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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: NICOLE FERREIRA DILL – PRINCIPAL DANCER OF THE JOBURG BALLET – SOUTH AFRICA’S NATIONAL BALLET COMPANY

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I’m Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to ‘Womanity – Women in Unity’. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women’s milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us in us today in our Johannesburg studio is Nicole Ferreira Dill, who is the Principal Dancer of the Joburg Ballet; South Africa’s national ballet company, which is the highest ranking title for a female ballet dancer. In the next few weeks from the 29 th June to the 8 th July she will be performing in Johannesburg in a production called ‘Fire and Ice’ which showcases the ballet company’s range and expertise in two contrasting ballets; the classical ‘Raymonda’ (Act 3) and the more contemporary one; ‘Whispers of My Soul’. Welcome to the show!
MS DILL	Thank you for having me.
DR. MALKA	Now starting off, as a dancer, being a performance artist is physically demanding, it requires numerous elements to attain success, from sacrifices on rehearsals, perseverance, teamwork, single minded focus; can you share with us a few of the landmarks in your journey so far and when you understood that being a ballerina was going to be a significant part of your destiny.
MS DILL	Yes I think ballet’s such an amazing art form and I, as a young dancer, I think there’re lots of, you know, all mothers take their little girls to ballet class and that’s also how I started. I just went to ballet class as a young girl at the age of five and I think just from there my love grew and at about the...at the age of about twelve I decided this is what I want to do, this is what I want to do with my life, I want to become a ballet...a professional ballet dancer and from there I just, you know, put all my love and energy into my training and yes, from there I obviously went into the company and I’ve just grown from there.
DR. MALKA	And it’s so rare, I think, to find what you love so early on in your life and then you know what you want to achieve and deliver. I mean quite often you chat to people and say well, what do you want to be and you can talk to someone who is thirty; forty, fifty, sixty and they’ll still say I’m still trying to find out what that key thing is...
MS DILL	...yes....
DR.M ALKA	...so it is wonderful that you found it at such a young age.
MS DILL	Ja, I think that’s ...I think like you say, it’s incredible to be able to say that my work is my passion, it doesn’t feel like work. It doesn’t feel like I go to work every day, it’s something that I love, it’s something that I want to do, I want to work hard, I love the rehearsal process of working hard and putting all that energy in and you know getting home and being so tired and exhausted but you know you’ve achieved something. And then obviously being on stage, that’s....I could be on stage every night of the year, it’s just...that’s what I want to do.
DR. MALKA	You’ve got this entire creative process of formulating the steps, looking at how one relates to other dancers on the stage, packaging it all together and then being able to deliver a performance, which let’s face it, doesn’t last all that long, I mean if we’re looking at these couple of dates that I shared earlier; 29 th June to

	8 th July, so much effort goes in to delivering for eight shows.
MS DILL	Yes I think and that's why I think you can't, as a dancer, just want to be on stage. You can't, you have to love the rest of the work as well; you have to love the studio life as well because ultimately you do spend more time in the studio than on stage. Like you say it's only eight performances, usually we do about ten performances and a performance is usually about two hours so if you take out of your whole day where you're in studio about eight hours, five to six days a week, to a performance which is only two hours, you have to love that creative, high energy part of the work as well.
DR. MALKA	But practice makes perfect.
MS DILL	Yes and that's...I think we're all striving for perfection and I think that's what's also so beautiful about it is no-one is perfect and the rehearsal or studio life is where you can have your imperfections and you can strive for that perfection and hopefully on stage that perfection comes out and even though no performance is perfect but, you know, you have to be happy enough with what you have rehearsed.
DR. MALKA	And talking for a moment on studio life, I understand that within the Joburg Ballet Company there's a fairly eclectic mix, these aren't just South African dancers, you've got people from all over the world.
MS DILL	Ja. Ja I think that's also...that's what makes Joburg Ballet so special, is that we've got all those influences and we've got all the different nationalities and all the different flavours from the different countries, I mean we've got dancers from Brazil, from Cuba, from Australia, from you know, from all over and ja, that's what make the Joburg Ballet, Joburg Ballet.
