



Khoi Khonnexion

JETHRO LOUW . GLEN ARENDSE . GARTH ERASMUS

Profile 2008

- Name:* Khoi Khonnexion
- Members:* Jethro Louw, Glen Arendse, Garth Erasmus
- Context:* From an historical African context of broad institutionalized political, social, economic, gender, sexual and racial oppression and domination, emerge first nation and indigenous cultures, traditions and identities, exploited, distorted and maimed by a cruel onslaught to smother, appropriate, destroy and control.
- Where do we start to pick up the scattered pieces from which are put together the puzzle of individual and collective identities and a struggling existence, in a country filled with contradictions, paradoxes and ironies that, till this day and age of democracy, reconciliation, social justice and human rights, reflect the advanced levels of mass destruction and dispossession that have lead to the continued alienation and exclusion of the majority of a nation?
- Goals & Aims:* Our general aim is to develop movement for personal and cultural awakening and emotional growth and expression; to make a difference through engaged performance poetry interwoven with earth sounds, world rhythms and the visual and dramatic arts; to establish forums for learning and development, expression and healing through play.
- Mission:* Our mission includes the development of meaning and orientation through joint action, dialogue and enquiry with others; the exploration and promotion of first nation and indigenous history and culture through the mediums of spiritual, performing and fine arts and sciences; contributing towards the restoration of cultural dignity in the alienated sectors of society; the development of awareness of our rich first nation heritage and its significance in our national memory and collective yearning for reconciliation; the promotion of a critical basic human rights and social responsibilities outlook; promotion and support of the liberatory ideals of lifelong learning as it relate to, among others, the understanding and promotion of a culture of learning and social inclusion of the marginalized; the creation and presentation of vibrant and accessible life skills programmes for youth, especially the vulnerable. To heal.
- Strategy:* Develop and link sustainable awareness raising activity programmes on current issues, for schools, tertiary institutions and for the needs of broader communities.
Organize and participate in local, national and international arts and cultural events.
Develop and link indigenous knowledge foundations for storytelling to learn.
Develop and link practical performance poetry and trance music workshops to life skills.
Develop and link human and social resource capacity by facilitating creative and life skills training workshops and fun learning sessions in disadvantaged communities.
Focus on indigenous musical instrument making and playing in ways that reflect our practical approach to cultural awakening in urban and rural settings.
Cooperate and network with and support like-minded initiatives.
Lead by example.

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1.1 Group Background:

The Introduction

Khoi Khonnexion features Jethro Louw, aka The GHETTO Poet, aka Tanneman !Xam. Jethro renders fiery performance poetry against an improvised free-sound backdrop, conjured up by mystic sounds from a range of indigenous and contemporary instruments. Among others, Garth plays the traditional Khoi bow-and-arrow (instrument for hunting converted to musical instrument), and wind instruments, including flutes, whistles, saxophone and didgeridoo; and Glen plays the traditional Khoi drum, mbira, Khoi mouth bow, percussion and wind instruments and chanting.

The Meeting

Jethro is central to the meeting of souls that form the Khoi Khonnexion. Jethro and Glen met in the late 1990's at a cultural event on Robben Island, while performing in separate performance groups. Jethro met Garth in a similar way. The three then informally met, played and socialized at cultural events across Cape Town and started initial talks to work together.

The Performance

While Jethro's performance group experienced difficulties along the way, another performance was due on Robben Island. He approached Glen to accompany him on guitar for the event. And this was the start of something new. Glen explored simple reggae-dub back chops and backing chants. This set Jethro's energy free for performance. The range was extended to the use of the Khoi drum.

The Khonnexion

Garth, as accomplished fine artist, was at that stage still engaged but interested. It was just a matter of time until "formally" joining, and bringing with him a rich musical versatility. These skills complemented and augmented the group sound, to weave a dynamic carpet for 'The Ghetto Poet' to ride on.

The Way Forward

The group started to further develop the performance and development concept of the Khoi Khonnexion and since then had taken on 'edutainment' and commissioned performance poetry bookings, as well as shaping a social activist role by doing voluntary outreach and development work among young groups at risk. They now pursue a mission and a strategy as social change agents. All this is based and founded on the beauty of simplicity and minimalism as symbolized by the single string Khoisan musical bow and arrow as trance musical instrument. The energy behind the mission and purpose of the group is reflected in the kinds of activities they are undertaking and completing and the feedback from partners.

