

Hewa Rwanda – Letter to the absent

By Dorcy Rugamba

With Dorcy Rugamba accompanied by Majnun

Dates: Mon 3 – Thu 6 March

Venue: Elder Hall

Duration: 1hr 15 mins, no interval

Note: Recommended for audiences 12+

Due to the sensitive nature of this work, latecomers may not be admitted.

Credits:

Author Dorcy Rugamba

Performers Dorcy Rugamba and Majnun

Musical creation Majnun and Akasha

Stage manager Jules Niyonkuru

Dialogue Director Judy Dennis

Production Rwanda Arts Initiative (Rwanda) / The Charge of the Rhinoceros (Belgium)

Producer Ellen Dennis (USA)

Tour manager The Charge of the Rhinoceros (Belgium) chargedurhinoceros.be

Book published by JC Lattès (France)

Presented by Arts Projects Australia and Adelaide Festival.

With the support of Wallonie Bruxelles Internationale (WBI) and Commission Communautaire Française (COCOF) (Belgium).

Every year, Dorcy Rugamba returns to Kimi, on the heights of Kigali, to the family home to reconnect with the absent. There is still ivy on the walls, white calla lilies on the terrace, palm trees, and papaya trees in the garden. From this house, now transformed into an art center, he paints a portrait of the world as it once was, symbolically resurrects the absent to bring them back to life, and contemplates the shape of the world to come.

Thirty years after the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi, actor, author and director Dorcy Rugamba brings to life his work *Hewa Rwanda – Letter to the absent*, a profoundly moving tale of his family, culture and spirituality. In tandem with Senegalese multi-instrumentalist, actor and singer Majnun, Rugamba presents a musical reading from this memoir.

A love letter to those who are no longer here, and a hymn to the living, he addresses his father, mother, and all those who are absent. Rugamba speaks of what he saw and what he learnt from them, and the time it took him to accept the unacceptable. He then asks himself: how can we translate into words what is out of our reach?

Dorcy Rugamba, a major figure of the Rwandan cultural scene brings us this moving, timeless account, carried along by powerful writing and a voice of rare intensity.

"While 'Hewa Rwanda, Letter to the Absent,' addresses the genocide, questions of mourning, and a family that was nearly annihilated, I primarily wanted it not to be a commemorative text but a hymn to life, so the tone of the text deliberately embraces lightness, humour, poetry, music, and life in all its aspects.

Over time, I realized, long after the genocide, that the victims, after losing their lives, faced another form of annihilation—the risk of their existence disappearing as well, after their bodies. Young Rwandans born afterward, as well as international audiences, no longer know who these people were. We often only know their number; sometimes their names are engraved on a stone. Their existence tends to vanish behind their status as victims. A person's existence is much richer than his biological life. There are many things that survive death under normal circumstances: a person's culture, their projects, their loves, their ambitions, their legacy, their ideals, their achievements, the struggles and challenges they faced during their existence and to which the world afterward is indebted. All of this, in the memory of the living, tends to fade before the enormity of the genocide.

This 'love letter to the absent' is therefore a hymn to life, an attempt to symbolically resurrect the absent so that their lives and existence can be restored to them, and they can cease to be merely the unfortunate victims of a genocide."

- Dorcy Rugamba

Dorcy Rugamba

Dorcy Rugamba is a Rwandan author, actor, dancer, and director. He was awarded the first prize in dramatic arts from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Liège and was initially trained in performing arts by his father, Cyprien Rugamba—writer, choreographer, composer, and museum curator. Based between Brussels and Kigali, Rugamba co-wrote the play *Rwanda 94* in 1999 and founded *Les Ateliers Urwintore*, a contemporary creative space in Kigali, in 2001.

In 2005, he directed *L'instruction*, a play by Peter Weiss about the trial of Auschwitz officials. He is also the author of *Bloody Niggers*, a sweeping portrayal of mass violence with echoes of Aimé Césaire's work, produced by the National Theatre of Belgium and performed across Europe and Africa from 2007 onwards.

In 2012, he founded *Rwanda Arts Initiative* in Kigali, an arts center dedicated to cultural entrepreneurs. In November 2018, he staged the Afro-futuristic choreographic performance *Planet Kigali* in Hamburg. In April 2019, he wrote and directed *Umurinzi*, an

opera created for the official ceremony commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Tutsi genocide in Kigali.

In March 2020, he premiered *Les Restes Suprêmes* at the National Theatre of Belgium, a performance about African heritage in European museums. In October 2020, at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, he began collaborating with Abderrahmane Sissako on the staging of the opera *Le Vol du Boli*, set to music by Damon Albarn.

At the 2021 Avignon Festival, he presented *Liberté, j'aurai habité ton rêve jusqu'au dernier soir*, written and performed by Felwine Sarr. In May 2022, as part of the special projects at the Dakar Biennale, he created a visual and performative version of *Les Restes Suprêmes*.

In February 2024, together with the Rwanda Arts Initiative team, he launched the Kigali Triennale, whose first edition took place from February 16 to 25. On March 13, 2024, he published *HEWA RWANDA, une lettre aux absents* with J.C. Lattès, a book dedicated to his family.

Majnun

His name means 'the madman' in Arabic, a name he chose because madness is his space of freedom, where he can find his music. Majnun grew up in Senegal surrounded by music, theatre and literature and comes to Adelaide with *Hewa Rwanda: letter to the absent*.

Musically, his first steps were in hip-hop then reggae, but the guitar was the real starting point for him to become a multi-instrumentalist. Today, Afro-beat, jazz, funk, trance and even Latin music make up his musical fresco, an eclectic mix consistent with his nomadic roots. With a wealth of stage experience, Majnun released his first album in 2015.

After 19 years in France, in 2019 he toured West Africa, and thus came a return to his roots that culminated in recording his live album *Mandingo's Fight* with Senegalese label Woti.

You can also see Majnun performing at The Courtyard, Thursday 6 March at 10:30pm
adelaidefestival.com.au/events/courtyard/