



# HOTFOOT ONLINE



***LEADING THE WAY***

*SUMMER 2018*

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# FOREWORD

Fifteen years ago, we embarked on an initiative to strengthen the infrastructure which would raise the profile of Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) through cultivating leadership and excellence in the communities from the ground up.

One of the outcomes was the annual Trailblazers Fellowship, a professional development programme cultivating excellence in African Peoples' Dance by providing training and mentoring to ensure there is sustained investment in these talented individuals. With the alumni of 42 trailblazing individuals, these artists and practitioners are impacting the dance practice in diverse ways. This edition focuses on their journeys; how the Trailblazers are navigating the changing terrains and how they shape, drive and innovate culture and lifestyle.

Additionally, we share the findings from our ongoing mapping research for DAD with the aim to know, understand and serve the sector appropriately. We want to know who is working in the ever-evolving sector, where it exists, what it looks like and identify the prioritised needs.

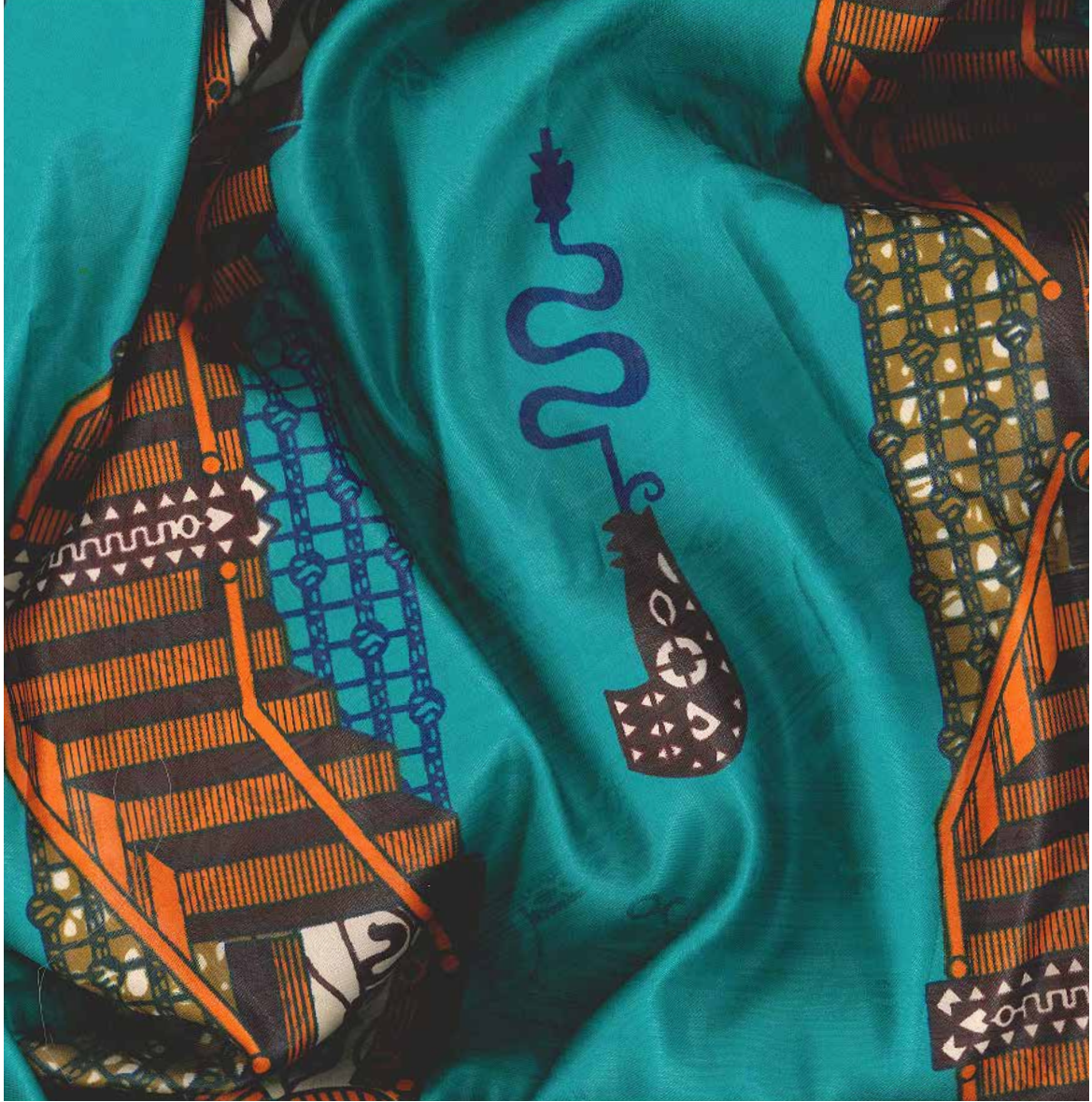
Thank you to all who have taken part and supported the research thus far. It has been a combined effort across the regions. We will continue the task... together.

Enjoy!

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**MERCY NABIRYE**

HEAD OF DANCE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA



# WAX PRINT MEANING

This issue features the African Wax print Akomfrah, which is a word from the (Akan) Twi language in Ghana. The pattern features a stool and knives of the King on the throne, symbols that reflect leadership and readiness to fight for his people. Like the pattern, the 42 Trailblazer Fellows featured are leading the way in the dance sector, championing art forms within dance of the African Diaspora to be more visible and valued.



# Help us to shape the sector you want to see

One Dance UK supports the practice of dance of the African Diaspora, with the aim to make the form visible and valued as part of the British cultural experience.

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per year

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Access to exclusive professional development opportunities like the Trailblazers Fellowship, life-coaching, choreographic observerships and mentoring programmes

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# WELCOME

I am delighted to have this opportunity to welcome readers to One Dance UK's magazine, *HOTFOOT*. It has been attracting positive responses since its first digitised edition, though we must remain vigilant to ensure that its focus does not simply pander to the whims of the status quo.

I am mindful of the fact that our diverse, yet Western privileged, dominant society continue to skew dance development in favour of one sector above others and thus Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) could remain marginalised. One Dance UK has the opportunity to represent the voice of diverse dance practice; to be a positive, inclusive avenue for supporting and promoting dance practice of the African Diaspora. *HOTFOOT* must be an unequivocal, strategic voice through which racist practice, policies and marginalisation that negatively impact DAD are challenged, and through which sponsors, educationalists, funders, venues, researchers and dance artistes are encouraged to collaborate, to ensure that DAD becomes fully integrated within British culture.

Finally, I would like to thank our sponsors for their continuing support and to extend my gratitude to One Dance UK and the many others, for nominating me for a recent dance award!

Respect!!

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**BOB RAMDHANIE MBE**  
*HOTFOOT* EDITORIAL FOCUS GROUP

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# Trailblazer

## OneDanceUK

Dance of the African Diaspora

**CLICK ON AN IMAGE  
TO VIEW A FULL PROFILE**

Set up in 2003, the Trailblazers Fellowship has led the way in professional development, providing a rare opportunity for talented individuals working with dance forms from the African Diaspora. The individually tailored programme aims to cultivate leadership, excellence and entrepreneurship supporting UK-based dance artists, practitioners, performers, choreographers, dance teachers and researchers.

To date, over 40 Trailblazers are now key leaders in the industry. Research and publications on the forms are increasing. Performances by Fellows have taken place at venues such as Sadler's Wells, Southbank Centre, The Place and ROH2; featured work on Channel 4, BBC4, London 2012 Olympics Opening and Closing Ceremonies and the 2017 Special Olympics Ceremonies in Sheffield. Additional achieved awards include The Place Prize Commission, Bonnie Bird Awards, Matthew Bourne's New Adventures Choreographic Award, Queen's Birthday Awards and many more. Previous fellowships have been supported by Bonnie Bird Choreography Fund, Fenton Arts Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, Garrick Charitable Trust, The Idlewild Trust and various individual donors.



@Julian Cole

**JEAN  
ABREU**



**CHRISSIE  
ADESINA**



@Joshua Olaiya

**LOLA  
ADODO**



@Esther Kiehl

**UKACHI  
AKALAWU**



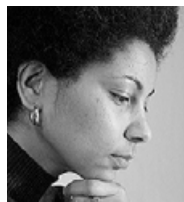
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AKINLEYE**



@Foteini Christofilopoulou

**AKOSUA  
BOAKYE BEM**



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CAMARA**



**FLAVIA  
CHEVEZ-  
LE MESSURIER**



@Nikmaton

**CINDY  
CLAES**



@Foteini Christofilopoulou

**IRIS  
DE BRITO**





**RONI EDWARDS**



**ITHALIA FOREL**

@Foteimi Christofilopoulou



**SIMONE FOSTER**



**ZELA GAYLE**



**NATHAN GEERING**

@Foteimi Christofilopoulou



**MARIA GHOUMRASSI**

@Foteimi Christofilopoulou



**SEAN GRAHAM**

@Messrs



**VICKI IGBOKWE**

@John Cassidy



**KENZI IRELAND**



**IMANI JENDAI**



**LEO KAY**



**CLEO LAKE**

@Irven Lewis



**OSUNTOKE DONNA LETTMAN**



**IRVEN LEWIS**



**YAMI LÖFVENBERG**

@Foteimi Christofilopoulou



**KARENISA LOUIS**



**DICKSON MBI**

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**ZINZI MINOTT**

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**DIANE MITCHELL**



**RACHAEL NANYONJO**

@Foteimi Christofilopoulou



**MBULELO NDABENI**

@Foteimi Christofilopoulou



**NAOMI O'CONNOR**



**FREDDIE OPOKU-ADDAIE**

@Hugo Glendinning



**PARADIGMZ**



**H PATTEN**

@Evewright Studio



**DENISE ROWE**



**JANE SEKONYA-JOHN**



**ALESANDRA SEUTIN**

@Luke Das



**BAWREN TAVAZIVA**

@Tavaziva Dance



**ANNETTE WALKER**

## DICKSON MBI, TRAILBLAZERS STARTER 2017-18



© Foteini Christophilopoulou

During the **2017-18 Trailblazers Fellowship**, artist Dickson Mbi was paired with Farooq Chaudhry for his mentorship. Dickson reflects on his experience as a fellow and shares his current work in the sector:

“Working with Farooq has been a great benefit at this point in my career. He is a kind, loving and caring man, who nurtures the work and the artist in every way possible. I feel privileged to have worked with him. We naturally developed a strong brotherly relationship based on honesty, trust and genuine care for one another; with that we have plans to continue working together on other projects and will potentially start a new company.