DR. MALKA	And what is it like infusing those different cultures together to tow the line because I think that anyone from a different country, you bring in a different energy and you do have a different identity?
MS DILL	Yes I think for classical ballet's I mean you're always striving, I mean if you talk about the Swan Lake and the Sleeping Beauty where you've gotballet girls which have to be...look exactly the same, they have to...their arms have to be exactly the same, their bodies, you know, their angles, the way we move have to be the same and that's...going to bigger companies where you have a school that feeds into the company, that's what you can get but whereas with Jo'burg Ballet because we're so different, I think that makes it so exciting, I mean we are still striving for everyone you know in the ballet to look like one but I think everyone has such a different energy to offer and I think it comes through on stage as well and I think now that the audience members start to get to know the different dances and the different countries, they have their favourites as well and they can see their different influences.
DR. MALKA	And from a performance point of view, we're now talking from a Johannesburg delivery; does the company go out to different countries to perform?
MS DILL	We have travelled in the past, we're not a touring company, but we have travelled towhich was amazing to perform for such a different audience, but we mostly travel locally if we do travel.
DR. MALKA	Okay so it's not exclusive to Johannesburg, you do....
MS DILL	...no...
DR. MALKA	...performances around the country too?
MS DILL	Yes, yes.
DR. MALKA	And stepping back a little bit, I also saw that when you were doing your studies that you had studied jazz, Spanish, contemporary; what made ballet win you over?

MS DILL	Ballet's...ballet is the foundation of any dance form. I think if you've got ballet training you can branch out into any different style and it's easier to learn different styles, whereas if you trained in...or just trained in one of the other styles, you can't necessarily become a ballet dancer and I think that's also what makes ballet so special and it's just for me ballet has always been that is what I want to do, that's just my ultimate dream, was to become a ballet dancer.
DR. MALKA	So you are really living your dream...
MS DILL	...yes....
DR. MALKA	...you're at the pinnacle now; tell us what has been your journey to become a Principal Dancer, what are some of the steps that you've had to take?
MS DILL	So usually you start right...I mean as in any profession you start at the bottom and you have to build your way up and it's all about hard work and what you can offer the company. It's all about you know putting in that hard work, the dedication, I mean you can say yes and I've done all the different roles but I think it's what I've put in and what I've given myself, I've given myself to ballet and I think that's what's led me to where I am today.
DR. MALKA	And how long should it take to get to this level?
MS DILL	Well...(laughs) so I started ballet at the age of five and I'm turning thirty this year. I joined the company when I was eighteen so it's taken me about eleven, twelve years to become a principal dancer, so it' doesn't happen overnight.
DR. MALKA	And I always think you know back to Malcolm Gladwell's book, I can't remember which one it was, but one of them he talks about that to be an expert at anything you've got a minimum of 10,000 hours, which you have definitely clocked up. You learn different lessons from your experiences and although they may be learnt in one genre, there's often lessons that can re-apply into different fields of life, so you are now at the top and importantly it's about staying at the top; what are some of the principles that you think relate and apply to perhaps the business world or life in general?
MS DILL	I think it's as in any job, once you're at the top you can't become complacent and think I'm at the top, I don't need to work hard anymore, I've made it. I don't think you've ever made it, I think it's always...you're working hard, you have to always work hard, you have to always...I mean even though I'm a principal dancer I'm nowhere near perfect. I think the minute you stop learning is when you should retire from any job; I think . I think there's always something to learn from the work, from different people and I think that's the only way you stay on top is to keep learning.
DR. MALKA	And having been in the industry for twenty five years, knowing what you now know, what would you have liked to have known before you started out?
