memberships until a number of years ago. And the opera community that I've chosen to work with is the opera community of people who grew up in township choirs like I did. It is home to me, I can read it, it can read me. And what happens often is because I work from the inspiration of folk melodies, and I compose in the way and the style that is legible in that community very quickly; the work has an antiphonal aspect. So the call and response becomes available. Specifically here, I'll speak about a production that I made with Magnet Theatre and Cape Town Opera about ten years ago now, which was an adaptation of Zake Mda's book *The Heart of Redness*.²

And in it we really played with some of the hymns that people would've known from the township area and we amplified them in an operatic way. Then what happened in performance is that people on the floor, in the auditorium who, when they recognised the references, started to interject and or accompany the singers on stage. That troubled the people who were the more elite white audience sitting at the front. So that's one example for me that shows how these things can live side by side and the tension can be somewhat productive depending, of course, on where you sit. Your question is about the conditions of producing outside of South Africa. I do work as some of you know quite a lot outside South Africa. So I want to give you an example about *Dutch National Opera* and which premiered in 2021. It is a project, an opera entitled, *How Anansi freed the stories of the world*.³ Anansi, in the Akan tradition, is a deity who was able to transit between the world of the gods and the world of the humans.

Due to the transatlantic slave trade, stories of Anansi also transited the Atlantic Ocean to influence Dutch Caribbean stories, in particular the folklore for children started to profile the character of Anansi within the enslaved community. Later, when communities of people from the Dutch Caribbean were either imported as indentured servants or chose to migrate northwards to the Netherlands as economic labourers in search of better economic prospects, the tales of Anansi, of course, travelled along with them too. So when cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and others started to experience an influx of people from the outlying colonies what happened, as far as I understand it, is that the stories of Anansi and the folklore of the Black Caribbean was transitioning back into Dutch society. But these stories have now transformed somewhat after making their transition, compared to how they would have been experienced in their original West Africa context. All of this is, of course, a story that unfolds and plays out over a period of about 300 years. So the commission from the Dutch National Opera, I think, came to me based on the fact that they know me as an African composer, a composer based in Africa.

They know that my tradition is not West African necessarily, but they were intrigued whether I would be interested in telling that story. And of course I was, I do work quite a bit in West Africa and the stories of Anansi are interesting and important to me, but how I also enter the story of Anansi is through my work in Latin America where the worlds of Capoeira and Candomblé refer

² *Heart of Redness* premiered in August 2015 in the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town as a collaboration project by Cape Town Opera and the Magnet Theatre.

³ Opera from Neo Muyanga to an libretto of Maarten Hinte, which premiered in November 2021 at the Dutch National Opera.

themselves to the lore of the Orishas, particularly in Brazil. So I was very keen when I responded, firstly, to accept the commission but then to also say there are two conditions under which I would be able to work. One was, that I would need to work with a librettist namely, Maarten van Hinte who would write text that reflected the influence of the language of the Dutch Caribbean. It's creole and the lingua franca references signalling the ways in which those transitions were made into the Netherlands and Dutch society are of great interest to me. I think that is a political statement, right? The languages we choose to valorise in operatic terms on operatic stages matter a lot.

The second premise I set forward was the need to earmark a period of workshopping because my work isn't always a comfortable journey for people who've been trained in the West only to undertake. I think of course people trained in the West can perform it by simply playing what is written on the score or page. But in fact, there are a lot of interpretive qualities and details that can go missing if an entire musical and contextual language is unavailable for us to exchange. So, my second insistence for a period of workshopping was, so that the work wasn't merely performed in quick succession after the rehearsal, as an opera company would normally opera undertake on an existing work, that had perhaps already been performed numerous times.

These for me are very important postures, which I generally make when I'm working outside South Africa. The first is to work in a language that reflects an alterity and the second is to insist on workshopping where I spend time with the musicians, with the singers, with the conductor, with the director, really articulating and translating what I mean because we don't always understand the same thing. This comes out very much for me where and how people play syncopated rhythms for example, and people's resistance to harmonising in particular ways, which I'm sure we all have experienced.