During my fellowship, I was selected to be part of a series of dance documentaries, ‘Street to Stage’, curated by the BBC and Sadler’s Wells. As

one of the featured artists it documents my work with Farooq, my composer and other supporters, as I prepare for my performances as part of Akram Khan’s Portraits in Otherness at Sadler’s Wells on 5-6 June 2018.

In addition to showing the artistic development, I also share the work that I do with the young dancers in my community. Every Friday evening my crew and I run a session for dancers to learn Popping and practice improvisation; in-front of an audience, in a friendly and welcoming environment. Currently, we do not have a resident location for the company. My hope is to have a space of our own where we can train, practice and run classes for anyone that wants to dance.”

‘**Street to Stage**’ premiered 8 May 2018, 7:30pm on BBC. For more information about Akram Khan’s Portraits in Otherness click [here](#).



## RACHAEL NANYONJO, TRAILBLAZERS STARTER 2015-16



Photo courtesy of Rachael Nanyonjo

Rachael was recently awarded a Choreographer Observership supported by One Dance UK. She shares her experiences in the sector:

“Reflection is a constant for choreographers. It involves looking back, analysing, planning and in my case drinking far too much coffee and daydreaming. Reflection led me to apply for the observership programme with a desire to challenge myself and grow.

My practice varies; being a director, movement director, choreographer and lecturer. Recently, I served as a director/movement director for Bernstein’s MASS at the Southbank Centre, Cover My Tracks at the Old Vic, and as assistant director for Caroline or Change at Chichester Festival Theatre. These roles involved choreographing dance numbers, developing characters, creating heightened physical movements

to progress storylines in which I often found connections to my own family, community and heritage. My next project, *Shebeen* by Mufaro Makubika, does exactly this; exploring racial tensions faced by Nottingham’s black community in 1957. The observership is a great opportunity to develop my choreographic skills for working on large scale projects in dance and theatre. I have chosen to observe Jeanefer Jean Charles, who has over 20 years’ experience in devising, creating and facilitating dance for performance. With an international portfolio and a strong education programme, observing her projects provided an opportunity to interrogate my practice. Jeanefer is a Black British female blazing a trail for younger artists like myself to reimagine how we see ourselves and the impact of our creativity. As artists from the diaspora we must challenge how we are seen and promote our stories and heritage in all spaces.”

## CINDY CLAES, TRAILBLAZERS STARTER 2013-14



© Nikkination

Cindy Claes is an ambassador for dancehall, hip hop and krump theatre. A fervent storyteller through movement, an avid physical theatre and comedy practitioner; her choreographic work aims to shake things up. International exchanges and global connections are at the core of her work. Traveling has brought life-changing chapters to her own life as an artist.

Claes wanted to share opportunities with the next generation of leaders, and therefore she set up a professional development programme, 1000 Pieces Puzzle, for dancers and choreographers 18 to 30 years. In this programme, dance artists from different countries collaborate with international peers and train with incredible guest teachers who reflect a true diversity of leaders.

Set up specifically for dancers from the dancehall, krump, hip hop, house, and afro-beats communities, the programme offers

opportunities to nurture artistic and business skills, network internationally and build the confidence to further develop new ideas. The ripple effects are numerous and continue to flourish by connecting artists from the UK, Belgium, Jamaica and Los Angeles. Claes aims to empower 1000 leaders, who will impact another 1000 people who will empower another and so on.

Whilst expanding the programme, Claes is working on a TV programme - the pilot funded by the Dance Enterprise Fund (East London Dance), with the aim to gain further investors and partnerships. As choreographer and performer, Claes currently nurtures her practice at the International School of Jacques Lecoq (Paris) and continues to create work nationally and internationally.



## ONE DANCE UK NOVEMBER CONFERENCE AND AWARDS 2018



### One Dance UK Awards 2018

© Design by One Dance UK

#### Save the date for the One Dance UK 2018 Conference, coming 23 and 24 November!

The One Dance UK 2018 Conference takes place in Leeds and marks the launch of the first One Dance UK Awards. The conference theme is *Leading the way – a stronger future* for dance and will create a vibrant platform for educational and networking opportunities, inspirational speakers, discussion and debate. There will be something for everyone whether artists, students, managers, teachers, directors or healthcare practitioners and will include performances and presentations from our Trailblazers Alumni. Click [here](#) for more information.

The One Dance UK Awards will recognise the outstanding contributions of practitioners and professionals working in the dance sector. This annual event is an opportunity for people to get together and celebrate those who have made an

impact on the UK's vibrant dance landscape. 23 carefully chosen awards will shine a light on the vital work taking place in dance today; including the Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) Lifetime Achievement Award.

This Award recognises professional achievements contributing to the development of the diverse African Diasporic Dance. Recipients of the award are recognised by the public, particularly practitioners and advocates of these dance forms for dedicating their lives to building a legacy and changing perceptions of DAD in the UK. It's a perfect opportunity to acknowledge, document and celebrate the art forms and their place in the dance landscape.

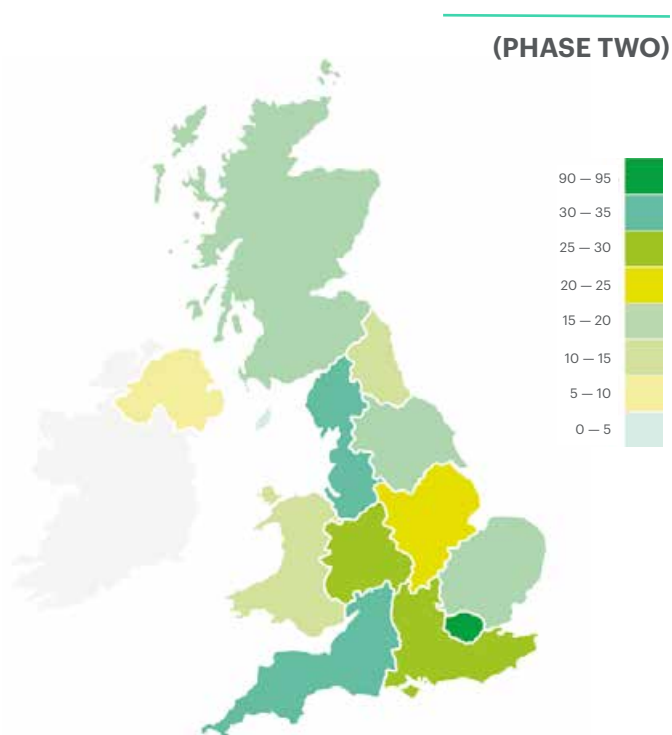
Nominate a leader in the sector for the DAD Lifetime Achievement Award and many other categories. For more information on awards, click [here](#).

# NEWS

**"I TAKE THE SECTOR  
WHEREVER I GO"**

VICKI IGBOKWE

# MAPPING THE SECTOR



In Autumn 2017 the Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) team\* conducted a survey to better understand the current sector practice and the key issues affecting professionals working within the DAD sector. Our research seeks to find out what is happening, who is working in it, and identify the current needs. The aim is to ensure our future programmes are fit for purpose, addressing the gaps and changing needs.

With 154 responses to the initial survey, we gained a starting point to conduct further face-to-face research to interrogate the findings and help shape our role as a sector support organisation. We continue our research with the 42 Fellows that we have supported through the Trailblazers Fellowship since 2003, to lead the sector forward. They share their individual experiences of working in the dance sector as well as perspectives on what is needed to ensure dance of the African Diaspora continues to thrive.

\*Mercy Nabirye, Heather Benson, Katy Noakes and Oluwatoyin Odunsi

**“THE SOURCE, THE MOTHER OF ALL ART FORMS. IT IS AN ENERGY THAT RESHAPES AND REINVENTS ITSELF ACCORDING TO WHAT IT NEEDS TO ACHIEVE INCLUDING SHAPING SOCIETY’S INNOVATIVE CREATIONS”**

**MBULELO NDABENI 2015-16 STARTER FELLOW**

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

“It focuses on Africa, the inspiration is from Africa, and it is a fusion of contemporary dance and traditional movement”

**BAWREN TAVAZIVA 2003-04 FELLOW**

‘Original form’ DAD was mostly explained within its relationship to music – one did not exist without the other.

**LOLA ADODO 2008-09 FELLOW**

“It is a much more familiar part of contemporary society. Most importantly, people’s attitudes have changed, thanks to advances in science, arts and technology which all help diverse communities interact better”

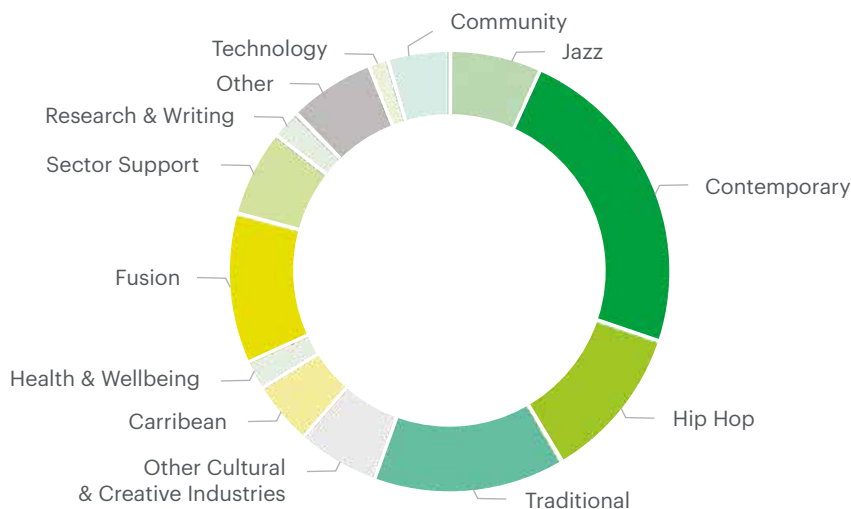
**JEAN ABREU 2003-04 FELLOW**

“Dance of the African Diaspora is a dialogue between myself and my ancestors. Is the vibe and energy in my veins, the heartbeat that beats faster and feeds my soul. It’s Intuition and Connection”

**MARIA DA LUZ GHOUMRASSI 2004-05 FELLOW**

“The sector has in many respects diminished rather in terms of profile and number. In the 80s and 90s there were over 32 African people’s dance companies practicing African and Caribbean dance forms – plus black bodies involved in mainstream forms”

**H PATTEN 2009-10 FELLOW**



**WHERE IS IT HAPPENING?**

Our next phase of research continues with focus groups hosted across UK regions, connecting on-the-ground and bringing together key independent artists, organisation leaders, venue producers and programmers. The first focus groups were hosted in April, in the South West by Trinity Arts Centre (Bristol) and in the Midlands by People Dancing (Leicester); both of which provided a deeper understanding of the climate for artists in specific cities and communities within those regions. Additional focus groups will be hosted in partnership in Leeds, London and potentially other cities.