1.2 Personal Backgrounds

a) Jethro Louw

Poet, philosopher, Grahamstown National Arts Festival veteran, published poetry collection 'Cape of Storms', praise poet to Adam Kok, beadworks and craft artist, community and youth leader and activist.

Jethro, aka The GHETTO Poet, aka Tanneman !Xam, a prolific writer, has featured on many local, national and international poetry and cultural programmes and rendered praise poetry to many a luminary including the Western Cape provincial premier.

b) Glen Arendse

Community, social and cultural activist; development worker and trainer; musical improviser (poetry and drama); adult and lifelong learning facilitator and animator. Glen is experienced in the development field at various levels and is exploring the dynamic link between improvisational arts and culture as medium in learning and development programmes. He has performed in local dramatic productions like "Klarabelle gaan Kaaptoe" and "Crossing the waters clearing the air", and enjoys jamming on the local jazz and alternative music scenes.

c) Garth Erasmus

Interdependent artist, ex-art teacher and accomplished visual artist, musical improviser and instrument maker, with many professional exhibitions under the belt.

Garth's fine art work has been acknowledged and honoured with a piece in permanent exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute, USA, and his work has been featured at the annual Suid – Ooste Fees, in February 2008.

2 What have you done?

What we have achieved to date has taken the shape of public performances, contributions to social dialogue, motivational sessions, development workshops and extensive networking, and has encompassed a deep communication of a sense of pride in our indigenous and first nation identity and cultural heritage.

This includes participation in various local and national arts festivals and cultural events where the aim includes raising visibility of "Khoisan" traditional and cultural symbols and artifacts in the eye of the local, national and international public.

- As Khoi Khonnexion, we facilitate a **Township Tour** experience with a difference, in the form of a project entitled '**Roosterbrood en 'n Langsous**', in Kalkfontein, a Reconstruction and Development housing Project (RDP) near Kuilsriver in the northern suburbs. This has been run for foreign tourists, including academics, and locals (poets and artists).
- We had been intimately involved in a **Human Rights Tour of Robben Island**, run by C-Consulting formerly Asijiki Tours, and organized by Derrick Grootboom an ex-political prisoner.
- We form supportive relations with fellow poets and performers, locally, nationally and internationally.
- We interpret and perform the works of contemporary poets.
- We performed for **Vusi Mahlasela** and **Louis Mahlangu** at a breakfast function presented in their honour by We-Shop, an empowerment facility for people with physical disabilities.
- We performed on a programme with Vusi Mahlasela and Louis Mahlangu at the then **Nico Malan Theatre**, in aid of funds for people with disabilities.
- We performed at a special gathering of Khoisan Chiefs and dignitaries, at the **Khoi Exhibition at the Attaqua Museum in Oudtshoorn**, during the Klein Karoo Nationale Kunstefees (KKNK).
- We designed, presented and coordinated development workshop segments at Schoemanspoort, for 35 Grade 11's from the broader Oudtshoorn area during the KKNK, for 5 festival days. The pupils were selected and accommodated under the auspices of the **Western Cape Cultural Commission**. Some workshop segments were presented by prominent television personalities and producers.
- We were featured on **Punt Radio** and **Radio Sonder Grense**, during the KKNK.
- We were featured on **Fine Music Radio** with Ray Maillon; and on **Bush Radio**'s Culture Lab slot.