And so I find my work, after I've composed, tends to be that of a diplomat who then has to help make the translation of that work land as effectively as possible at its destination. Working with the Dutch National Opera and Ballet is complicated because these are two companies that have shared a house for the past 60 years, I'm told, but who had hardly or never worked together before they came to work together on my production. So a lot of my work wasn't just being able to look after the musical side, but it was about setting up a conversation between the needs of the ballet company and the needs of the opera company in order for the musical work to translate for the artists and audiences alike. I think to do this kind of work outside of Africa, and I'm coming to my conclusion now, really requires us - as composers, music-makers and as music-interpreters who base themselves in Africa and who want to speak to the world - to take seriously the role of translation and what happens in the moment of transiting from our base to another place.

Some details or nuances may be lost, some may be transformed, while others may be found or invented anew – for me, it is about having a posture as a maker of work. The thing that I wanted to share in the house, and by the way there was a third small condition, which was to ensure the opera could be taken on the road. This aligns with the story that Donato [Somma] was touching on yesterday [during his conference presentation], which is the opportunities we get sometimes are a once off and for me the political act begins with a second coming and possibly also a third where the work is allowed to build muscle in performance as it journeys to different audiences. I'll pause there for now.

Bode Omojola:

The context within which I've been working as a composer of opera is slightly different, I think, from the two speakers because it has been likely within an educational context. When I got a job, one of the things they would like me to do in the Five Colleges is to teach and produce operas,

which I thought was a good thing and that has given me a kind of a backdoor channel to compose, and then I have the support of the Mount Holyoke Symphony Orchestra. For me, I'm lucky to have an orchestra conductor who is ready to put my work as part of his repertoire for the year. You know how orchestra conductors are very strict and they have their own plans. One of the challenges that I have faced is not unrelated to the very nature of the work we do as composers of music that is heavily connected to Western classical music, and one could argue that there's something self-contradictory by engaging in the very medium that signals colonising and trying to contest that very space. This is what I call taking the cultural battle to the musical warfront where the musical sign of oppression becomes a decolonial tool. This is something I have said before, whereby we're using the very symbol of oppression as a means of resistance. It's difficult. So, if there are contradictions, if there are challenges, it's because of that, but also because we're dealing with an art form that is elitist. Let's face it, unless we just want to do our traditional drumming.

But the moment we begin to use some Western elements or the Western orchestra, there's something elitist about that. Again, there's something self-contradictory or potentially self-contradictory about that. So, if we're facing challenges, it's because of the nature of the art form that we're engaging in. Fela Anikulapo will not face such challenges, for example, because of the nature of his art form. Now, the way that I have tried to address this problem is to do different kinds of opera. The first opera that I did was the *Palm-wine Drinkard*,⁴ the one that Dr. Adeolu Ogunsanya discussed earlier today, which is a folk opera. So, we didn't have a musical score. I got the songs recorded by somebody in Nigeria sent to me. I taught the students by rote. We brought drummers from New York, and everything went beautifully well, and the Five College community enjoyed it. So that's one extreme form where we basically do an orally mediated opera that wasn't even mine either.

That was followed up by another opera called *Queen Moremi* which is based on the Yorùbá legend of a woman who resisted invaders tormenting her community. And for that opera, I wrote a little bit of some musical numbers, just a couple, but again it is largely orally based. So that's another way that I tried to escape from these inherent contradictions that we face as composers. So for the third one, I decided to be more faithful to myself, to what I really would like to do, which is to actually compose an opera and use an orchestra, predominantly a symphony orchestra, which was the one I wrote about in the *African Theatre* 19 volume on opera and then followed that up with this last one that you saw today, again, *Funmilayo*,⁵ which is fully notated. So, these various approaches are part of that. Regarding the ways that I'm trying to engage with those contradictions, one could ask, which one satisfies me most? The ones that I wrote and in which I reflected the cultural influences that molded me. I went to an European art music school, followed by a postdoc in Germany and it's difficult for me to escape from that. This is why I say that these contradictions that we face actually define us. We embody those contradictions, and I don't see how we can escape them in what we do in our various compositions.