Further analysis of our research will be published later in the year.

**Watch this space!**

\*\* Percentages represent instances where multiple options were selected  
Survey conducted from August to November 2017 by One Dance UK with our stakeholders and audiences

“Choreographers are doing more work now in theatre as movement directors. The role is becoming more known among other movement specialists”

**DIANE MITCHELL 2003-04 FELLOW**

“Artists are collaborating more and more with each other and with organisations to give this sector continued visibility that will position it as a leader within the dance sector and beyond”

**VICKI IGBOKWE 2012-13 CHAMPION FELLOW**



**57,4%**

**PERFORMING ARTS VENUE**



**44,3%**

**COMMUNITY HALL**

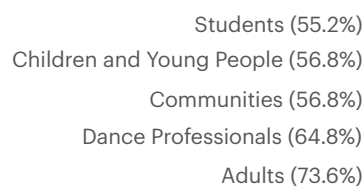


**39,3%**

**UNIVERSITY**

**“IT IS IMPERATIVE TO STAY CONNECTED, SO WE CAN GROW AND FEEL SUPPORTED!”**

**MARIA DA LUZ GHOUMRASSI 2004-05 FELLOW**





## WHAT IS NEEDED FOR GROWTH?

“There is a higher need that those in institutions work closer with the artists to fully understand the immediate needs and support, crucial for DAD development. This includes initiating face to face conversations, creating trust, providing introductions to key people and mentorships.”

**IRIS DE BRITO 2017-18 STARTER FELLOW**

“The sector needs a visionary that can galvanise support from Diasporic entrepreneurial businesses and argue a case for an independent professional level art space in order to become completely autonomous and determine its success without yielding to overarching organisations that do not have DAD specific interests as priority”

**PARADIGMZ 2005-06 FELLOW**

“The challenges specifically for black artists working with DAD is we are seen by the gatekeepers as being the same, which breeds an unhealthy competition amongst us. This stops us from connecting and collaborating. Both the artists and gate keepers have a responsibility to do better”

**VICKI IGBOKWE 2012-13 CHAMPION FELLOW**

“I think it starts and ends with education. I’m so lucky to have had the education I did with ACE dance and music as it empowered me to believe in the values and qualities I held dear as a young artist. I worry about young dancers who don’t have that empowerment and feel disillusioned and on the fringes of the whole dance society”

**JAMAAL BURKMAR 2017-18 STARTER FELLOW**

\*Participants were asked to pick five priorities and rate them 1-5. The top priorities show the most selected at 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.  
\*Most selected refers to how many times the priorities were chosen, irrespective of ranking 1-5.

**“MY IMPACT IN THIS SECTOR, HAS BEEN TO OPEN THE MINDS OF THE PARENTS OF CHILDREN FROM AFRICAN BACKGROUNDS TO SUPPORT THEIR KIDS IN TAKING DANCE AS A CAREER”**

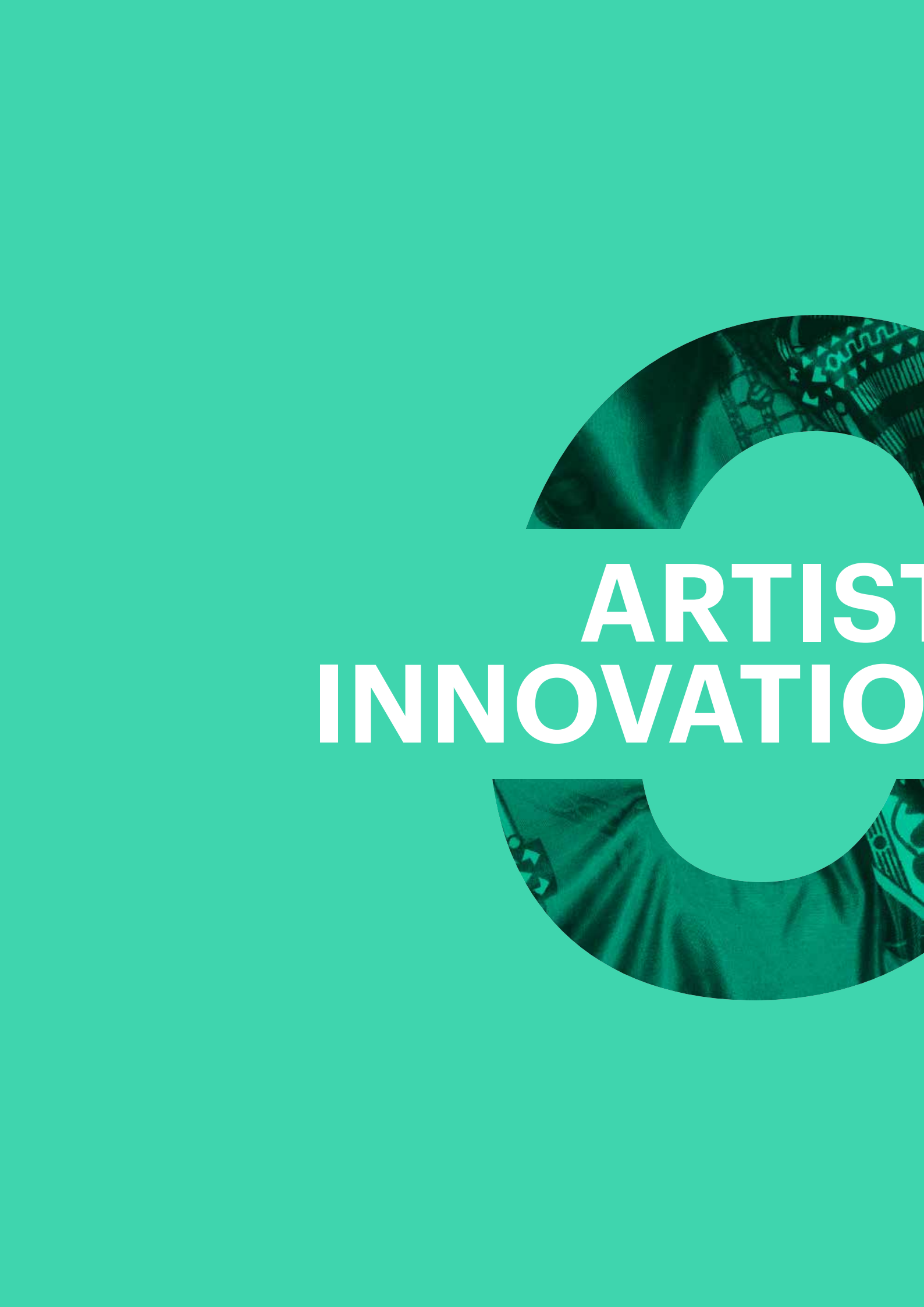
**DICKSON MBI 2017-18 STARTER FELLOW**

## TOP 5 PRIORITIES\*

- 1** FUNDING
- 2** FUNDING RESOURCES
- 3** SHOWCASING WORK
- 4** COMMISSIONS
- 5** INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

## MOST SELECTED PRIORITIES\*





# ARTIST INNOVATION

TIC  
NS





# A SOLO FOR TWO: DANCE, IDENTITY AND ROBOTICS

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BY OLUWATOYIN ODUNSI  
[JEANABREUDANCE.COM](http://JEANABREUDANCE.COM)



As Jean Abreu prepares for a UK tour of his new dance production *Solo for Two*, which premiered in May 2018 at Southbank Centre in London, Oluwatoyin Odunsi, North Programmer for Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD), speaks to Jean about his artistic practice and the role he plays as a leader in the sector.

**Tell our readers a bit more about yourself. How did you get into dance?**

Dance came to me. Like most major things in my journey as an artist – it happened by accident. At





## "DANCE FOREVER MOVING & EVOLVING"

Photo credit for the article © Ambra Vernuccio

the age of 17, living in my hometown of Imperatriz, Maranhao, in the north eastern region of Brazil, I entered a Brazilian ballroom dance class. After a week of training in the different techniques within the art form, I realised that this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I felt as if everything just made sense and was fortunate to find dance at such an early moment in my life.

### **How would you describe your signature dance form?**

I don't see it as a fixed thing, but rather as a dance form that is forever evolving. As an artist and choreographer, various dance forms and life experiences rooted in a migrant identity influence my work. During my dance journey, I moved across different regions of Brazil and then came to London to begin formal training in contemporary dance and ballet at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Alongside learning these dance techniques, I was also introduced to the Brazilian martial arts form of capoeira. A theme of migrant identity runs through

my choreographic language and practice based on the premise of continuation; things forever moving or evolving. The movement expression I created is an amalgamation of my Brazilian and European cultural dance aesthetics and influences including Brazilian ballroom dance, traditional Brazilian folk dance, classical ballet, contemporary dance and capoeira.

The way I would describe my dance form also changes and will continue to change. There has been an evolution of my choreography since my first show in 2003; a refining of the quality of the work that I have developed and nurtured for the last 12 to 15 years as a creator.

I have a fascination with change and the evolution of change, which is another thematic expression in my work - to see how much the movement develops and what kind of movement I can create through my research.