MS DILL	Oh my goodness I think there's so...I think in life you can always say if I had only known what I know now, but I think my journey to where I've come; I think it's been such a smooth, beautiful journey and I don't think I would change anything. I think yes I could say I should have known how to work differently or...because now as a principal dancer or doing principal roles you do work a little bit differently but that also that comes with experience, that comes with wisdom, it's you know I think life experience so I don't think I'd necessarily change anything; it's just a beautiful journey. You know I think if you start the journey where you are now you've got nowhere to go so I think everyone just has to have their journey.
DR. MALKA	And often it's about...it's not just the destination factor but it's about the journey of getting to that end point.
MS DILL	Yes.

DR. MALKA	Your performance repertoire has included roles in Cinderella, Coppélia, Carmen, Giselle, The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, Donkey.....and Snow White, to name a few, they're all timeless classics and being able to retell those stories and not telling them with words but expressing them through your body; was there a particular performance that has left a lasting mark on you?
MS DILL	I think for me all the principal roles that I have done have been such beautiful roles and I've really enjoyed them, but my ultimate favourite ballet and my dream ballet to do was Swan Lake and I can say my dream came true and I think Swan Lake is just...that was the performance where I really felt I can do this, I'm...because usually everyone always says Swan Lake is one of the hardest ballet's to do, which it is, and I can say I accomplished it and I was proud of the way I did it. So I think that was, you know, doing...telling the story of Swan Lake and being the character of a swan, which is so hard to do, it's not like a Cinderella where you're a person, I mean you're ultimately an animal and I think portraying that character was just absolutely my dream.
DR. MALKA	Do you have a particular saying or motto that you live your life by?
MS DILL	I think there's so...I think sometimes people's motto's change, I think it's, you know, I don't necessarily have one motto but I think I like being where I can say you know, be like a sponge, just soak up everything that you can. Soak up, learn, take from everyone and just squeeze it all in.
DR. MALKA	Where would you say that you draw your inspiration from?
MS DILL	I think inspiration, I mean it comes from inside, I think it's what you want to give, I think there's so many things out there that I want to do and I have inspire myself to keep working hard and to keep, you know, wanting to do those roles and those ballets and the inspiration I think comes from inside, knowing that this is what my dream was and knowing that my dream has come true but I've still got things that I would like to do.
DR. MALKA	So to keep developing and moving ahead. Having been in your position now, what words of advice or encouragement would you share with aspiring dancers that are coming up through the ranks?
MS DILL	I think I would say to them that being a professional ballet dancer is an amazing career, it's something that you can't you know put words to. It's so amazing but you have to know it is incredible hard work, it is sweat and tears and you have to drive yourself. It's hard work, you cannot go a day without working hard, you have to every day strive to be better than the day before.
DR. MALKA	And when you were saying working hard, earlier you mentioned that it's eight hours a day in studio; could you run us through a typical day?
MS DILL	Yes, so I get up...I wake up at about half past six and have my routine, then I go to the gym for about half an hour to forty minutes, then I'm usually in studio by nine o'clock, which I've got an hour to warm up and stretch and get my body going. Then we do a compulsory class for about an hour and a half which starts at ten o'clock and then from there we just go...we have rehearsals the whole day until six; you're dancing flat out, you're working on things, you're working on your technique, you're working on your characterisation and it's just putting ballet's together.
DR. MALKA	So that's very physically intensive, but I would also imagine you need mental stamina to keep going as well.
MS DILL	I...that's also what I usually say is you can have the hard work, you can have the technique, you can have the talent, but if your mind is not strong you're not going to make it either. Your mind has to be so incredibly strong because there are different aspects to being on stage as well and you know there are days when you are so tired, your body is so sore, but your

	mind has to get you through it. If your mind's not strong you're going to go sit on the couch and stop working, you know, so your mind has to be strong.
DR. MALKA	Any helpful hints on developing mental strength and agility?
MS DILL	I think it's, you know everyone has to find their own way but for me I think calmness. You have to be calm, you have to be...you cannot be a nervous wreck when you go onto a stage, it's...you have to be...that's for me personally, I have to be in such a calm space and that's the only way I get through things.