- We had collaborative relations with the **Writers' Informal Co-operative (WICO)**, which creates a critical forum for the development of creative writing and poetry.
- We composed and regularly perform commissioned poetry for the **UWC's Division for Lifelong Learning**. These were performed at various official functions on the UWC campus and at the **Mail & Guardian Careers Fair**, in the Cape Town Civic Centre auditorium.
- We get invited to perform and present motivational talks for the youth at schools, e.g. Melton Primary, Eerste River, **Human Rights Day Message**.
- We performed at the **June 16 Celebrations**, organized by the NGO **Molo Songololo**, for the attendance of the ex-mayor, **Nomaindia Mfeketo**, in the Cape Town Civic Centre.
- We perform at the **National Art Gallery** in Cape Town.
- We were featured on various **foreign TV arts and culture programmes**, e.g. CITY TV Canada.
- Performed at Pieter Dirk Uys' "Evita se Peron" in Darling as part of the **Weskus Fees**.
- Presented a poetry workshop in Darling, West Coast, as part of the **Weskus Fees**.
- Performed at the **'One City Festival'** in Cape Town, at the Garanary building.
- Performed as featured act on the cultural programme of the **International Conference on Lifelong learning**, held by the University of the Western Cape, at Breakwater Lodge Cape Town.
- Performed at the pre-election conference in the Cape Town City Centre for 5000 Congress of South African Trade Unions (**COSATU**) shop stewards and delegates.
- Performed on a local television programme centering on HIV/AIDS awareness and featuring an HIV/AIDS poem. (**E-TV** youth programme **'Back Stage'**, screened on International AIDS Day.)
- Participated in a "Masters in International Human Rights Law" overnight camp, hosted by Derrick Grootboom in conjunction with the **UWC Community Law Centre** at Robben Island. A view on problems related to the first nation status of the Khoisan in terms of International Law and its Human Rights implications, were also introduced as a Khoi Khonnexion contribution, and is understood to have lead to the establishment of a Master's level research initiative.
- Appeared as featured performance at Papa's Café, organized and hosted by poet and journalist, **Sandile Dikeni**.
- Featured on a radio interview on **P4 Radio**, hosted by Nonkululeko Kgositile.
- Performed at **parliament** in Cape Town, at the launch of the **African Renaissance Fellowship - Western Cape Chapter**, addressed by **Dr Wally Seroti**.
- Active performers in **'The Talking Walls Project'**. Performed in a staged reading of **'Releasing the Shadows'**, a Talking Walls work in progress, featuring performing artists from South Africa and the US, at the District Six Museum.
- Performed at a seminar on 'Slave history in the Western Cape' and the launch of a new traveling exhibition, "Born to carry the burden", hosted by the then **Ministry for Environmental and Cultural Affairs in the Western Cape**.
- We formed part of a cultural programme at Zomerlust for the **Winelands Tourism Board**.
- We also gave input at a tourism development processes workshop for the **Winelands Regional Tourism Board**, at Franschoek.
- Performed at the UWC 40 Year Anniversary Celebrations, **long service awards ceremony**.
- Performed at the Part-time **student orientation programme**, at UWC, hosted by Division for Lifelong Learning.
- Performed at the Kuilsriver Teachers Training College, for the **UWC Street Law Project** that aims to develop literacy in human rights and democracy.
- Performed commissioned poetry at **Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens**, at the launch of a collaborative project between UWC and SAAMBOU, entitled "Wisdom", aimed at developing financial literacy for the under privileged communities.
- Performed at **MADESA**, who hosted a cultural programme for visiting cultural policy makers from 50 African countries
- We were featured at the **Drum Café** on **Black Arts Collective's** Open Forum Session.
- We performed at the **South African Youth Parliament**, held for youth from across the country, at **UCT**.
- We performed for the **Women and Gender Studies Unit**, All Africa House, UCT.

