

Jaiva Pantsula Shines at the National Arts Festival

By Lawrence Simelane

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The National Arts Festival in Grahamstown (Makhanda) recently celebrated its 44th edition, running for 11 days from 26 June to 6 July 2025. This premier cultural event in South Africa showcased a wide range of artistic expressions. Among the standout highlights was the debut performance of the Blaq Spider Pantsula dance crew from Protea South, Soweto, who went on to win the coveted Standing Ovation Award, which recognises exceptional shows on the NAF Fringe.

Their production, *Jaiva Pantsula*, devised and choreographed by the cast and facilitated by Lawrence Simelane, paid tribute to South Africa's iconic street dance culture through high-energy footwork, nostalgic music, and vibrant fashion. The show celebrated Pantsula's enduring influence and its joyful contribution to contemporary culture.

As a crew, we ventured into uncharted territory, blending our signature Pantsula style with theatre, dialogue, and monologue. It wasn't easy, but we persevered and delivered a performance that left a lasting impression.

The road to success was not without its hurdles. We initially had no confirmed time slot for *Jaiva Pantsula* and received little to no communication from the department. From January to June, rehearsals were on hold, and it seemed as though our show might never happen. Then, on 25 June, just a day before the festival began, we received a surprise call, our show had been approved, and we had only a few days to prepare.

With just two days to get everything ready, we worked relentlessly, rehearsing day and night to perfect our craft. The pressure was intense, but our passion kept us going. Despite exhaustion and sleepless nights, we refused to give up.

The results were spectacular. Our one-hour performance moved audiences deeply, earning us a standing ovation. The Ovation Awards committee took notice, and we were honoured with the prestigious Standing Ovation Award for *Jaiva Pantsula*.

The journey was truly worth it. From beginning to end, our show resonated powerfully, sparking excitement among audiences, journalists, and newspapers alike. We gave it our all, and the recognition we received stands as a testament to our hard work, creativity, and dedication.

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