

Gregory Maqoma investigates the clash of cultures between Africa and Europe in 'Broken Chord' | Culture

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The dancer and choreographer Gregory Maqoma, on the left, and the musical director Thuthuka Sibisi, this Monday in Seville. PACO PUENTES / EL PAIS

Choreographer and dancer Gregory Maqoma (Soweto, South Africa, 48 years old) stumbled upon the story he inspires by chance in 2017 *Broken Chord*, a new show whose premiere will be this Tuesday at the International Dance Festival Itálica, in Santiponce (Seville). Maqoma, a renowned international creator trained together with figures such as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, entered the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg one day four years ago, heard a melody in the distance and felt an “urgent” call. “It was a very strong feeling that prompted me to dance there alone, in the middle of a room, and I continued like this for about 45 minutes. A *performance* without an audience”, he recalled this Monday in Seville together with Thuthuka Sibisi, musical director of *Broken Chord* and creator, with Philip Miller, of the exhibition *The African Choir 1891 Re-Imagined*, which has inspired the show that can be seen at the Roman theater in Itálica on the 13th and 14th and will be performed .at the Grec in Barcelona on the 18th and 19th of this month

Maqoma, defender of social rights through a personal language that integrates dance and theater, had already collaborated with Sibisi on previous occasions, but when he was attracted by these a cappella voices, he did not know where they came from. “The truth is that that feeling of agitation and urgency that pushed me to dance in the museum is still present in the choreography of *Broken Chord*”, Explained the creator, who has presented several of his works since 2014 in Barcelona. But the memory of that improvisation has not been erased: it was recorded by the Eirene Productions team that has accompanied the choreographer since 2017 for the documentary *Joy Dancer*, a work .still in progress

More information

The show that opens in Seville starts from a true story: a choir of 15 young Africans (men, women and two children) who in 1891 began a tour that took them to London and Chicago in order to raise funds to build a school in Kimberley (South Africa). “There are pictures in the Hulton archive and some handheld programs that we know of performed Christian hymns in English, arias from famous operas like *Don Pasquale*, Donizetti, or some of Rossini; in addition to songs from African folklore or even *Good Save the Queen*. But no recording is kept, ”said Sibisi. The African Choir, which continued to tour until 1893, was very successful and even captivated Queen Victoria of England, who also .attended one of its concerts

We have tried to find out how those young people felt at the end of the 19th century who were “probably leaving their country for the first time, how they were received and what it meant to expose their black body in Victorian society and how that continues. What does it mean now? ”Asks the dancer who founded Vuyani Dance Theater in 1999. “What is the common thread between our two worlds? An African company performing today at European festivals ”, questions this master of fusion who has drank from *pantsula*, an urban rhythm against the *apartheid* who was born in the .1960s in Johannesburg and is currently continuing his fight against corruption in the country
Gregory Maqoma, during his show ‘Beautiful Me’, in San Francisco in 2009. Liz Hafalia / San Francisco Chronicle via Gett

Maqoma, who has collaborated on several occasions with William Kentridge, the latter as a choreographer and performer in *The Head and the Load*, an opera that premiered at London’s Tate Modern and is still on tour, will feature a local choir in each of the cities performed *Broken Chord*, since it is a co-production between several festivals in Spain, France, Germany and Italy. In Seville, 16 singers from the Proyecto Ele choir led by Carlos Cansino and Ainara Estívariz participate. Their voices will be complemented by those of four South African singers and actors and by the dance of Maqoma, who had previously performed in Seville, when he was still a stranger. “I was 19 when I came to the South African pavilion at Expo 92, I was one of 12 dancers in the Moving Into Dance .group. It was also the first time that I left my country ”, he says

The choreographer, who is interested in investigating the identity and definition of the borders between Africa and the West, tells one of the few anecdotes that have transpired from that tour 125 years ago: “The only references we have are the news that appeared in some newspapers and there is a very curious story. The members of the choir dressed in the European dress and the promoter of the shows told them that they could not sing like that, that they had to look African. So they went to