DR. MALKA	Talking about getting through things and staging and performances, in the next few weeks the Ballet Company is putting on 'Fire and Ice' which, as I mentioned in the introduction, showcases the company's range and expertise in two contrasting ballets; the classical aspect with 'Raymonda Act 3' and 'Whispers of My Soul'; how does it feel to perform new choreography as opposed to the traditional work that you would do in something like 'Raymonda' versus a new production like 'Whispers of My Soul' which I also understand it's the first time the ballet's being performed?
MS DILL	Yes, I think it's so....I think as dancers you're always looking for new things to do, new things to work on, new ways to improve and I think doing new works is how you improve and I think even I mean Raymonda I've never...this will be the first time I'm performing Raymonda as well, but even doing that part it's still a new ballet to me so there are new challenges in that aspect. There's...it's...there are different characters in the ballet, but then we've got only about 20 minutes in our interval to take our hair out, take the bun out, lose the tutu's and tiara's and go into the contemporary which is completely the opposite and I think it's so...I think the audience is going to be quite surprised to see us as a traditional classical company to be doing the contemporary, which is completely different.
DR MALKA	It sounds like chalk and cheese...
MS DILL	...yes....
DR. MALKA	...and but with that I think there provides opportunity like we were mentioning earlier offline, for welcoming new audiences to attract perhaps a younger generation.
MS DILL	I think that's always, I mean, you can't have only one audience, once that audience dies out you don't have an audience anymore so as Joburg Ballet we're always striving to get you know younger audiences, a new generation in, to filter in and to carry on being our audience.
DR.MALKA	So the show is running from the 29 th June to the 8 th July at the Jo'burg Theatre; can you tell us where can people get tickets, a little bit of detail there?
MS DILL	So you can book tickets through Jo'burg Theatre's Box Office, the telephone number is 0861 670 670 or via www.webtickets.co.za.
DR. MALKA	Perfect, so you've got a telephone line access and we also have an online access.
MS DILL	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Nicole Ferreira Dill who is the Principal Dancer of the Jo'burg Ballet, South Africa's national ballet company.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	You are listening to 'Womanity – Women in Unity' on Channel Africa, the African Perspective, on frequency 9625 KHz on the 31 meter band, also available on DSTV, channel 802. Today we're talking to Nicole Ferreira Dill, who is Principal Dancer of the Joburg Ballet, South Africa's national ballet company. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter:@WomanityTalk.

DR. MALKA	In the previous section of the discussion we spoke about Nicole's career thus far and her journey to becoming a principal dancer; we chatted about some of the roles that she's played from the more traditional characters to some of the contemporary work that she is doing and we also spoke about 'Fire and Ice' which is the forthcoming performance that the company is putting on stage.
DR. MALKA	Often when we hear about successful people there's this tendency to think that their achievements occurred overnight, but in reality, now as we've chatted now you've been in the game for 25 years if you think back to where you started. Now we're witnessing years of hard work and disciplined dedication that has been invested into your career path, but behind the scenes it's not just you as an individual, there's a support structure that backs the individual; what is your opinion on the role of support systems to help contribute to success?
MS DILL	I think it's incredibly important, you cannot...I don't think anyone can do anything alone, you need that support system to help you, to keep you grounded, to keep you focused, to maybe sometimes even take your mind away from what's important or your work. You have to sometimes be able to shut off and just relax and take those moments to recover and I think that's, you know, it's part of the support system. I think they are so important for you to get to the top.
DR. MALKA	And as a dancer, we were talking about the longevity, and part of that I think is to do with the support system in terms of making sure that we've got new science developments, we've got new opportunities to help speed up recovery, whether that's from injury or from a nutrition point of view to repair and restore ourselves; what, typically, is the length of career that a dancer could expect to have?
MS DILL	I think it completely depends on the person; it depends on how you look after your body and on how you recover from injuries. I think, I mean, we've had dancers who at the age of forty were still at the top of their game; at the top of...the peak of their career and then we've had dancers where at thirty or even younger, twenty five, have had too many injuries and not recovered properly and their bodies just can't do it anymore. So it's about, I think having serious injuries you have to take the time to recover 100%, if you don't recover 100% and you come back and the injury's still there, it's going to be there forever.
