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DANCE

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## Dance Films Association's 37th Annual Dance on Camera Festival

by Mary Hodges

Once again, Dance Films Association and The Film Society of Lincoln Center are ushering in a new year of dance with the annual Dance On Camera Festival. Documentaries, dance conceived especially for the camera, film adaptations of existing dances, and dance cinema classics will be on view January 6-17 at The Walter Reade Theater and other venues.

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A standout of this year's crop is *Nora*, from filmmakers Alla Kovgan and David Hinton. Nora Chipaumire, now a member of Urban Bush Women and a Bessie-Award winning solo performer, was born in Rhodesia. She lived through the country's transition from British colony to independent nation of Zimbabwe, but ultimately chose to relocate in light of the culture's restrictive expectations for women and artists. She returned from self-exile to Mozambique, near the border of her native country, to collaborate with the filmmakers in telling her story.

The 35-minute film is infused with hope, sadness, humor, and plenty of luscious color. Not quite a biopic, *Nora* is a poetic treatment of Chipaumire's early life. Kovgan and Hinton use simple captions, quiet but evocative shots, Thomas Mapfumo's polyrhythmic score, and dance to drive the narrative. When, for example, the colonial government sends for Nora's father, we see a man in uniform goose-stepping up to a country house. Encountering the dancer representing Nora's father, he kicks, gestures forcefully toward the ground, stamps, then slices his arm toward the street, extending his leg in the same direction. The message is clear: "YOU must GO." The father character, with no intention of leaving, widens and lowers his stance, bending his knees deeply. Undulating his torso like a snake warning an invader, he rolls his shoulders and circles his elbows, taunting the official. Again, there is no mistaking him: "Your orders from afar have no place here; you're going to have to fight me like a man." A thoroughly masculine battle of wills follows. Shots of children sitting on the dusty red ground with their chickens break up the action. Perhaps they are young Nora with her brothers and sisters, but they could be any children, drawn in simply by the curious displays and dangerous ways of adults. Perhaps they are us, the viewers.

The details are sometimes ambiguous—Chipaumire herself seems to shift between her young self, her mother, and her older, wiser self looking back on her life. Still, the thrust of the action and its emotional weight remain clear. *Nora* is a meditation on the past. Its dream-like recollections and vivid hues produce a rich and deeply satisfying film.