- We performed at the **Castle** in Cape Town, at the commemorative event hosted by Khoisan chiefs and attended by the **Minister of Arts and Culture** to celebrate the memory and life of Krotoa.
- We performed on the **Swellendam Heritage Day** programme, hosted by the Swellendam Heritage Museum.
- We performed on the Heritage Day programme, organized by local Khoisan organizer Ron Martin at the **Steenberg Library**.
- We performed on the University Western Cape's Management Department's **alumni function** programme.
- We performed at the launch of the Western Cape branch and 5th anniversary celebration of **Ditsela Trade Union Training and Development Organisation**, at the River Club.
- We performed at UWC on the programme to introduce the inaugural address of the new **Rector, Prof Brian O'Connell**.
- We performed at the University of the Western Cape's **Annual Long Service Awards**.
- We performed at the inaugural **Oostenberg Town Council Arts and Culture Festival**, in Kuilsriver.
- We performed at the opening ceremony of the **Rapport/Atlantis Festival**, in Atlantis.
- We performed at the **Visibility Arts Festival at Artscape**, Cape Town.
- We performed at the Kuilsriver '**Concert in the Park**', organized by the Oostenberg Municipality in Highbury, Kuilsriver.
- We performed at the **Freedom Day Celebrations** hosted by the **Western Cape Department of Arts and Culture**, at Vygies Kraal, Athlone.
- We performed on the **Women's Day** programme hosted by the **Provincial Department for Environmental Affairs**.
- We performed at the closing ceremony organised by **WIMSA – IPACC**, that celebrated the closing of a decade and the advances made by indigenous first nation peoples across the globe during the **International Decade for the Advancement of Indigenous Peoples**, at the National Art Gallery.
- We performed on the **National Libraries Association** conference's arts and culture programme, at **Centre for the Book**, and again at the 2nd **Cape Town Book Fair** at the CTICC.
- We performed at the **International Museum's Day Celebrations**, at **Iziko**.
- We performed at the conference of the **National Association of Childcare Workers**.
- Performed a praise poem in honour of the **Premier of the Western Cape** at the Gala event to launch the **Learning Cape Initiative**.
- We were featured artists on the regular **District Six Museum Music** programme.
- We opened and featured on the **Cape Town Festival** programme entitled '**Local goes vocal**' at the **Distrix Café**.
- We facilitated a series of music and lifeskills workshops aimed at youth at risk, in the **Right to Music Project** commissioned by the District Six Museum, and showcased the outcomes in a **Human Rights Day** performance at the museum.
- We performed at **St George's Cathedral** on the programme jointly organised by **Iziko Museums, Department of Arts and Culture and St George's Cathedral**, to celebrate the 1807 abolition of slavery in the British Empire.
- We featured on the **Goemarati Cultural** programme, a project of the Cape Town Partnership's Creative Cape organised by the **Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism**
<http://www.coffeebeans.co.za/khoikhonnexion>
- Performed on the programme for the event in commemoration of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade organised by **Iziko Museums of Cape Town and the Department of Education** at the **Slave Lodge**, with the national Minister of Education as guest of honour. 30 July 2007
- Performed on the Darling Voorkamerfest 2007.
- Performed on the programme of the **People's Assembly 2007** representing the Western Cape Province.
- We performed with **Anjie Krog** on the annual **Ithuba Poetry Festival 2007**.
- We presented a workshop on indigenous instruments at the **UCT School of Music**.
- We performed on the programme and facilitated a group-activity session at the **Researching Work and Learning International Conference 5** jointly hosted by **UWC, UCT, SAQA and HSRC**.
- We performed and presented a group chanting session at the UWC Part-time orientation programme for 2008.

- Together with Artscape and **Dizu Plaatjies**, we jointly presented **EMBO Khonnexion** as a launch programme of the **Artscape Indigenous Arts Project**
- We performed at the **KKNK** on invitation by the **!Garop Kuierplek** event organizers.
- At the **KKNK** we presented **life skills and instrument-making workshops** for three groups of youngsters (Bitterfontein Riel Dancers, Vredendal Riel Dancers and a group of 13 participants in the singing competition held to promote local youth talent.)
- We performed on the cultural programme and participated in the first **Khoesan Languages Convention held at the University of the Free State**.
- We performed at the opening of the **Art Against Apartheid Exhibition**, organized by the Robben Island Museum Heritage Department, at the **Nelson Mandela Gateway** venue.
- We performed at the **Vredendal Arts and Cultural Event** organized by the Department of Arts and Culture.
- We performed on the **Africa Day Festival 2008** cultural programme at Cape Town Company Gardens
- We facilitated an **'edutainment' session for educators** at the **UCT Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED)** in celebration and anticipation of Youth Day 2008.