DR.MALKA	And in this case your body is your instrument of work.
MS DILL	Yes.
DR.MALKA	'Womanity – Women in Unity' as you can tell by the name of the programme, is all about gender equality; taking into consideration the challenges that you've had as well as the successes that you've experienced along your career; in your opinion, what areas do you think we still need more attention with regards to women?
MS DILL	I think in the ballet world this is such a hard question and such a hard...there are so many different answers you could give but I think in my experience in the ballet profession, I mean people go to see the ballerina, they go to see the principal ballerina, to see the princess, to see...you know, so I think in ballet it's...women are quite well showcased...
DR MALKA	...they're the attraction...
MS DILL	...yes I think so and even though you've got the principal man who obviously also people go to watch but ultimately it's about the princess in, you know, most of the stories. But I think outside of ballet country I think in the country there can always be improvements, I think it's...women are such I think you have to be able to see the strong parts in a woman, I think that needs to come out and I think people need to see that.

DR. MALKA	So with respect to ballet, we've got people coming to see the princess, is the princess being rewarded in the same way that the male principal is being rewarded in the ballet world?
MS DILL	I think in...as in...I think if you look at sports and you look at say tennis players, or whichever sport you look at, and I could be wrong, I could be speaking under correction but I think there's always a thing of the men get paid more, if you're talking about salaries...
DR. MALKA	...yes...
MS DILL	...whereas in ballet we don't have...there's not so much money in ballet, it's not...the arts isn't funded as the rugby team or...and even though we're athletes just like the rugby...South African rugby team, you know, it's not...so I don't think that's really an issue with ballet dancers because we're all kind of on the same level, there are not millions that come in and there are not millions that can go to specific people and not to others. I think as in any company there are different salary levels but I think they're pretty much...women and men are on the same level.
DR. MALKA	And would you say...we know that predominantly the dancers are women; what about the other, I suppose layers in the hierarchy of the company, is it quite feminised?
MS DILL	No I think you know I think if people think about ballet they think about women but it's not, we have to have just as many strong men as you have women. You have to...it's so important for men to do ballet to have...you cannot do a ballet without a man and they have to be strong athletes as well, it's not a feminist...it's not or people I think if they think about men doing ballet they think about men being feminine and its completely not. You cannot look feminine on stage when you're partnering a woman; you have to be the man, so I think it's just as important to have the strong men.
DR. MALKA	And in other areas of ballet, so choreography, directing, putting the company out on the map; are those also predominantly female positions or is it mixed?
MS DILL	No...no, it's completely mixed I mean our artistic director is a man, Ian McDonald, our CEO is a female; Esther Nasser, then we've got our ballet mistress who is a woman; Lauren Dickson Seger, but then we've got lots of men behind the scenes, it's...we don't have a ballet master at the moment but I think they're looking for a ballet master as well, it's important to have a ballet master as well, you know, for the men to have that male figure. So no it's completely equal....
DR MALKA	...so it's very gender mixed and balanced?
MS DILL	...yes, yes.
DR. MALKA	From where you sit today; being a top athlete perhaps gives you a unique perspective on things, what would you say you've learnt from your own endurance, your personal limits, collaboration and teamwork?
MS DILL	So ballet teaches so you many different things. It teaches you to work with different people, I mean it's not like you go to an office, sit in your own office for eight hours or however many hours and go home to your family, you are working intimately with the whole studio of dancers and you get to work with different people and you get to learn from everyone and work with different choreographers and that's so...it's amazing that...to see that and to be able to learn all of those things but I think I've definitely....I always want to test myself, I've always said and it might sound funny but I would love to go to survivor and go see how I could actually put my dancing knowledge and with my body and my mental strength in something like that and not necessarily survivor but you know in one of those aspects.