**How would you describe yourself, in terms of your current dance practice with Artificial Intelligence (AI)? What made you enter the world of technology and AI as a choreographic style and language with your last two works?**

My relationship with technology began with the work I did with Gilbert and George using their artwork as part of my piece *Blood*, which was commissioned by the Royal Opera House. I discovered these two artists during a festival in Croatia. They presented an interactive performance installation, with an infrared red camera capturing moving bodies. This inspired a fascination with technology and computer science, focusing on the impact of advancements in technology on developments in human identity. Without technology, the evolution of human beings would be impossible. Working within the technological sphere allows me to question themes of identity, how people see themselves and how I see myself as a creator and a person in current contemporary settings. My work looks at how technology enhances, influences and shapes our lives.

Regarding AI, my interrogation focuses on robotics and the questions around morality: are they deemed slaves or not? Many questions have risen from this subject matter, which made me curious to know how much the machines around us already behave like slaves. I was also interested in questioning whether these robots had souls, along with my own human identity, using a philosophical approach to my work. Currently, I am interested in how AI influences me, how it influences others and what we will be in the next 20 years.

**Can you tell us a bit more about your current dance production?**

Continuing from *Blood*, my first work involving technology, I am creating a trilogy of solos titled *Solo for Two* in the same context with a focus on Artificial Intelligence. Where *Blood* was highly technological using cables everywhere, I decided to do the opposite in *Solo for Two* where the technology now acts as a symbolism.

Here, I wanted the technological aesthetics to be very retro and nostalgic. It's about looking back and technology becoming an entity, a totem, an oracle in a more emblematic perspective. The work is about the performers and the questions of whether the robot is a real person or not.

**How has your dance journey evolved as a Trailblazer and as a creative leader within dance?**

I thought about this recently and can recall the Trailblazers Fellowship being the first award I ever received. It was one of the first things that triggered my conviction and intuitive leadership, without me realising that I had already achieved quite a lot by moving all the way from Brazil to the UK, completing a degree at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and being a successful performer as an early member of Protein Dance. These experiences and the fellowship led me to create my own work. I don't see myself as a leader in that traditional sense of having any influential power. All the people that I have admired and have inspired me are unassuming, humble people that simply influence others with their presence, and that is what I aspire to do. I have a greater sense of consciousness and responsibility knowing that what I have done and will do is important for others in my position. Part of that influence is about believing I can inspire and help others to follow their dreams.



**Can you tell us about your international dance career, both as a dancer and a choreographer?**

I am lucky to have been invited to perform across Europe, South America and Asia as a performer in other companies and with my own company Jean Abreu Dance. I enjoy experiencing other cultures and sharing my artistic perspective, my tradition and my knowledge of dance. It's been important for me to continue collaborating and working in partnership with my creative partners and peers from these continents, as well as teaching and sharing my choreographic practice within international creative and educational institutions. One of the things that I have learned is that you must continuously be open to learning and building these relationships so that they can lead to new global partnerships.

As a creative person who is committed to my vision, I am careful to stay true to myself and the message I share with my audiences. It is about quality rather than quantity because fundamentally, what I hope

to achieve is a future legacy for my work that speaks beyond my physical presence on earth.

**Where do you see the future of DAD in terms of its forms, aesthetic and creative leaders in the UK?**

Thinking in terms of freeing the consciousness of society, the future is to help people realise we all have a connection to Africa and that movement rooted in African dance is present in everything. As a choreographer it is not my responsibility to prove anything, regardless of whether audiences understand the movement expression or feel it falls outside of a specific format. Rather, the responsibility falls on the audience to find a connection with the dance beyond the categorising of "other."

I am optimistic that there will be a time where I can present work from any perspective and it not be perceived as a something strange. We must be who we are. As artists we have the right to make our work in the way we see it.



# MBULELO NDABENI'S N'DA DANCE COMPANY *NaY TRIPLE BILL*

---

BY THEA NERISSA BARNES  
[WWW.NDADANCE.ORG](http://WWW.NDADANCE.ORG)

Mbulelo Ndabeni's goal for N'da Dance Company is to devise uplifting, culturally significant dance work. The repertoire is a collaboration between several artists who use dance to challenge existing false narratives that exist regarding peoples of the African Diaspora within society.

*NaY Triple Bill* was presented at London's Rich Mix on 15 September 2017, and for this performance Ndabeni presented three works in collaboration with clinical psychologist Dr Omar Timberlake, Yinka Esi Graves and Carolyn Bolton. In all three





## "A CALLING TO RETURN HOME"

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works, a protagonist is positioned in varied imagined situations in relation to several different characters. The work is autobiographical, with character interactions supported by singing, music, and movement; depicting a non-literal staging of a person exploring varied ways of being in the world. I had a conversation with Ndabeni in July 2017 about dance, dancing and making dance at this stage in his life. I had attended the first *Dissecting Principles* Lab Exchange on 19 June 2017 at Moonshot Centre, in London. Ndabeni participated in this panel discussion led by Funmi Adewole and was accompanied by Avatâra Ayuso and Rachel Nanyonjo. The discussion touched on the impact of transnational dance practices; how one evolves individualised creative authenticity as well as focusing on funding, research and dance-making in the UK's current cultural and socio-political climate. As I listened to Ndabeni, I sensed a young artist who seeks to identify the process for becoming what he imagines himself to be, without the loss of his core self. Currently, Ndabeni feels "a sense of reflecting;

reflecting and evaluating my process from South Africa to where I am now to where I would like to go". Born in Ugie, Eastern Cape, and raised in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, Ndabeni is a member of the amaXhosa, Dlamini clan. He would like to investigate the value of his root heritage and how to invest this more in life and his work. At the time of our interview, Ndabeni was feeling a disconnect from his cultural moorings. Having worked with Cape Town City Ballet, Matthew Bourne's New Adventures after further studies at London Studio Centre, and performed with Rambert, Company Wayne McGregor, and other dance performing and choreographing ventures, he has also found opportunities to grow artistically in his own way.

Currently in creative transition, Ndabeni seeks to understand what it is to be shaped by other dancemakers and their creative vision without losing a sense of his own way of being. He is in the process of discovering ways to negotiate the varied dance worlds of England and South Africa where he lives and works.

## **"A LONGING TO BE ROOTED, CONNECTED, ANCHORED"**

For Ndabeni, there is "a calling" to return home and connect to his roots; to immerse himself in his spirituality, to feel familial rootedness, and to speak his cultural languages fluently. Returning home will construct an identity that is inclusive of his Xhosa selfhood. My conversation with Ndabeni reminds me of Frantz Fanon's deduction in *Black Skin White Mask*: "I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (Fanon, 1967, 229).

'Home is where the heart is', one of the dance works for *NaY Triple Bill*, depicts a sense of searching for home through reflections and evaluations of being in several worlds at once. Parts of Ndabeni's history pose a two-sided representation: his particular experiential reality against the discursive manner his presence on stage facilitates. In this equation, choreographic structure is one aspect of this work which is personal, political and culturally infused; illustrating Ann Cooper Albright's (1997) argument that "autobiography, like dance, is situated at the intersection of bodily experience and cultural representation" (119).

Ndabeni's performance has these kinds of discursive intersections in which subjectivity is viewed from several perspectives. There is the male black dancing body drawing on an inner emotive landscape, and then there are those who participated in the work, female dancers and drummers; embodying female archetypical characters as well as supportive artistic positions in each dance. With music by Roberto David Rusconi providing the atmosphere for six female drummers / vocalists, the *Yemalla Drummers*, 'Nay - Nam and You' opens with soft ambient lighting.

Ndabeni, as protagonist, finds his sense of self through transformation assisted by women as mother, sangoma (shaman), heritage and an

inner confidence gained through strife. Ndabeni's collaboration with Dr Timberlake consisted of incorporating strategies for discovering and clarifying narratives for being. Ndabeni describes the work: "It's a way of defining stories. Not one story; having multiple stories, to free yourself from this one-story narrative there is; especially when it comes to people of the African Diaspora and for me as a dancer. I wanted to find out - how do I express all these worlds that I embody without now being in one story?"

'Nay - Nam and You' illustrated how varied narratives could avoid linearity and incorporate more varied emotional, human content. Each person lives multiple narratives, whereby "narratives" is a metaphor for different states of being in different situations or cultures differing within and outside one's own authentic culture. Ndabeni explains: "What does it do to one, because now you don't have that one story, you are a collection of stories. Narratives, when you attach to another culture so now you are an amalgamation of different stories, which in a sense doesn't imprison you; it allows you freedom to be."

'iBali - Echoes of the Future' is a duet for Ndabeni and Yinka Esi Graves, and 'Solo Matter' is a collaboration between Carolyn Bolton and Ndabeni. The evening utilised varied autobiographical narratives drawn from Ndabeni. The collaboration with clinical psychologist Dr Timberlake allowed him to use his lived experience and inspirations for decisively constructed creative strategies. In my telephone interview Ndabeni states: "The crying for my



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mother in 'Solo Matter', a longing to be rooted, connected, anchored, and that anchor is related to this mother figure and these pieces... I want to reattach myself, almost like an umbilical cord connection, for I know once I can do that within my work then I will find that grounding that I am looking for." There was a strategic effort to incorporate emotions to build movement for the work. Dr Timberlake's conversations with Ndabeni shaped the work dramaturgically and anchored his choreographic foundation, thereby inspiring intuitive shaping of movement. This groundwork gave Ndabeni freedom to expand his chosen vocabulary of movement beyond what he expected of himself and those working with him. Ndabeni reflects: "The conversations allow me to tap into my spiritual side. Being South African, I feel I am carrying a mountain where apartheid, that hasn't gone away, puts me in an equation where I am relegated to the bottom of the chain. Living in London, I find myself in a third dimension since I am not from here, yet I am not fully connected to South Africa. "There is a third "I" where my history, my experiences are. I can discuss and how can I use the tools Dr Timberlake

provides to look into my past and exploit things that I went through and express in my art and creativity." Here Frantz Fanon's (1967) statement illustrates Ndabeni's current creative cycle: "I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom" (231).

