

# Dancing Identity

## Gregory Maqoma's *Beautiful Me*

Gregory Maqoma, Catherine M. Cole, and  
Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts

South African choreographer Gregory Maqoma was Regent's Lecturer in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures (WAC) for the 2010–11 academic year, an initiative led by WAC dancer, choreographer, and professor Victoria Marks. A highlight of his two-week residency was an "Artist Alphabet," an interweaving of artistic performance and scholarship that addressed the topic of "Memory and Identity." Mr. Maqoma offered excerpts of his acclaimed dance-theater work *Beautiful Me* accompanied by Los Angeles-based musicians (Fig. 1). Catherine Cole, Professor of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley, and Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts, Professor of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, spoke about memory, identity, performance, and cultural production. These presentations were followed by a roundtable led by Susan Foster, dance scholar, choreographer, and Distinguished Professor in WAC.

This composite article includes an essay by Gregory Maqoma on his personal and social history, followed by the essays of the two respondents to his performance. The voices of scholars and an artist are brought together across the media of dance, performance, visual arts, and cultural studies to consider questions of identity and expression in postcolonial African contexts.

Born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa, Gregory Maqoma has emerged as one of his country's preeminent choreographers. As founder and artistic director of Vuyani Dance Theater, he creates complex and unpredictable dance theater that mixes traditional and contemporary movement practices and explores personal and community histories. Mr. Maqoma has taught and presented his works throughout Europe, West Africa, and North America and has produced arts festivals in South Africa and the Netherlands. His choreography has been performed by the South African Ballet Theatre and in multiple stage productions by theater director James Ngcobo. Currently, Gregory Maqoma is collaborating with Belgo-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui on a new project entitled *Southern Bound Comfort*.

1 Gregory Maqoma performing *Beautiful Me*.  
PHOTO: JOHN HOGG

