

Throwing off pretensions

By ADRIENNE SICHEL

It's not likely that Adam McKinney, the epitome of a pedigreed classical dancer, has never had to partner someone with his bare toes.

That didn't stop him from doing just that with David Fumbatha, who threw away his crutches, during a rigorous sequence in the creation process of *Pretending to be Something, now Coming from Nothing*, when the New Yorker dragged his Sowetan counterpart across the floor.

At that, and several other moments, they were equal, the only test being their individual, then combined, physical and spiritual strengths in choreography which is about "exploring liberation through the body's attachment to histories of and connections to suffering".

Not surprisingly, for three months prior to coming to South Africa for a six-week residency as part of the US Consulate's Culture Connect programme, McKinney was at the University of Ghana exploring movement, ritual and healing. This involved "looking at structures of oppression - the effects of colonisation on our bodies and minds". This approach also examines how hurt - physical, psychological or emotional - gets stored in our bodies.

His visit to Johannesburg and Cape Town as a cultural ambassador is connecting him to a wide range of institutions, such as The Market Theatre Laboratory, Benoni's Sibikwa Community Theatre and various dance companies. The one Jozi group that immediately took his fancy, after spending a morning with them, was Gladys Agulhas's mixed-ability Agulhas Theatre Works based at MuseumAfrica.

Conversation soon turned into action. On the first day of the creation after a few hours of improvising off certain phrases the performers produced a wealth of material, true to the title, something from nothing.

Anyone who has met, or watched, McKinney move and teach might be surprised that with his training and professional track record that he would choose to work with ATW.

"Gladys's mission is so heartfelt... We are temporarily able-bodied," he asserts. "There's a lot of fear. A lot of us have disabilities that we mask."

He is particularly pleased that he gets to partner David Fumbatha and lift him. As it turns out, they lift

each other. His training, beginning with a BA in dance performance at Butler University, in Indianapolis, through to stints at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Centre and the Joffrey Ballet School, paved the way for a repertoire in contemporary classical and modern ballets.

After dancing with the Milwaukee Ballet, for four years, he spent 2002-2003 with the Bejart Ballet in Switzerland and last year with Alonzo King's Lines Ballet in San Francisco.

He currently guests for Lines and two other companies in New York.

Apart from a tight schedule of meetings in Joburg and Pretoria McKinney has been teaching at Jayespreet Moopen's Tribanghi, PJ Sabbagha's Forgotten Angle Collaborative, Moving Into Dance Mophatong, the University of Johannesburg's Song and Dance Company and is workshoping his choreography with SA Ballet Theatre.

This refreshingly frank dancer choreographer, who loves to teach ballet class to hip-hop, brings with him the gift of inquisitive energy, which rapidly translates into sharing.

■ See a showing of *Pretending to be Something, now Coming from Nothing*, with Adam McKinney, Gladys Agulhas and David Fumbatha, at MuseumAfrica on June 15 at 7pm, Suggested donation: R30.

An excerpt will be danced on Youth Day at 11am also featuring the ATW Satellite Youth and the Soweto Deaf Women Dancers. For information telephone 011-833-5624 ext 226 or 083-318-2728.



FREEDOM IS THE WORD ... Adam McKinney and David Fumbatha working on the collaborative *Pretending to be Something, now Coming from Nothing* at Museum - Africa
PIC: STEVE LAWRENCE