Ndabeni's journey in this evening of dance is about him finding himself through his work: "Enkosi! Thank you so much to everyone who has supported my journey so far through various ways. I look forward to developing these relationships and partnerships towards exciting future endeavors together, 'Ubuntu'" (Ndabeni, 26 March 2018).

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## EXPECTATIONS: MINE OR YOURS?

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WITH MARIA DA LUZ GHOUMRASSI  
TRAILBLAZERS PROFILE

**Maria da Luz Ghoumrassi reflects on how her heritage has impacted her artistic journey.**

“I am a mid-career dancer, choreographer and educator based in London, working through multidisciplinary techniques from around the world to develop intercultural performances.

I am British, born in Portugal, of Cape Verdean descent. I live and create work in London, a unique place where cultures meet and ideas flourish. I grew up singing and dancing the traditional Cape Verdean morna and Portuguese fado; a heritage that has led to my interest in diverse cultures and histories. Now living and working in London, my



**"A WOMAN IS  
STILL A WOMAN  
REGARDLESS  
OF HAVING  
CHILDREN"**

© Three Blokes Productions

heritage informs my artistic vision and inspires me to create work that explores identity and tells untold stories. I believe that intercultural education and performance can be a vehicle through which different ideas and cultures can come into discussion and arrive at a greater understanding and acceptance of one another.

I personally feel happy and fulfilled by being a mother and an artist, though I am looking for answers about both.

How do we challenge societal expectations around women? Do we first consider our roles as women, then our role as artists or female dancers? Should women opt for a career or motherhood? Do women need to give birth to feel fulfilled, to feel we are women? Do we need to have a biological child to experience motherhood, or is it possible to mother in a different way?

These are some of the questions that have been raised throughout my research of *The Pestle and*

*Mortar* (2005), which was one inspiration for *A Tree Without Leaves* (2018).

I am reflecting on my artistic journey since being a Trailblazer, on the impact that my experience of motherhood has had on my creative and artistic voice, but also on how I see motherhood in a wider context, as an extension of the family and the wider community.

After graduating with a BA (Hons) in Dance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, I joined Kokuma Dance Theatre working with Patrick Acogny, Germaine Acogny and Flora Thefaine. I was in the original cast of Disney's *The Lion King* as ensemble and dance captain working with Garth Fagan and Julie Taymor. After five years in *The Lion King*, I pursued my career as a choreographer with the vision to create work encompassing the diversity of dance styles, techniques and aesthetics that I have been exposed to throughout my career. My eclectic dance experience led me to believe that all dance forms are of equal value;



## "HOW DO WE CHALLENGE SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS AROUND WOMEN?"

hence, my practice draws from contemporary, ballet, jazz and Africanist movement as well as the visual arts and other cultural references. I received the Trailblazers Fellowship in 2004. In the same year, I was also shortlisted for The Place Prize for showing a video of ideas inspiring my work in *The Pestle and Mortar*, which The Place presented in 2005 at *Resolution!* The interest it generated endorsed my passion and showed me that I had the potential to create meaningful works.

Receiving this award was pivotal to the development of my choreographic voice. I began to explore a new vocabulary that reflected the eclectic nature of both western and non-western dance techniques. Through these vocabularies I told my family stories. My intention, however, was to inspire and allow people to find commonalities within my stories; *The Pestle and Mortar* being the first of these stories. As Thea Barnes wrote in *Ballet Dance Magazine*, it "offered syncretism in embodied knowledge that drew from her contemporary dance and African/Caribbean experiences to illustrate a person's breakaway from communal structures" (2).

Then, I was a mother of two young children. Despite having a supportive husband, who shared most family responsibilities, the demands of juggling work and family were difficult. After a few years, now with three children, a sense of disconnection from the dance world emerged. I felt artistically dissatisfied and disempowered and decided to focus on teaching as my main source of income. This led me to gather a wealth of knowledge by working with community groups ranging from babies and parents, children, young adults, special needs groups, older people and professional dancers. I was confident this experience would be extremely useful for my future creative work.

The positive outcome of this diverse experience is that now I teach regularly at The Place, TripSpace and Lewisham College. I also mentor adults

with learning disabilities, and I am an Associate Artist with Spare Tyre, a leading participatory arts charity challenging prejudice to transform lives.

However, as time went by, the lack of contact with the artistic community and being unable to continue growing artistically, I gradually felt that my dreams were getting further away. Despite promising myself "I will dance until I die", I reached a very low point in my professional career unsure if I was ever going to return to dancing and choreographing professionally. On the other hand, I love being a mother, as I feel very much connected to the mothers in my family.

Fast forward ten years it has been a difficult but rich journey. I have since raised a family but my passion for dance is stronger than ever. In 2015, I was selected for One Dance UK's Dance Teaching Mentorship and received a Dancers Career Development Retraining Grant in 2016. This helped me reconnect with myself and see where I wanted to be in the future. These awards gave me the confidence to start exploring my choreographic ideas with an understanding that with careful planning and clear goal setting followed by action, great ideas can be materialised and fulfilled.

My current research, *A Tree Without Leaves*, follows on from *The Pestle and Mortar*, reflecting on my grandmother's experience as a mother of 20 children, my mother who lost three babies and my own experience as a mother. My intention is to find my way through a lineage of loss. The work uses dance, drawing and singing to test the meaning of womanhood in contemporary society. The title derives from a Chadian proverb saying:



“A tree without leaves is like a woman without children” (Anonymous).

I was taken aback by this proverb. However, I felt truly inspired by the metaphor of women as trees. As a young person, I loved drawing trees without leaves as I believed they were beautiful just as they were. After all, trees provide us with oxygen, food, mark the season, prevent soil erosion among many other important roles. I was inspired by the thought that “a woman is still a woman regardless of having children”.

I wanted to hear from women that were having difficulties to conceive and about their struggles. I approached local fertility clinics and delivered a creative workshop entitled Blessing Our Bodies, targeting a diverse group of 6 women at different stages in their fertility journeys. I aimed to gather stories exploring being and/or not being a mother through movement, drawing and writing.

It was a very positive experience; confirming the power of dance and the arts in bringing people together in a live, physical space to explore difficult issues. The workshop also highlighted how learning about different journeys can help

with understanding and coming to terms with your own. As one of my participants stated, “being in the same space and hearing each other’s experiences, they could share and see what others were going through and they were not alone”. By sharing stories in this way, you can see your place in the story and help you feel less alone.

I have since, been exploring how to embody this collection of stories physically, using voice and sound, writing and drawing at workshops and in my professional classes”.

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**A Tree Without Leaves can be seen at:**

BHM Live 2018, 4 October 2018, Serendipity, The Curve, Leicester

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# FINDING HER DANCING FEET AGAIN

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**BY ERIN SANCHEZ**  
**WATCH LOLA'S PRACTICE**

Lola Adodo is a dancer, choreographer and fitness and health educator. She talks with Healthier Dancer Programme Manager Erin Sanchez about her work supporting mothers to use dance to enhance health and fitness, and Adodo's new project Finding My Feet Again, which focuses on experiences of injury, pain, and rehabilitation after illness.

**Tell us about your role as a health and fitness educator.**

I currently work with women who come to sessions once a week after doing the school runs in the morning. In these sessions, I support the participants to make a lifestyle change through various health discussions such as what to add or take away from their daily diet to ensure that they have a balanced diet, the adverse effects of eating unhealthily, and the benefit of doing exercise. This is then reinforced by taking them through a set of exercises in the session.

These sessions last usually between 9 to 15 weeks, and so it enables them to form a community of their own as some of them may not necessarily get the opportunity to be in the same room for more than a week at the most. I make sure that as they work hard they are also having fun, which brings them back to sessions. As well, I encourage them to either meet up and further discuss or do the exercises they learn in the session together.



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© Prima Chanderrh



**"A DANCER'S  
BODY IS  
THEIR  
INSTRUMENT"**

© Anita Toure

**How does your role as a health and fitness educator integrate you into the community?**

I can integrate into the community as a health and fitness educator using my skills to engage and support people with common needs and goals and to bring out a positive outcome. I do not just go in as the expert, but also take part in the journey with the community to help them bring a critical change to their lives and help reduce the level of various ailments within the community ie. depression and obesity.

**What is your personal experience of illness and injury?**

It first started with pains in my joints, and then the whole of my body began to ache as well. It got so bad that I could not walk for more than about 5 to 10 minutes without taking time to catch my breath. Then getting out of bed was becoming a huge task. I went to the doctor to find out what could be the problem. I was told that it was lack of

vitamin D and was prescribed vitamin D tablets. After finishing the dosage, the pains subsided, but I started to lose weight and could not keep anything down - water or food.

Again, I went to my doctor to find out what the problem could be this time, and this was when the trips back and forth to my doctor and the hospital began. The hospital took every kind of sample that you could think of, but to no avail I had lost so much weight. This continued for another three years until one day when I received a phone call from my doctor.

After discussing with her colleagues, she suggested that I should go for an AIDS test as all the symptoms I was showing were leading them to think that might be the case. I did not want to go for the test as I certainly knew that I did not have AIDS. She would not back down, so I said they could book me for the test, but I did not go.

Throughout the ordeal, I was an outpatient with no prescribed medication because the doctors did



## "I TAKE PART IN THE JOURNEY WITH THE COMMUNITY"

not know what it was they were dealing with. It wasn't until I started to get better that I was then told what they thought the problem had been; an acute kidney infection. For another eight months I was kept as an outpatient, going to the hospital for them to monitor the improvement of my kidneys. After the fourth check-up, I was discharged but told to keep having check-ups with my doctor at least every six months to a year.

It took another two years to recover, and in total this ordeal lasted for five years before I felt strong and confident enough to start doing any intense physical activity. However, I wasn't confident enough to start dancing again. I wondered what I could do to get my fitness level to a standard that I felt good enough to dance again. One day as I was walking through town, I was handed a flyer for Kung Fu classes. They were offering a month's admission to the sessions for free before one decides to carry on or not. I went and stuck to it.