3 **What are you doing now?**

- Making final preparations for the production of a Poetry-Image-Sound compilation CD and DVD with **Botsotso**.
- We are planning to start a quarterly poetry publication, 'The Khoi Khollexion', that features local talent
- We stage a cultural event for tourists and locals, in a local township, as part of collaboration with tourism operators and other interested parties.
- We work with dramatists and documentary film makers in supplying soundscapes for plays and films with an indigenous theme.
- We are preparing to do soundscaping in a new opera on the life of Lydia Williams; the opening is to coincide with the international commemoration of the abolition of slavery, 2010.
- We also do experimental improvisational work in progressive improvisational ensembles
- We get commissioned to write poetry for special occasions (e.g. conferences and commemorations) and accompany other poets in performance productions, e.g. **Spier Poetry Exchange**.
- Current performance projects/ideas/themes include;
 - > **Performance Anxiety** – poetry, sound and dramatic performance, using anxiety creatively.
 - > **Cape Doctor** – healing, poetry and (South-Easter) wind through 'squatter camp sounds'
 - > **HIV/AIDS** – awareness poetry, educational and motivational messages
 - > Music and development workshops for youth (at risk)
 - > Researching and exploring the musical range of various indigenous instruments for inclusion and presentation in performances to the public.

4 **Future plans?**

- To raise funds from our recordings and to document our creative material and developmental work
- Plans to grow the Khoi Khonnexion concept and strategy horizontally and vertically
- Plans to explore commissioning by, example, government departments and NGO's to do dedicated work in the development field especially with youth and adults in urban and rural areas, through the improvisational and performing arts.
- Plans afoot to use professional space at the Artscape for creative work and development.
- To continue to learn, develop and hone our development and facilitation skills and experiences, and to grow our sensitivities and sensibilities through dialogue, study, exchange and collaborative partnerships
- Through our innovative efforts and networking, continue to build critical tolerance, creativity, appreciation and celebration of our cultural diversity and heritage, especially among the most vulnerable indigenous peoples.

- To contribute towards establishing sustainable and viable community-based performance and development platforms and infrastructure.
- Plans to cut an educational trance music CD
- Plans to conceptualize the development of a programme for community television, on contemporary urban Khoisan issues
- Plans to build on our work using musical instrument-making, improvisation, movement, performance and praise poetry, visual art and literacy, and drumming, for lifeskills learning to township and rural youth
- To establish a venue/ location/ space that can serve as a retreat or safe haven for work with youngsters where they can freely partake in the various cooperative development and growth programmes and projects that we facilitate, and for it to be sustainable and responsive to their individual and collective needs.

5 Contact Details

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6 Quoted:

“Thank you for leading the youth in the wonderful presentation yesterday. All our staff present yesterday was wowed by how amazing these kids were and could not believe that they were able to making such beautiful music after only six short workshops.”

– **Shamila Rahim, Coordinator; Right to Music Project, District Six Museum - 2007.**

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“... my sincere thanks on behalf of Iziko for the stirring rendition of the musical items last night. You guys have been doing a great job and we hope we can grow our partnership through further initiatives.”

- **Vivienne Carelse, Director: Education and Public Programmes; Iziko Museums of Cape Town - 2007**

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“Your performance as a group was of a very high standard; as a result, with all the different activities that were taking place at the same time in all the different venues during the Book Fair, we were able to have a huge following of visitors who made a point of attending all the poetry sessions on all the days!

I am still receiving congratulatory words from a range of people who attended the programme, as well as a lot of people who attended the Public Lecture on Slavery, during which you rendered a sterling performance, which was much appreciated by the Chairperson of the Board of the National Library of South Africa, Prof Muxe Nkondo, the National Librarian, Mr John Tsebe as well as by Dr Z Pallo Jordan, Minister of Arts and Culture.”

- **Mandla Hermanus, Marketing & Communications Officer; Development, Communications and Marketing National Library of South Africa - 2007**

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“Your facilitating role as the Khoi Khonnexion at the !Garob Kuierplek, a project of the ABSA KKNK 2008, was critical to its success in surfacing a set of ideas about how heritage work could impact positively on the development of new productions and production ideas for future festival offerings, and for the process of drawing community stakeholders closer to the festival. In particular, the Khoi Khonnexion brought a depth of research, educational methodology and artistic practice to the project which helped to build a platform for thinking about aesthetics and critical discourse about heritage in practice.

Thank you so much, and I look forward to a debrief, and to building a longer term collaboration along these lines. “

- **Valmont Layne, Curator of !Garop Kuierplek, KKNK 2008**

rhythm of my being and humanity
river of life
that flows through me
please flow through me
and let me see
let me witness my legacy
- Jethro Louw

First passage from
"Poet tree" in
"The lyrics of Tanneman !Xam, the Plakkerkamp Poet"
Jethro Louw - 2007 Unpublished