I would like to pose to my friend speaking in South Africa a question: How do you engage with these contradictions that I'm talking about? I imagine that you are facing the same issues.

Neo Muyanga:

My own style of composition, as I mentioned yesterday, is hybrid because I am, and I take this very seriously, part Western trained, part street trained. And so the contradiction is part of my language, but it's not different. W[illiam] E[dward] B[urghardt] Du Bois spoke about this idea of

⁴ An opera by Kola Ogunmola, based on Amos Tutuola's novel.

⁵ The opera is based on the anti-colonial activism of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978).

double or triple consciousness. We as children of the diaspora, because we have grown up under the imposition of the colonial settler reality or people who've been taken across to other lands, what you acquire is an ability to speak in multiple registers and speak in multiple tongues. And for us in South Africa, we still operate in those terms. We've now got up to 12 official languages. I believe in Nigeria you have something like 200.

[Interjection from B. O.: Right over 200, 500. We're still counting.]

There you go. And I don't know what your situation is with your languages, but for us in our languages, particularly those of us who grew up in the urban scape, you grow up speaking three or four of those languages which are not necessarily related and then you speak English and then we were all forced to speak and learn Afrikaans under our apartheid.

And so functionally having to speak multiple languages as you turn to the different people in your conversation is a norm. The normative for us is to speak multiple cultural languages. And so I take that as the inspiration to go into how we speak artistic languages as well. So, my musical language has this facility, which is why I have the challenge often when I'm working with people from outside South Africa to say, but what do you mean by this? This sounds wrong, or this doesn't resolve well or this is a question. That's why for me, it's so important to represent the work because what I bring is the cultural context together with what's on the written page. So, I don't feel conflicted by the contradiction. Contradiction is necessarily what I'm constructed of.

Lena van der Hoven:

Neo, you mentioned that you have workshops with the singers and I know that sometimes you also do collaborative work. Are these working methods something that is unknown or difficult when you bring it to a world outside of Africa where the production process is so different? Or is that maybe part of the reason why they want you, because the way you are approaching production is different from what we're used to in the Global North?

Neo Muyanga:

No, permit me a little large «Yes» here. I think often what happens with these commissions, particularly to African composers is because the commissioners in Europe are at a loss as to who to ask about how to do things differently. I think the Global North as a generic tradition and a place realises, it's reached to the end of its path. And so people are looking for inspiration and they're looking for new horizons, new vantage points. The idea of opera is to always look for the new horizon to usurp. It's almost like a vampire. In order to survive for 400 years, you need to be eating outside of your normal biological fare. And I think it's very similar to what's happening with the major opera houses today. So when they look up and they realise they haven't programmed work that comes from elsewhere, and the critique that comes for them is you see you are a preserve of white monopoly and white elitism and they look up and they reach out to the first two or three, they happen to know, I happen, I guess, to be on that list now, but I'm not always on that list.

And I suspect all of us who are composers in this room have those lists that we reflect up on. And so the accepting of a commission for me always comes with those terms in mind. So I accept knowing that that's part of why the approach is made. And my reason for accepting is I still have something I want to speak into that complex and I have a politics, which is why I have to be so careful about the agreements I have set up coming in is to tell them what I need in order for my posture, my politics to also be reflected and then to stay in the room with them when the tensions flare up and invariably, inevitably they will flare up where people misunderstand or people dislike or people would rather prefer you work in the way they would normally do is to constantly

make representation for why the commission for it to mean well has to deliver on certain key factors that recognise our historical stories with one another.

So it's about staying with the trouble, to quote Haraway, I guess it's about staying for the tense moments and ensuring that those become part of what the production is made of. And my way is to include members of the company, the people I'm making with into what my story and political context is as I come. And so I guess there is a way in which that can reflect uniquely, but I don't think it's particularly unique because I know people who are based in Europe who work in this way and who have for many years, I mean I think what's called the avant-garde or what was called the avant-garde that came from the northeast of the United States around the 1980s was about workshoping on the lower east side of New York for example. And that language then transitions into a rarefied respected language, but it's after a number of people have taken it up as a collective to represent I guess present we're doing that too.

