

KAAI
THEATER

CONNEXION BXL

PEPE 'ELMAS' NASWA
DANS LA PEAU DE L'AUTRE

PREMIÈRE | 15 > 17/12 20:30 | KAAISTUDIO'S
DANCE | 60 MIN



PEPE 'ELMAS' NASWA DREAM MANDÉ – DJATA

NL Augustus 2016, een volkskermis ergens in Kinshasa. De jonge choreograaf Pepe Elmas Naswa kijkt vol bewondering naar een nieuwe dans. Het is een indrukwekkende en extreem energieke slangendans, gebracht door een groep chèqueés (straatjongeren) en kuluna (bendejongeren). Na afloop vraagt hij de jongeren naar hun kijk op dans en de betekenis van hun bewegingen. Hij overtuigt ze zelfs om de slangendans tijdens een workshop aan te leren aan een groep hedendaagse dansers. Dat werd het vertrekpunt voor *Dans la peau de l'autre*. De dans toont de chaos en de radeloosheid van een aan zijn lot overgelaten generatie. De bewegingen zijn doordrongen van hun kwaadheid en frustraties. In de muziek en de opzweepende ritmes van DJ Samantha zitten invloeden van Congolese rumba, hip hop, rap, enzovoort.

FR Août 2016, une kermesse populaire quelque part à Kinshasa. Le jeune chorégraphe Pepe Elmas Naswa regarde plein d'admiration une nouvelle danse. Une danse de serpent impressionnante et extrêmement énergique, exécutée par un groupe de chèqueés (enfants de la rue) et de kuluna (enfants de gangs). Ensuite, il demande aux enfants leur vision de la danse et la signification de leurs mouvements. Il les convainc même d'apprendre la danse de serpent à un groupe de danseurs contemporains lors d'un atelier. Ce fut le point de départ de *Dans la peau de l'autre*. La danse montre le chaos et le désespoir d'une génération abandonnée à son sort. Les mouvements sont imprégnés de rage et de frustration. Dans la musique et les rythmes endiablés de DJ Samantha, on perçoit des influences de rumba congolaise, de hip-hop, de rap, etc.

EN August 2016, a spring fair somewhere in Kinshasa. The young choreographer Pepe Elmas Naswa is watching a new dance, fascinated and amazed. It is an impressive and extremely energetic snake dance, performed by a group of chèqueés (street kids) and kuluna (gang members). Afterwards, he asks the kids what they think about dance and the significance of movement. He even convinces them to teach a group of contemporary dancers the snake dance during a workshop. This was when *Dans la peau de l'autre* was born. The dance expresses the chaos and desperation of an abandoned generation. The movements are pervaded by their anger and frustration. The music and energetic rhythms by DJ Samantha were influenced by Congolese rumba, hip hop, rap, etc.

CREDITS

CHOREOGRAPHY Pepe Elmas Naswa | DANCE Maxime Amusini, David Bakonese, Serge 'DJ Samantha' Boka, Bel'Ange Hangidi, André 'Bared' Kabangu, Trésor Ngonzama, Dieu 'Charlo' Risasi | SOUNDSCAPE Salva Mose | LIGHT DESIGN Ralf Nonn | OUTSIDE EYE Ben Fury | PRODUCTION Compagnie Pепенas, Kaaitheater, Connexion BXL | THANKS TO Institut Français de Kinshasa | WITH THE SUPPORT OF Brussels-Capital Region - Development Cooperation

LA CHANSON DE/SONG OF SAMANTHA

L'amour des gangsters ne s'arrête pas comme ça... Maman José, tu soutiens les
jeunes mais maintenant que c'est mon tour je dois attendre

Le Refrain (danseurs) : TOZELA (On attend) !!!

J'ai beaucoup pleuré, on nous a promis du travail mais ça n'arrive pas

Depuis qu'il est assis sur son trône, il ne fait rien pour nous

Je regarde le Congo, les fonctionnaires, les veuves et les orphelins...on a pleuré
plusieurs fois, on nous a promis du travail mais jusqu'à maintenant toujours rien

Je regarde le Congo, je vois beaucoup de vendeurs de rue, beaucoup de
chauffeurs et de prostitués

On a attendu, on a attendu mais on attend toujours

Papa, Papa, Papa là, tu parles mais tu n'agis pas, tu fais de l'argent mais tu ne
partages pas

Ca fait longtemps que je danse, ça fait longtemps que je chante mais je ne suis
toujours pas reconnu

Je suis venu danser le ZEMBE, le KOTAZO, le FOUMBA MOUELA, le
ESTHOUBELE, le TOKOLONGOLA, le MULUNGE

.....

The love of gangsters does not stop like that ... Mom José, you support young
people but now that it's my turn I have to wait

The Chorus (dancers): TOZELA (We're waiting) !!!