DR. MALKA	Well I think you know and listening to what you're saying you've got timing because you've got to be synchronised with what you're doing whether everybody's doing the same thing, or knowing what comes next and also being conscious of the vulnerability that dancers have to injuries, that if you're out of time it could cause someone else to have an issue or an injury. You've got this teamwork of working with different personalities, people from different countries; you are not communicating verbally but you're communicating physically through your body, so there's a lot of I would say like sensory experience and nuances that you have to pick up on.
MS DILL	You have to, definitely and I think it comes when you start in a company you are ballet dancer and that's when you're dancing in a group and like I said you usually in thewhere you've got ten/twelve/sixteen even twenty women at one point and you have to be exactly the same, you have to....and that also comes with experience where you're standing and you might be in the front of theballet line but you have to feel everyone behind you because ultimately you're leading them and I think it's your peripheral vision improves, your spatial awareness, it's all about you know feeling other people without actually touching them and being synchronised and working with other people and I think that's just as important as a sport where you've got a team, you know, we're a team as well, you can't have a ballet...put on a ballet with just the principal couple. It's about the team.
DR. MALKA	So extensive collaboration and I think co-operation and when you look at analogies with other sports, they would be about competition, but this isn't about competition, this is about making sure that everyone is in unison and doing the right thing on the stage.
MS DILL	Yes it's, you know, I think there's always people think there's competition in ballet, which there is, I mean everyone is striving to do the principal role and not everyone can, you can't have a company with twenty principals, you have to have thethe soloist, the senior soloist and then your principals. So there is a lot of competition, like I say everyone wants to do the role but we all...I think at the moment Joburg Ballet's such a...we're in such a good space, we all, you know, we want everyone to be good. You don't want to be the best from a bad bunch, you want to be the best from a good bunch so everyone is fighting and striving to make the production as good as possible.
DR.MALKA	One of the questions that I all my guests who have made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of success is about factors that they consider have contributed to become the person that they are today, so whether this is about perseverance, hard work, a particular person that has influenced you; so if you could tell us in your opinion what have been some of the key drivers to your success?
MS DILL	I think for me my....like I said my hard work, dedication and mental strength has...are strong aspects that have gotten me to where I am, but also like we spoke earlier, the support system that I have, my family and my husband is incredibly supportive, they have always been there, they are always there. They're always there to support me, they're there to pick me up when I've had disappointments, they're there when I'm achieving my goals when my dreams are coming true and I think that's what's also gotten me to where I am.
DR. MALKA	And if you reflect back on your life so far, what have been some of the pivotal moments for you growing up?
MS DILL	I think for me as in for my career; I think my...the first pivotal moment was when I danced the role of Giselle, when I did the lead role, that was my first

	principal role and I think that was a pivotal moment to know I am getting where I want to, I know I can get to the top and I think from there it just grew into the roles and I just grew.
DR. MALKA	And what or who would you say has had the biggest impact on your life to make you the person you are today?
MS DILL	Definitely my mom, she's...everything that I've learnt, everything that I am, everything that I've done has been from her and with her and she's just...she's absolutely she made me who I am.
DR. MALKA	And did she dance?
MS DILL	No she didn't; no, she grew up on a farm. She always says that if she...maybe she would have been a dancer if she knew ballet existed but as a child she didn't, she grew up on a farm in Namibia and only once she had come to South Africa and actually saw ballet and also fell in love with ballet, I mean her love for ballet also grew.
DR. MALKA	Now lastly, as we close out our show today, could you please share a few words of inspiration that you'd like to pass on to women in the continent that are listening to us today and particularly as we're in youth month in South Africa and our broadcast is going out just before youth day?
MS DILL	I think women out there; I think they need to know we have a voice. Women have a voice, we've got a strong voice and we need to be heard. I think women if you put your mind to anything you can do anything that you want, you can achieve your dreams; you can achieve your goals. I think put your mind to it, put in the hard work and be who you are.
DR. MALKA	Thank you very much I think that's a very important message that speaks to authenticity of self.
PROGRAMME END	