Lena van der Hoven:

I know that you, Neo, see opera as something that is political, and it is a political statement for you. The question for me would be, is it also something that's always political for you, Bode?

Bode Omojola:

Yes, but maybe not radical politics given the context in which we created these things. The Five College area is a likely very liberal part of the US. One recurring or one particular theme that has recorded in my operas has to do with the role of women. The *Queen Moremi* who resisted the invaders, and then formula who led women against British culinary. So to that extent it's significantly political. And then the other opera that I did five years ago, *Ìrìn Àjò* is based on immigrant life in the United States. And at the time when that particular topic was very topical and people felt a little bit uncomfortable when we staged that opera. But one challenge, again going back to the contradictions, at times I see contradictions between the politics of my opera and the music of the opera. [...] At times I go back after the taking of my opera and then I begin to reflect and I say, well maybe my music is yet to reach the level of the politics that my liberator is conveying. [...] I think my music is still relatively conservative and then there is a limit to the radicality of the kind of politics I could do given the fact that I'm doing this on campuses who are sponsoring the production.

Lena van der Hoven:

One last question: When I spoke to an African playwright last week, he told me that he found it very difficult that when he wanted to bring his productions to Europe, he was asked to work on issues such as migration or decolonisation. He expressed that some of his artistic freedom is taken away because he has to be responsible as an African voice for certain issues. Is that something you feel too?

Bode Omojola:

It doesn't apply to me because I'm here and I do things mostly on campuses, but I could imagine that there'll be all sorts of challenges for those who are trying to come from the continent. They'll need financial support and those who give the money may impose conditions.

Neo Muyanga:

In my case, no, I haven't experienced that and I'm grateful and fortunate to have that. And I think it's for two reasons. One is the approach often comes from the house because they have a sense

of the kind of work and the kinds of themes I focus on and I focus on specific themes, certainly in certain pockets and brackets of periods. But I think the work of defining your opera based on what philosophical or political purpose it fulfils for the person inviting, is the work to be done by the marketing department. And so I would throw that back and of course I'm not saying that lightly because I think one needs to have quite a lot of confidence and a strength and a calling card to be able to make that request.

But the request has to be along the lines of, well the story happens to be about these lives that are lived in this alternative way and let's find somebody in a department, whether that's a local department or whether that belongs to a commissioning house that is able to understand what the meaning of that is and spin it in a way that allows for tickets to be sold. Because ultimately that's what they're trying to do. They're trying to make it a product that you can put on a supermarket shelf. And to do that, you need people who advertise products for the supermarket and those are people who have the skill of marketing. And I think if we are more resolute about these parameters and I think we can afford that, there's a way in which the industry itself will transform. By the way, I'm also speaking in multiple registers. There's one conversation obviously with the major houses and it's quite another conversation with experimental platforms that are open to generating ideas that they haven't seen before. And I think one has to calibrate the language so that it does service also to the fact of what that composer or what that maker of the opera wants to do. But I think first and foremost, one has to have an opinion. One has to have a thing they stand for and that has to be the basis upon which the invitation is accepted.

Donato Somma:

Thank you so much to all three of you for these fantastic statements. They've been really interesting just to respond. Now I think you mentioned a European creativity at some endpoint of its path and looking outward for inspiration, but I would say that's been going on for over a century and [Pablo] Picasso and abstract cubism and Africa's been a resource. I think what the difference is now is that composers like you are occupying the stage, setting out conditions. It's not Africa as resource anymore. I think there are some composers like you who are able to set conditions that use an opening to actually occupy more completely. And I think that's very powerful. And Bode, I was reminded of Audre Lorde's *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house* in your statement of at what point do you put down certain tools, use other tools or work from within and then also just really moved by Charles's idea of suddenly being given the keys to that house and you're not shown under what conditions, you've been given the keys to the house and then you go into dismantle the house you finally have the keys to, or do you do something else completely. So, thank you for sharing these amazing statements about where you each are in your compositional lives and what it means for Africa and the African diaspora.