I cried a lot, we were promised work but it does not come

Since he is sitting on his throne, he doesn't do anything for us

I look at the Congo, the civil servants, the widows and the orphans ... we cried
several times, we were promised work but until now nothing happened

I look at Congo, I see a lot of street vendors, a lot of drivers and prostitutes

We waited, we waited but we still wait

Papa, Papa, Daddy, you talk but you do not act, you make money but you do not
share

I've been dancing for a long time, I've been singing for a long time but I'm still not
recognized

I came to dance ZEMBE, KOTAZO, FOUMBA MOUELA, ESTHOUBELE,
TOKOLONGOLA, MULUNGE

‘HERE, IN MY CORNER, I’M THE KING’

A CONVERSATION WITH PEPE ELMAS NASWA, BY EVA DECAESSTECKER (KAAITHEATER, OCTOBER 2018). TRANSLATED BY JOHN ARBLASTER.
THIS CONVERSATION WAS MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO MICHAEL DISANKA, WHO CONDUCTED THE INTERVIEW FOR US IN KINSHASA.

During *Connexion BXL*, Pepe Elmas Naswa will present the premiere of his fourth creation. In *Dans la peau de l’autre* (In the Other’s Skin), he casts a spotlight on the potential of a group of ‘forgotten’ Kinshasan youths. ‘They dance with abandon to overcome the difficulties of their everyday lives – but what is their future?’

Tell us about your first encounter with the snake dance. What was the first time that you found inspiration in the street?

It was a long process that led me to the snake dance, but let’s start from who I am to unravel all the contours of the project. I am a young choreographer from Kinshasa and thanks to the *Plateforme Contemporaine*, I have had a series of rich encounters with playwrights, choreographers and directors of international fame. From this perspective, I wanted to do something new with contemporary dance, which would be a discovery for me and which would allow me to cast off the yoke of my elders and finally find my own voice. I first encountered the snake dance at a bar in my neighbourhood, ‘Chez Papa Fololo’, the manager of which regularly organizes events with young people who are socially marginalized because they are scoundrels, street children, and hotheads... The bar is often very rowdy, the beer flows freely, and fights break out over nothing. If you go there, you risk being assaulted. And it was in this world that for the first time, I saw young people energetically dancing the snake dance.

How did the young people react when you suggested that they teach you the dance? And what did they say when you asked them to explain the meaning of the movements?

It was a bit strange for me because I did not feel excluded from the dance. But I did have a lot of questions about the origins of the dance and the attitudes that result from it. It was something that only happened there and not elsewhere. Many of the young people already knew me and that certainly helped our relationship. DJ Samantha is one of the prominent young people with whom I have worked. He was my guide and it was with him that I made the journey to a different world that exists right beside ours. I gradually discovered that this is a dance that developed out of a certain provocative audacity. It expresses an ephemeral joy as if to say ‘I am dancing now and nothing else exists, I am the king here and you are all watching me.’ When I asked them to tell me about what motivated their movements – because the movements always changed – they answered ‘I dance to show that I am superior... or because I want them to know that I am the strongest...’

So it is a provocative dance that says: here, in my corner, I am the king? I imagine that also reflects the situation in which these young people live.

Yes, they think of themselves as baby snakes. They were forced to fend for themselves too early because their parents neglected them. So they find themselves somewhat on the margins of society. The simple fact that they are there is disturbing and the relationships between them are governed by the law of the jungle. They live in constant violence. You can feel the spirit of struggle in this dance, which gives provocation free rein.

How did you integrate the dance into your choreography *Dans la peau de l'autre*?

First and foremost, I had to preserve the spirit of the dance. As they say themselves: 'sans esprit, zéro' (without spirit, there is nothing). So I integrated it into my creative process. Eighteen people took part in a series of exchange workshops with professional and amateur dancers in Kinshasa. At the end of these workshops, I already had some material and I selected two of the eighteen participants, including DJ Samantha, to be part of the production's cast. We then worked on transforming this material, which allowed us to go beyond the snake dance itself.

Going beyond this dance of survival also led to you integrating other forms of Kinshasan street dancing. How did you do that?

My goal was to bring the reality of this very neglected social group back into the spotlight, to raise questions. They dance with abandon to overcome the difficulties of their everyday lives, but what is their future? Do they have a future? This required a transformation not only of the material that I used, but also of these juvenile delinquents who are called 'Kuluna'. My production is inspired by this segment of Kinshasan society, so this transformation still had to be infused with the spirit of Kinshasa. That is why I explored other forms of expression, so that I could really integrate the streets of Kinshasa. After seeing my production, I would like people to see these young people in a different way because they are also a constitutive part of Kinshasa.

How do you change this perspective, knowing that they are violent?

When I talk about transformation, I mean that their position needs to change. Some of them have gifts other than violence. You only need to watch them performing the snake

dance to understand that. But society has prevented them from developing in any other way. If I can make two young people aware of the fact that they can achieve more through dance and music than with machetes, my work makes sense. I want them to show the world that they are capable of much more than violence.

Have any the youths seen the show? Have you discussed it with them? If not, will you try to show it to them?

No, not yet. The show will première at the Kaaistudio's in Brussels in December. I hope that the production leads to the return of the snake dance in the place of its birth.

You are a choreographer and a dancer. How did you start dancing yourself?

