

COBA, Collective of Black Artists, celebrates during **Black History Month** with

Banta

featuring new choreography by **BaKari E. Lindsay** and **Charmaine Headley** including a tribute to the late legendary South African singer **Miriam Makeba** and a remount of ***Doun Doun Dance***

Toronto, January 21, 2009Š **COBA**, Collective of Black Artists, in association with Harbourfront Centre's *Next Steps*, proudly presents ***Banta***, a dynamic and versatile program of dance and live music featuring exciting **world premieres** from Co-Artistic Directors and Co-Founders **Charmaine Headley** (with ***Passage***) and **BaKari E. Lindsay** (with ***Maa Keeba*** and ***Inner Voice***), along with a remount of last season's favourite, **Sis Robin Hibbert's** spirited ***Doun Doun Dance***. Running **February 20-22** at the **Fleck Dance Theatre**, ***Banta*** - meaning to talk in the Wolof language - fittingly coincides with **Black History Month**.

The **world premiere** of ***Maa Keeba*** by **BaKari E. Lindsay** is a tribute to the late, legendary South African singer **Miriam Makeba** who collapsed as she was leaving the stage after her last performance at a concert in Italy last November. Known as Mama Africa, Makeba was an outspoken opponent of South Africa's apartheid regime and became a symbol of the fight against apartheid in her home country from the 1960s till its dismantling in the early 1990s. ***Maa Keeba*** is a variegated portrait of her life through her music and juxtaposes the music with movement to tell a story that is humorous, spirited and emotionally charged.

The **world premiere** of ***Inner Voice***, also by **Lindsay** is an abstract exploration into the awe-inspiring presence of the unknown, where creativity and silent power emerge. It illustrates the psychic battle between the mind (analyzer) and the body (spirit) where physical trust is guided by spiritual intuition and free will becomes the path of life.

The **world premiere** of ***Passage*** by **Charmaine Headley** is inspired by ***Indaba, My Children***, a collection of tales and legends from Credo Mutwa, a Zulu shaman from the South African province of Natal, who was determined to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather and become a tribal historian. Rooted in African storytelling and underlined with metaphors, Headley's contemporary interpretation of this anthology is layered with chants, improvised musical buffers and a physical language that captures its essence.

Choreographed by Brooklyn-born **Sis Robin Hibbert**, ***Doun Doun Dance*** (2008) is a traditional West African work that explodes with rhythm and movement. Based on the spirited KuKu rhythm and high octane stick-drum dance traditionally performed by women from the forest region of Guinea to mark the end of the harvest and celebration festivities, it was a smashing success last season.

Charmaine Headley, a Trini-Bajan by birth and culture, is a performer and choreographer with the company, who also teaches at the associate school. A graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre and School of Barbados Dance Theatre where she went on to dance with the Barbados National Dance Theatre Company. She has also performed as a guest artist for the Danny Grossman Dance Company and Gina Lori Riley Enterprises and was a member of OMO Dance from 1996 to 2002. Among her works for COBA is a graceful trio called ***Inspirat*** (2001), which explores vocabulary reflecting her dance background.

Sis Robin Hibbert is a devoted dancer and performer whose journey in dance began at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and the Dance Theatre of Harlem. Hibbert has studied and performed with the pioneer of West African style - the late Dr. Pearl Primus, the late Pearl Reynolds, Unite Ballet du Senegal and Ballet Bougarabou of Dakar, Senegal.

Trinidad-born **BaKari E. Lindsay** trained at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, The School of Toronto Dance Theatre on scholarship and with various teachers from the Caribbean and the African Continent. BaKari holds a Masters Degree in Dance Ethnology and Bachelor of Education from York University. He developed a physical language for training in West African and Diasporic African dance culture entitled ***A-Feeree - The Physical Language***.

Founded in 1993, **COBA** is dedicated to creating and presenting the finest traditions in dance and music that celebrate and reflect an Africanist aesthetic. Hailed as a company that entertains with "dynamic dance and exhilarating music performed by talented dancers and drummers" (Susan Walker, *Toronto Star*), COBA continues to push the boundaries of "traditional" dance in its 16th season. With a repertoire of over 25 pieces, the company has toured Ontario, the United States, the U.K., and Trinidad and Tobago with its critically-acclaimed traditional African, Caribbean and contemporary works. As well, COBA has commissioned works by renowned choreographers from Senegal, Haiti and South Africa and has carved a niche in the Toronto dance scene through its annual Black History Month school-touring programs and student matinees.

In the spirit of "banta," **Headley** and **Lindsay** hope that ***Banta*** spurs conversation, and that audiences are propelled by the program to fill the theatre and their homes with inquiry and dialogue.

COBA, in association with Harbourfront Centre's *Next Steps*, presents

Banta

at the **Fleck Dance Theatre** (formerly Premiere Dance Theatre), 207 Queens Quay West

February 20-22: Friday and Saturday at 8pm, and Sunday at 3pm

Tickets range from \$20 - \$32, available at the

Box Office: 416 973 4000 or tickets.harbourfrontcentre.com

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