About the authors

Lena van der Hoven

Lena van der Hoven's research interests include the diverse entanglements of opera and music theatre with politics and their function in societies. She received a PhD in Musicology at Humboldt-University, Berlin. She was also a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Max Planck Institute for Human Development. From 2015 to 2022 she has been a Postdoc for Musicology at the University of Bayreuth and from 2016 a member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In 2020 she was appointed Research Fellow of Africa Open Institute for Music, Research and Innovation at Stellenbosch University. In 2018 she received the Scientific Award of the University of Bayreuth for her research on South African opera after the apartheid. She was co-editor of a volume on opera and music theatre in Africa in the Boydell & Brewer series 'African Theatre' and is a co-founder of BORN. Since 2022 she has been Professor for Music Theatre at the University of Bern.

Bode Omojola

Bode Omojola is the Hammond-Douglass Five College Professor of Music. He holds a joint appointment with all five institutions of the Five College Consortium: Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, Smith Colleges, and the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, USA. Omojola earned his Ph.D. from the University of Leicester in England and previously taught at Northeastern University in Boston, USA, as well as the University of Ilorin in Nigeria. He has held several fellowship positions, including the Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship (University of Cologne, Germany), the Ratcliffe Fellowship in Musicology at Harvard University, and the Ford Foundation African Humanities Fellowship (University of Ghana, Legon). Omojola, who combines scholarly work with composition, has published on diverse African music topics, including opera and popular music, in peer-reviewed journals like *Ethnomusicology* and *the British Forum for Ethnomusicology*. His compositions span various media, including piano, chamber music, choral works, and operas. His most recent opera, *Funmilayo*, is based on a libretto about the anti-colonial activism of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978). The opera premiered in the United States in April 2023, performed by the Mount Holyoke Symphony Orchestra and the Five College African Opera students. It was conducted by Ng Tian Hui.

Charles Uzor

Charles Uzor, born in Nigeria, came to Switzerland during the Biafra war. 1990, after studying oboe and composition at the Royal Academy of Music he obtains his Diploma and Master degree. 2005 his dissertation on "Melody and the Phenomenology of Internal Time-Awareness" is completed. Uzor's oeuvre focusses on pieces with ensemble and voice, e.g. *Canto, Notre Vie, Ricercare* and *Solar Eclipse*. *Go* wins the International Onassis Prize. *Black Tell* is staged at Expo 02. *spleen /mimicri* and *Nri /mimicri*, with lowered bird song represent Uzor's concern with identity and Derek Parfit's philosophy. *Mothertongue* on the loss of language, 8'46". *George Floyd in memoriam* and *Merrusch* strengthen Uzor's political positions. In 2023 *Parmenides Prooimion*, 8'46" and *Katharsis Kalkül*. *George Floyd in memoriam* are premiered by London Sinfonietta and the LFCO. *Hier in diesem zierl'chen Prunkgebäude* is performed by the BR-Choir. In 2024/2025 presents *Go. Septet for Ballet imaginaire* performed by ICE and the OENM, *Breaking of the Vessels* by the BBC-SSO, *The Great Wall* by Ekmeles and *nids et territoires*. Uzor is a Civitella Ranieri Fellow and currently working on the opera *Leopold II. Exhibit*. He lives in Switzerland and Greece and has published 5 CDs by Neos and col legno.

Neo Muyanga

Neo Muyanga's practice straddles multiple spheres of disciplines: Opera & Music Theatre, Multimedia Installation and Studio Recording. A common thread in the work is storytelling that relies

on archival research and especially features ongoing investigations into *voice* as a vector that continually shapes how we understand and interact with society. Born in Soweto, Muyanga’s compositional style reflects largely his grounding in the South African choral tradition and also his researches into practices such as the Italian Madrigal, Ethiopian Mezmur and the Shaabi musics of Egypt. Muyanga is a PhD candidate affiliated to the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of Cape Town. He also holds the position of *Impresario* at *The Centre for The Less Good Idea* - an interdisciplinary incubator space for arts based in Maboneng, Johannesburg.