My background is in the hip-hop movement and I learned to dance while doing it, thanks to the many choreographers that I have met over the course of my career, like Didier Ediho and Faustin Linyekula, and many others both from Africa and elsewhere. I also took part in many workshops organized by the Plateforme Contemporaine in Kinshasa. *Dans la peau de l'autre* (In the Other's Skin) is my fourth piece.

I saw that you presented *Face à Face 2* at the Masdanza Festival on the Canary Island. Was that production influenced by the snake dance?

Perhaps, but it certainly influenced my writing, which you could call contemporary Afro-Street-Kishasan. In *Face à Face 1*, I wanted to take the show to the public and perform in the street to question Kinshasan society about conflict because the various positions are too hardened in Kinshasan society, but there is also an unexpressed energy due to the common ground in society. But in *Face à Face 2*, I return to Congo's recent history, following the presidential elections in 2011, when two political figures in the DRC each claimed victory and took the presidential oath, followed by clashes between their supporters. And we are still living in a kind of cacophony in Congo today.

In December, you will present *Dans la peau de l'autre* (In the Other's Skin) in Brussels during the Connexion Bxl Festival. Is this the first time that you will present your own work in Belgium?

Yes, and I think that this will be the beginning of a new period in my career.

HISTOIRE DE SAMANTHA

Je suis né dans une famille normale avec un père et une mère. A l'âge de 5 ans Papa est mort, je suis resté seul avec Maman. Maman n'avait plus les moyens de me payer mes études. Ce qui me dérangeait beaucoup parce que je n'avais pas la chance d'étudier. Maman m'a trop laissé chez ma grand-mère, j'ai grandi chez elle.

Parce qu'on avait rien à faire, on a créé un groupe de kuluna, de jeunes délinquants. On allait au marché pour nous battre avec d'autres kuluna. On cassait tout, on cassait les tables dans la rue.

On avait un bar dans le quartier, chez Papa Fololo. Là on se retrouvait avec d'autres groupes de kuluna et tout le monde exprimait ses sentiments. Celui qui veut danser, il danse. Celui qui veut chanter, il chante.

Un jour je suis venu au bar pour chanter mes sentiments. C'était un samedi. Le lundi, les vieux du quartier qui m'avaient entendu chanter m'ont dit que j'avais quelque chose. Ils m'ont offert l'opportunité de chanter dans un studio dans le quartier, ce studio était aussi à un kuluna.

Lorsque j'ai chanté là, mes amis étaient trop contents et la chanson a cartonné. Après ça, Papa Fololo a eu l'idée d'organiser une kermesse pour produire des jeunes kuluna.

Le lendemain de la kermesse, il y a Pepe Elmas qui est venu me voir pour me proposer de travailler avec moi, par rapport à ce qu'il avait entendu pendant la kermesse. Je me posais beaucoup de questions. Toi tu es danseur, moi je suis chanteur, comment est-ce qu'on peut travailler ensemble? Elmas m'a dit : on va travailler sur ce que j'ai vu hier. C'est à partir de ce moment là que j'ai eu l'envie de travailler avec Elmas.

Chez les autres kuluna, la violence ne finit pas. Les raisons sont la conjoncture du pays, les parents qui n'ont pas les moyens de prendre en charge leurs enfants, et troisièmement mes amis se battent à cause de l'argent et des femmes.

Je lance le conseil qu'ils prennent le don qu'ils ont comme un métier, comme le métier que Dieu les a donné. Qu'ils y mettent l'esprit, et ça va tenir.

Et moi, mon travail est de danser et de chanter.

SAMANTHA'S STORY

I was born in a normal family with a father and a mother. When I was five years old, my father died and I was left alone with my mother. Mama did not have any means to pay my school fees. It was troubling me a lot that I did not have the chance to study. Many times, Mama left me behind to stay with my grandmother, in fact I grew up at her place.

Because we did not have anything, we created a gang of kuluna, young criminals. We went to the market to fight with other kuluna. We tore down everything, we smashed the tables on the streets.

There was a bar in the neighbourhood, 'Chez Papa Fololo'. We gathered there with other kuluna gangs and everyone expressed their feelings. Those who wanted to dance, danced. Those who wanted to sing, sung.

One day I went to the bar to sing about my feelings. It was on a Saturday. On Monday, the elders of the neighbourhood who had heard me sing, told me that I had something special. They gave me the opportunity to sing in a studio in the neighbourhood. That studio also belonged to a kuluna.

When I had sung there, my friends were really happy and the song was a great hit. After that, Papa Fololo had the idea to organize a fair so he could promote young kuluna. The day after the fair, Pepe Elmas Naswa came to see me, and he proposed for us to work together, because of what he had heard at the fair.

I had a lot of questions. You are a dancer, I am a singer, how can we work together?

Elmas told me: we will work on what I have seen yesterday. From that moment on, I was really eager to work with Elmas.

The violence never stops with the other kuluna. The reasons are the economic situation of the country, the parents who do not have the means to take care of their children, and, in the third place, my friends who fight over money and women. I advise them to take their gift as a job, as the job that God gave to them. If they make the effort, it will work.

And my work is to dance and to sing.