### **How will your solo bring to life these experiences, and how has your collaboration with 'Funmi Adewole supported this process?**

The project *Finding My Feet Again* is a solo piece, but like the African saying goes "it takes a village to raise a child!" Presently, I am doing personal research and development to get an understanding of the how, who and what. 'Funmi Adewole, an independent artist and scholar, has been supporting me in this process. Working with her allows me to break down the idea into manageable sizes, and in a way, she

is my unofficial mentor. With 'Funmi's support, I am able to see a headway in moving forward with the project. She took the role of the interviewer,

interrogating me so that I can then use the recording as inspiration to begin exploring movement vocabulary. I aim to use the project to explore my story along with three other dancers who have had similar experiences. I also plan to collaborate with a multimedia artist who will film interviews and create live manipulated visual images that will inform, respond and complement the work. As well, I will collaborate with a set and costume designer to add another visual aesthetic and dimension.

### **What would your advice be to dancers who are experiencing pain, illness or injury?**

My advice to other dancers who are experiencing pain, illness or injury is not to leave it to the last minute. As soon as you feel the first pain or sense that something is not quite right, go to the doctor to get more clarity on what the problem could be.

Dancers tend to have a high pain threshold. A dancer's body is their instrument, and it can be likened to an engine. For a car to be legally roadworthy it must go through a MOT. Furthermore, the engine needs petrol as well as water in the radiator, otherwise you and the car are going nowhere. If we think of our bodies in this way, then we are more likely to continue regular maintenance check-ups. Otherwise, dismissing the initial stage of pain could lead to a long, slow, and not always pleasant journey to recovery.



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# MOVING THROUGH THE GLOBAL DIASPORAS

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WITH ZELA GAYLE  
FACEBOOK

One Dance UK's DAD Team speak with Trailblazer Alum Zela Gayle about her experience teaching in Ethiopia and throughout the global diasporas, impacting people of many generations through a fusion of sport, wellbeing and dance movement.

**Following your Trailblazers Fellowship, you moved from the UK to Ethiopia. Can you describe the international infrastructure in which you operate and how this impacts your practice?**

I moved to Ethiopia to accept a full-time position as a dance teacher in a newly established international school in Addis Ababa. It led to another dance teacher position, for both primary and secondary education, in a top choice international school. Because it was the only school offering a year-round curriculum at the time, I felt privileged to hold the position. Every day I was able to put all the global dance forms I studied over the years into practical use as well as discover new emerging urban, African fusion styles.

Outside of teaching dance in a school environment, I offered beginners to intermediate level classical ballet classes, which were very well attended by 3 to 11 year-old children from affluent Ethiopian families. Even though there are two ex-ballerinas from Russia and Australia also teaching in Ethiopia, I felt it was necessary for Ethiopian children to learn ballet in a community setting.

Following my research and experience gained from my Trailblazers Fellowship in 2005, I wanted to work with children in an environment where I



© Biruk Amsalu



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could grow. I love teaching in Ethiopia because the children are open to the appreciation of African Peoples' Dance (APD), which I implement across the curriculum. During my experience in the UK, I never found enough interest from the institutions to incorporate APD in primary schools.

I am currently teaching dance full time in a private school that follows an American curriculum, and this has been the driving force for developing my practice as a dance instructor for children. We develop choreography to coincide with their art and music curriculum; equipping them with a global and collaborative perspective of the arts as well as giving them the opportunity to learn specialised dance skills and techniques.

As a dance artist residing in Ethiopia, I found that most of the essential structures needed are very limited or nonexistent, making it a challenge to create work as a choreographer or to be inspired by other work. Traditional Ethiopian dance is very popular, frequently broadcasted on TV and

performed in certain cultural restaurants. However, there are limited options for APD workshops, classes and performances. All 82 ethnic groups within Ethiopia have their own traditional dance culture; many performed by dance groups and companies. Artists working under urban dance styles are more likely to be self-taught and turn to singing as a career to enhance and incorporate choreography with music videos.

I depend largely on broader networking circles to support my practice as an artist. There are many associations that support artists and entrepreneurs. For example, I joined the Centre for African Leadership programs, Empowering Women to Advance (AWEP), InterNations Addis Ababa community and Khul Wellbeing Academy. They all offer forums to build skills for self-development, self-discovery, leadership and networking opportunities that facilitate women in business, etc. The international infrastructure that I work within, continues to grow. The more I travel; the more I have to offer.



## "EQUIPPING YOUNG DANCERS WITH A GLOBAL AND COLLABORATIVE PERSPECTIVE"

**Your work crosses between well-being/sport and dance/movement. Can you explain how this cross fertilisation works? Would you see this as the future for driving connections and development?**

Yes, definitely. I am currently working in a new area of business, merging dance, health and sport to help people who are less motivated by fitness regimes to find easier ways to keep fit and healthy. I came up with the brand name InnerZeal Reggae-Robics. Teaching children has been a big influence in my work in this direction. I wanted to offer young people and the entire family a dance that increases cardio fitness and draws from my background in reggae music and dance.

I did extensive research on the most effective and current fitness trends to create and produce my instructional DVD video *Innerzeal Reggae-Robics, Fitness for Life*. InnerZeal Reggae-Robics is a combination of dance choreography merged with aerobic steps, repeated several times using the method of high intensity interval training for the entire body. Aerobic classes are very popular here in Ethiopia, but it is often done to digital music that doesn't connect us to the movement from the "inside out". The music must bring a feeling that resonates from the heart. It was important for me to provide a different experience and inspire people, especially the Ethiopian community. It has generated a lot of interest, allowing me to deliver workshops internationally. People are excited and fascinated that a reggae beat can help keep them fit!

I recently gave a demonstration of my InnerZeal Reggae-Robics warm up at an outdoor event for the Women's 5km, the biggest road race in Africa where only women and children can participate.

This year 12,000 women took part, which gave me so much joy to experience the excitement of Reggae-Robics warming up the crowd at the

start of a race. Engaging with people is my biggest inspiration right now because fitness to me is not just how we use our bodies to work out, but how we think about ourselves from day to day. What we eat and what we engage our minds in is fitness too. I see it as a holistic experience which I hope to research further.

**What message do you have for organisations or individuals working in the sector to sustain or propel development in dance?**

Don't spend too much time theorising, be ready to try things out, be proactive. Broaden your horizons of the sector by attending events outside your sector. Attend networking events regularly; share your stories with others because it may lead to bigger things you never imagined. Be clear about what you want to do and how you want to do it.

**What is next for you?**

My plan is to collaborate with other East African dancers and institutions based in Nairobi-Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda on their annual dance and music festivals. I will continue to promote health and fitness practices amongst children and young people through the InnerZeal Reggae-Robics presentations, workshops and performances at major events. I plan to deliver Reggae-Robics training to emerging local dancers and dance crews to build on their performance skills and opportunities. Through InnerZeal Reggae-Robics I will continue to expand my reach internationally; making dances of Africa more visible and accessible to people of all backgrounds.

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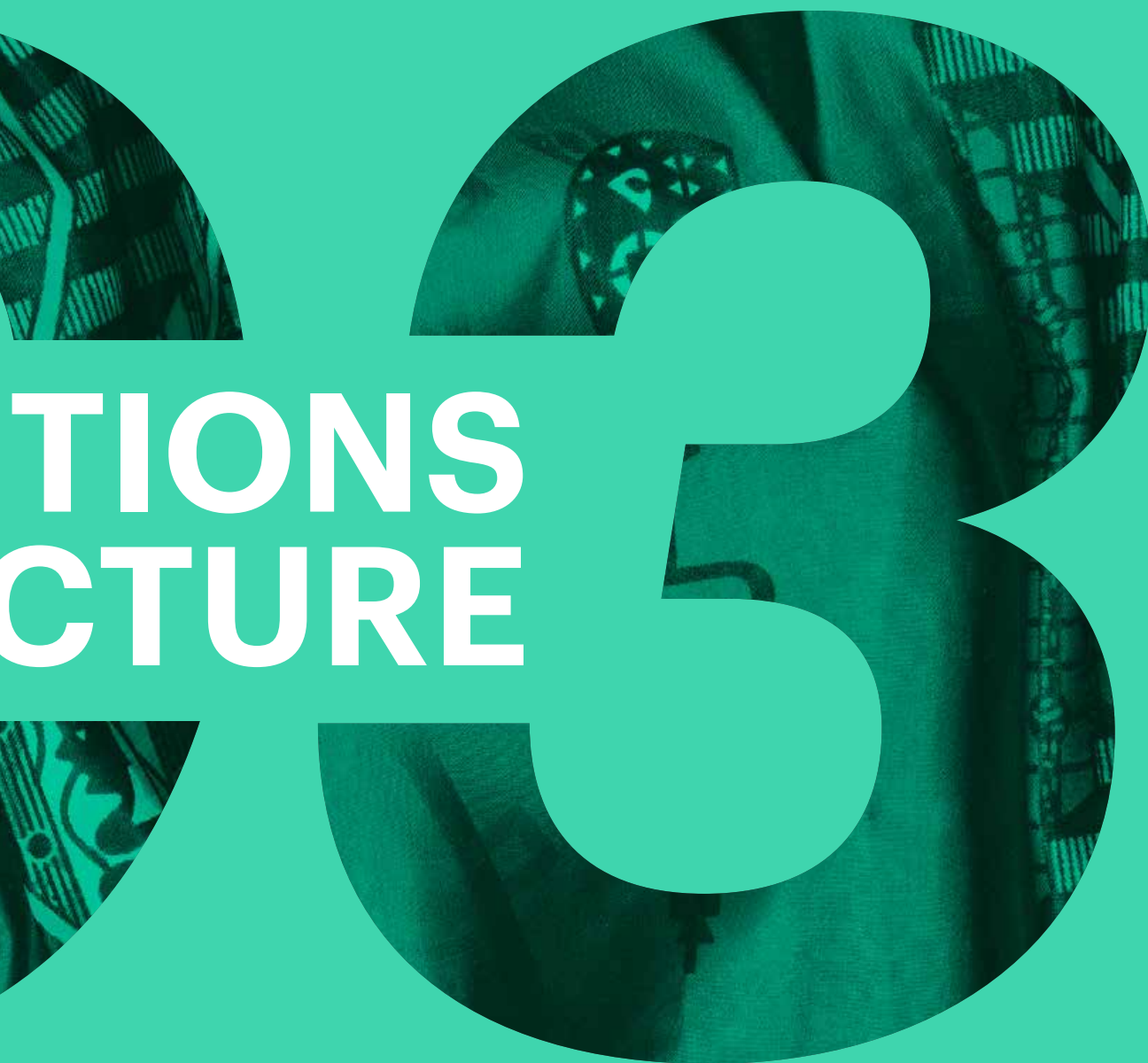
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# NEW ENERGY, FRESH PERSPECTIVES

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**BY CAMERON BALL**  
**UCHENNADANCE.COM**

Vicki Igbokwe, Creative Director of Uchenna Dance, has a mission to empower, entertain and educate through her many roles as a choreographer, creative director and empowerment specialist. She is in conversation with Cameron Ball, Special Projects Coordinator, about her journey as an artist and creative leader.

