

# TONIGHT

## Exotic encounters with Nelisiwe Xaba

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By Diane de Beer [Comment on this story](#)



Nelisiwe Xaba

**With a title like *Fremde Tänze* it's obvious that choreographer/soloist Nelisiwe Xaba will not present something mundane.**

It might sound as if you know where she's going when added to that, the town where she was invited to explore a forgotten (or suppressed) aspect of German modern dance in the early 1920s and '30s with the spotlight on exoticism, is situated in the Black Forest. Just talking about it makes Xaba smile.

She was especially interested in German choreographer Mary Wigman who was regarded as one of the most important dancers of her time, but also an exponent of exotic dances. With all of that information in her head, Xaba wanted to turn the tables – naturally. As someone who understands being exoticised, this is what she really wanted to explore. And how she wanted to place herself in that foreign place to reimagine a world while doing it from a very specific stance.

"It would be looking at me as 'the other'," she said – a concept she's very familiar with.

The thing that also makes her smile is that even though she is often seen as exotic, she loves the exotic. "It's all about the gaze," she says, how people are looked at and whether the looking comes from below or above.

It's also about how you play, explains Xaba, which again shows how important it is to take others into consideration in a world that is peopled by 'the other'. Aren't we all at

some point in that space? That's an issue Xaba plays with constantly. "It's about the politics of display," she argues. "It is how people are invited to look at me."

This is not a new conversation for this choreographer/dancer. She previously blended her own story with that of Saartjie Baartman in a work titled Sakhozi says NON to the Venus, but it is a topic that she can take down many different roads. In this piece, it will be merged with what's happening in the world including being informed by horrific events that resulted in Je Suis Charlie.

It's about being a woman, it's about being a black woman, it's about being seen in a way that might be uncomfortable, it's about being pushed to be the 'other' and sometimes it is about being comfortable about being in that place because of the way that someone is being looked at.

- Fremde Tänze, March 14 at 8.15pm and 15 at 2.30pm, Dance Factory, Newtown.