Famed Zimbabwean Dancer Nora Chipaumire
Dazzles UIUC

In March, world-acclaimed Zimbabwean dancer Nora Chipaumire spent several days at UIUC as the guest of the Dance Department, The Krannert Museum, and The Center for African Studies. A dynamic speaker and explosive performer, Ms. Chipaumire treated local residents to a potpourri of performance, film and oral presentations.

Trained as a lawyer, Chipaumire gravitated to dance at age 30. In her words, at that mature age she discovered that dance was “the language I wanted to use to express myself.” From then on she drew on a wide range of inspirations, from her own roots in Zimbabwe to the modern dance of Martha Graham. A journey to Cuba helped her learn about the development of a truly national dance form which “didn’t deny either Europe or Africa.”

Chipaumire currently lives in New York. She admits to residing in the U.S. by choice, calling herself a “self-exile.” She regards that choice as a “political statement”, an acknowledgement that conditions in Zimbabwe are “are not good enough to live in...but that there is a struggle happening and I’m a part of it. I’m no Nelson Mandela but there are certain beliefs that sustain me.”

Her beliefs vibrantly emerge in her performance. Her local tour included a stunning live solo session at the Krannert Museum where she brought us small pieces from three of her dances, including the famous “Lions will roar, swans will fly, angels will wrestle heaven: Gukurahundi” and “Chimurenga, for which she won 2008 New York Dance and Performance Award (aka "Bessie") for choreography.

Perhaps University of Florida Dance Professor Joan Frosch describes Chipaumire best: “She is a presence as a performer and has an incredible physicality as a dancer. Her eyes gaze into the soul of someone watching her.”

Chipaumire’s eyes didn’t only gaze into local audiences’ souls during her performance but also throughout the Krannert’s showing of the fascinating dance film, “Nora.” This movie tells the story of her life as a young girl in Zimbabwe during two crucial periods: the liberation war in the 1970s and the early years of independence in the 1980s. Featuring musical accompaniment from legendary Zimbabwean musician Thomas Mapfumo, the film won a number of international honors, including grand prize at Italy’s Asolo Festival, and the Ann Arbor Film Festival’s Maintland Award for finding an effective way to give voice to a woman.