**This edition of *HOTFOOT* focuses on Infrastructure and Leadership. How do you see the current state of infrastructure within the UK dance sector?**



**"KNOW YOUR  
PRODUCT  
AND PROFIT"**

Photo credit for the article © Foteini Christophilopoulou

It's an interesting one that feels like there are a lot of us scrabbling around for the same pots of money and ways to keep our businesses running. Recently, I was in some very candid conversations in a meeting with a group of artists, producers, venues and promoters and was struck by how hard they also have it.

Even though we talk about how the dance sector can think more entrepreneurially, I am not yet convinced that we actually want to put in the work to make this happen. There is untapped energy and time that could go into this way of thinking and I believe we all must take more time out working on our businesses.

**What are the challenges and opportunities for dance artists today?**

Besides lack of money, it is developing business skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit. When I say business skills, I mean things like people

management, building a great team no matter the size, and having a plan: what it is you want to achieve, who it's for, why you're doing it, when and how. It's building processes for you and your team, knowing your product (yes artists - we have a product!) and profit. Yes, I said profit.

I love the dance sector dearly but find conversations around doing things differently are always met with resistance. When I have the same conversations with those in other industries my mind is blown away with endless possibilities.

**Tell us about your career journey in the dance sector. How did you develop your leadership skills?**

It began at the age of 14 when I became the full-time carer in my family looking after a sick mother and three younger sisters. I definitely "learnt on the job" and had no idea how this level of responsibility was preparing me for my life ahead.

My career started when I created my dance group Random Freaks in 1997. We were a team of 25 based at Paddington Arts Centre, and I was the choreographer and manager. I met Hakeem Onibudo, Artistic Director of Impact Dance, in 2000, and worked with him as a dancer, choreographer, teacher and Youth Artistic Director.

After graduating from Middlesex University in 2004 with a BA in Dance Studies, I worked at East London Dance (ELD) as a Youth Dance Practitioner on a four-month contract. I left in 2009 holding the position of Creative Projects Manager for their Children and Young People - Informal programme of work. 2009 is also the year I set up Uchenna Dance, my mum passed away, and I began studying for a Masters in Cultural Leadership at City University.

The Trailblazers Fellowship was pivotal in my career change, embarking on a professional career as an independent choreographer. It gave me the time, space and resources to reflect on my work, identify my present situation and to plan where I wanted to be in the future.

#### **Who are your gurus?**

I have a guru who doesn't know I exist! Lisa Nichols is my virtual coach and mentor. Those who know me closely know exactly how I feel about this woman. She has lived an incredible life, going from a single mother on benefits to a multimillionaire business woman. It's not the money that I admire, it's her story of how she was able to change her mindset and perspective on life to change her destiny. I have watched so many of her videos online and still go back and watch them to learn something new.

Two people that know me very well, Hakeem Onibudo and Jeanefer Jean-Charles, began as mentors of mine and are now like my big brother and sister. I admire how they have carved amazing careers in dance, and beyond, always willing to take "risks", bet on themselves and seek the skills, information and knowledge they need to have the careers they want that afford them the life they want to live.

#### **You are a valued member of the One Dance UK Board of Trustees. What do you seek to achieve through your support of the organisation?**

I want One Dance UK to be the UK Body for Dance that leads and represents the dance sector for all. It's a tough position to be in, but I truly believe that One Dance UK can, and will be, the voice for all.

#### **Congratulations on the recent national tour of *The Head Wrap Diaries* with Uchenna Dance. Tell us about the response it received.**

This show was conceived in 2014, with a research and development project in 2015, made at The Place in 2016, has been touring since August 2017, and has had its first booking for 2019! The show has been performed as part of the Rural Touring Dance Initiative and at small scale theatres across the UK.

It has been received with so much love and a wide range of audiences, many of which are first timers to seeing a dance show or going to the theatre. After one show, I had eight different audience members come up to me to share that this was the second, third, or fourth time seeing the show and each time they brought different friends or family members to share the experience.

#### **What's next for you? What does your new role at The Place mean to you?**

I am an Associate Artist at The Place via their Work Place scheme, and I am excited to be working with them and joining the other Associate Artists. The Place was instrumental in the development and creation of *The Head Wrap Diaries* and in their support of Uchenna Dance. Making a further commitment to each other was natural and felt right.

DanceEast, Strike A Light and The Place have commissioned me to create a family show. It will premiere at The Place in December 2018 and tour to small scale theatres and rural venues between November 2018 and November 2019; finishing with a Christmas run at DanceEast.

I have big plans to develop *The Head Wrap Diaries* into a musical. In the meantime, *The Head Wrap Diaries* is available for touring, with an installation, head wrap bar and participation programme that can also be booked as a package or separately.



Taking time out to feed the entrepreneur in me, is super important also. I want to find a business model that enables Uchenna Dance to be resilient and profitable. When I work this out I will share the tools!

**Do you have any advice for aspiring arts leaders?**

You must work out who you are, what you stand for, why you do what you do and who for. My early days of Uchenna Dance were spent trying to please people, which resulted in making work that was okay and not truly being myself. The moment I started making the shows I wanted to see, things changed. It should be such an easy thing... being yourself. Unfortunately, this is one of the hardest things to do in life.

Don't be afraid to do things differently, think outside the box, challenge the status quo. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Finally, seek inspiration and knowledge from outside dance and arts sectors. Some of my most meaningful conversations have been with people outside of the arts; there is so much learning to be had and networks to be developed. Get out to different types of events that are not dance related. Yes, it can be a little daunting being the only dance artist amongst lawyers, accountants and CEOs of commercial companies, but trust me, the conversations are rich. You must be unapologetically you! If you remain humble and kind to others, you will get there.





# LEADING THE NEXT GENERATION

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BY BEVERLEY GLEAN MBE  
AKOMAASA.COM



Artistic Director of IRIE! dance theatre, Beverley Glean MBE sits down with the newest recipient of a Queen's Honour, Akosua Boakye BEM, to speak about her experience and expertise within the sector.

**What influences and experiences helped shape your career in education, dance and other performing arts?**

My parents are key influences who installed in me certain moral characteristics: hard work,



**"PROVISION  
NEEDS TO BE  
INCLUSIVE"**

© Foteini Christophilopoulou

commitment, generosity and a love for what I do. I've grown up to apply these principles in my career and professional work.

Having grown up in Ghana, I was filled with the need and want to dance, specifically in African dance forms. I thought that I would attend school to learn western contemporary dance and African dance forms. When I searched institutions for training, (the top three were Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Trinity Laban and London Contemporary Dance), I would get contemporary dance, but not the African dance forms I desired. I realised that the dominating offer in the sector was ballet and contemporary.

This sparked my decision to have a career in education to contribute to the dance curriculum. After a year on the Diploma programme at Trinity Laban, my tutor Thea Barnes, informed me that I needed to earn a degree instead of a performance course to become a teacher and push African dance forms in the UK. This was a key moment

because it changed the course of my studies and career path. I wanted to become a teacher because it was the only way I could contribute to making a change in the lack of visibility of the African and Caribbean dance forms within UK dance institutions. Then there were no recognised accreditation, pathways nor progression routes for African dance forms. However, now there is a BA (Hons) course at IRIE! dance theatre accredited by University of Roehampton. We need to support this programme, as well as provide progression routes from secondary schools or community-based programmes to create opportunities to study African dance forms through to MA levels and beyond. Provision needs to be inclusive.

My studies at Morley College focused on dance and social administration alongside community workshops in drama. Whilst working at the Young Vic, I met Ben Evans who asked me to work for him. I jumped at the opportunity. In 2008, Thea Barnes called me about interviews for teachers to join Disney's new Cub School to train children

for the roles of young Simba and Nala in the West End musical, Disney's *The Lion King*. She has guided and mentored me for years. Everyone needs someone like her who is willing to connect with your vision enough to give support and push you beyond your perceived limitations. Once the door was open, I did my part, which has led me to become the Children's Casting Coordinator for the show.

During my dance journey I have many people to thank including Thea Barnes, Jane Carr, and Stuart Thomas, for guiding me as I strived to achieve all my ambitions. Stuart Thomas whipped me into shape, giving me a strong sense of discipline and a demand for focus in my dance training. When I was ready, he gave me the opportunity to teach his classes and develop my teaching skills; helping me build confidence, learn from my mistakes and understand what it means to be a teacher of dance.

**How did the DAD Trailblazers Fellowship impact your journey?**

I was aware of those who had received the fellowship before my application. I remember thinking that I wasn't ready, but I realised I could focus the application on the work I was doing at Kensington and Chelsea College and my overall vision for African dance training in the UK. My desire was to visit Germaine Acogny's Ecole des Sables in Senegal. The fellowship helped me shape my vision and revisit my early thoughts around education. The bursary connected me to the sector by exposing me to individuals and organisations within the mainstream and making my work more visible.

**With your focus on dance and cultures of the African Diaspora, can you describe the impact you have had on the curriculums you have taught within the UK?**

Without doing research into specifics this is a difficult question to answer. Kensington and Chelsea College is where I formally introduced West African Dance into their BTEC dance curriculum. This has since developed into my current PhD research and is very much part of the work I do at Canterbury Christ Church University under the supervision of Angela Pickard, who has been immensely supportive. At Kingston University, they have developed an urban dance curriculum which includes African dance styles, and since teaching there they continue to offer this form. Other artists such as H Patten, Vicki Igbokwe, Alesandra Seutin and Iris de Brito have taught there. I did not necessarily open the door as others like 'Funmi Adewole taught there before me, but I contribute to the work and the impact other individuals make in education. There are others before me whose shoulders I stand on. Without them I would not have achieved what I have today.

**What do you think are some of the challenges that educators and leaders in the sector face, specifically those working in DAD?**

Visibility. Before the 1990s these forms were not recognised for curriculum study. If a dance form is not studied, valued nor offered within a social, commercial and academic context, then its community will not value it in the same way. If the form is visible, individuals no matter what colour or creed will feel there is something to work towards. Those skilled to teach at an academic level still deal with issues of employability; no

**"IF THE FORM  
IS VISIBLE,  
THERE IS  
SOMETHING  
TO WORK  
TOWARDS"**

positions available for them to fill. The limit of inclusion is a factor. If the forms are not practiced in British dance culture, artists will not build the skills needed to sustain DAD. The inequality in provision is completely ignored. The focus is still very much on ballet and contemporary forms, leaving little funds to support DAD forms. Other challenges are skills development, inclusion and employability. Dance from any culture should be celebrated. It is important for children to be aware of these forms to progress the work of trailblazers.

**What message do you have for young people who want to become leaders in their communities?**

Everyone has something to contribute to society. Realising your own potential is the key to supporting your journey. Be willing to stand up for your truth. Once you understand your vision and the cost you are willing to pay for it, that will fuel your development, and everything will fall into place. Know how and when to be bold and courageous. If you don't, learn.

Be ready and willing to work hard.

Not all opportunities will be visible. Seek them and be ambitious!

**Recently, you received a British Empire Medal in the Queen's New Year's Honours. What does this mean to you?**

Somebody somewhere was watching. I'm usually not speechless, but the call from the Cabinet House about my nomination left me totally gob smacked. It means a great deal for someone to think, "the work this person is doing is key." Not

only for now, but for the future. It's great to be honoured for what you love doing and want to share. It is confirmation that I am on the right track. It

motivates you to keep going.

**You were recently invited to the Cabinet Office to discuss increasing Honours nominations from the BAME sector.**

Whilst remaining humble and getting on with the work, we don't talk enough about what we do. To help bring awareness, I am in a video campaign for the Cabinet House where I speak about the need for more nominations for BAME leaders. I will continue to talk about it and bring awareness to how nominations can be increased for BAME. I've invited the Cabinet House teams to my academy to speak to the communities about how to nominate individuals they want to recognise.

**What's next for you?**

I will continue my work at AkomaAsa Performing Arts Academy providing training and progression opportunities for children and young people who want a career in dance and performing arts. The curriculum includes dance forms, songs and storytelling from African dance traditions, Caribbean dance forms, ballet, contemporary training with performance opportunities. The future goals for AkomaAsa are to develop collaborative projects, a youth performance company and an arts placements scheme with organisations within the sector.





# LEADING WITH PASSION

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**BY KATY NOAKES**  
[WWW.MOVEMA.CO.UK](http://WWW.MOVEMA.CO.UK)



Katy Noakes, South West Programmer for Dance of the African Diaspora, speaks with Trailblazers Champion Ithalia Forel about her experience during the 2016-17 fellowship, applying new skills to her work in Liverpool and what leadership means in the context of her practice.

**Your Trailblazers Fellowship supported the creation of new work for your company Movema and the development of your leadership skills. How do you feel your leadership style and concerns have moved on since the programme? Have there been any key learnings and impacts?**



**"IF PASSION IS  
THE INSPIRATION  
ANYTHING THAT  
FOLLOWS CAN  
ONLY BE  
FRUITFUL."**

Photo credit: Foteini Christofilopoulou

My Trailblazers experience was definitely a learning curve. The fellowship coincided with massive changes in my work and personal life. Suddenly there was a challenge: "How do I take this opportunity forward and make the best of it?"

Our organisation lost a big contract due to funding cuts and had to change our main venue, which led us to review how things would be managed and financially supported. Dealing with those things in addition to a bereavement really challenged me - balancing being truthful to what I could do and living up to the expectations of the artists I had on board.

**Did you have to let go of some things to be able to effectively manage the other aspects?**

Looking back, I thought, "Wow, we made it. We produced something", but there were some big things I didn't have the chance to do, like applying for the additional funds which are essential for a quality experience, so that was a

massive challenge. I forfeited applying for Arts Council funding but then I got a commission from Southbank Centre, so there were great things happening, but I was in a chaotic 'let's deal with all these different things' mode whilst trying to engage with an artistic process.

**The move into creating professional work as part of your Trailblazers experience was a change of focus for you. How do you navigate between your approach to this and your ongoing education practice?**

During the fellowship process something shifted. It was about my desire to really say something and change perceptions through art. That's something I do with the education work, but I wanted to do it on a professional performance level. However, I realise now I was overly optimistic about doing it on a shoestring budget and needed more time to engage with the creative process before I put the call out for artists.

Usually, I have a moment to focus on the message of my work. Instead I ended up juggling the creative process with the call out, marketing and engaging in a collaboration with the artists. Collaborations, in the true sense, can be one of the toughest things to do. I went in with a vision and leading the process, which isn't collaborative. Because of this there were frustrations for both the artists and myself. Being clear from the outset is the most essential part - what happens at the end is a surprise.

There is a power in knowing someone; building relationships need time as well. Our company has been working together for eight years, so we understand and know how to support each other. Leading and collaborating with artists you've never worked with before - bringing them together geographically, with different views, different approaches and different understandings - needs time.

To deliver on a collaborative process there must be time to make sure everyone's voice is heard, and I found that somewhat challenging. The opportunity to perform at The Place and Southbank Centre, to work with Alesandra Seutin and an incredible drummer: that was all amazing. The pressure did make the dancers feel they weren't always valued as professional artists - and that was my responsibility. I felt like I was not always myself throughout the process.

**Did it help you transfer some of those skills back into your teaching practice and the work you do throughout the year?**

Our company is very supportive of each other. There was crossover with how my co-director and

I work in terms of the collaborative process that helped me to understand things. We're not always creating performance work and the Trailblazers Fellowship made me realize that we really want that element within Movema, but we need to be realistic about our resources and priorities.

**Can you tell us about your current education focus? How is the current climate around arts in the curriculum affecting your business planning and how you can engage with students? Have you found any new opportunities?**

The education system is forever changing priorities. Even though we're a micro organisation, it is great that we are still part of key city groups like the Liverpool City Education partnership. That allows us to see how we link in with plans going forward and how we keep arts and culture a vital part of education.

We focus on primary schools at the moment, and being part of the city's Primary School Network has been vital. It helps us see what we do as relevant to the curriculum. Teachers still want what we have to offer. Also, remembering that teachers are not our only clients, we are shifting more into digital work to expand our reach and to make the work accessible online. For example, we partnered with a successful YouTube channel to launch a series of six programmes expanding our reach beyond teachers to parents and carers.

In terms of children's developmental needs, we know that parents and carers will select the right content for their children. We focus on different cultures - the world in relation to children and how they connect to it, which links to the child development path. We are currently finalising the



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digital contract and hope to have the resources live by September. Additionally, we have a partnership with a centre for digital development in Liverpool as part of a recent application to Arts Council England.

**Leadership can mean many different things to different people. Can you describe your leadership style in three words?**

I can describe leadership in just one word: "passion"! That's what creates the attraction for others. There are many types of leaders that people follow for different reasons, but I think it ultimately comes down to their passion. The learning curve I experienced during my fellowship helped me navigate the challenges whilst allowing the passion to bloom!

I want to encourage others to do something that's meaningful to them. Because if that's the starting point, anything that follows can only be fruitful.

**Where do you see leadership that inspires you?**

There are many leaders that I read about and take part in their message or approach, but what really inspires me is young people. They're the leaders of tomorrow and why I'm so passionate about the programmes Movema runs. When young people are given the opportunity to express themselves or be 'the star of the class', the leader in them grows. This inspires me.

We've just finished working on a Children in Need programme, teaching Indian and Chinese dance with pupil premium schools, linked to the Terracotta Warrior exhibition, Holi Festival and Chinese New Year. To see the change over an eight-week programme was incredible. At the end of the event, everyone was engaged by moving together. Parents who had just expected to be watching their children, were moving alongside them. We created a safe environment for everyone to dance. It was a special experience.





# REVIEWS

3



# NARRATIVES IN BLACK BRITISH DANCE: EMBODIED PRACTICES

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**EDIT BY ADESOLA AKINLEYE**  
**REVIEW BY FUNMI ADEWOLE**  
[NARRATIVESINDANCE.COM](http://NARRATIVESINDANCE.COM)

Though accessible to a general audience, Adesola Akinleye has produced a multi-layered book which is of academic importance. I can only discuss a few reasons why I make this statement here. One reason is the theoretical framework that Akinleye has devised for the presentation of these narratives. Akinleye does not cast Black British dance as an artistic genre but a discursive genre. Her main methodology is a narrative inquiry. The analytical focus is placed on the lived experience of the individuals and what dance means to them. Akinleye writes, "Black British dance refers more to a community of people that are created from the experience of toiling and negotiating the impact of a label, rather than a label that summarizes a community" (p.21). The sixteen articles in the book appear in three sections: 'Paradigms', 'Processes', and 'Products' with each section providing a different lens through which we can look at Black British dance.

'Paradigms' is about the negotiation of dominant Euro-American discourses by writers and the knowledge they produce. Namron, the first Black dancer to be employed by a major contemporary dance company, calls his article "I don't do Black-dance, I am a Black dancer." Other articles address a range of issues which include the "burden of representation" felt by dance artists due to the label "Black dance" (Adair and Burt), the "in-between" spaces that dance artists of colour tend to occupy in the British dance industry (Uzor), how the ideology of "primitivism" shaped attitudes to Black bodies in classical ballet (Bourne) and the challenge of decolonising the language of creative process in the dance studio (Akinleye and Kindred).

'Processes' seeks to draw analytical attention to the creative processes used by Black dance



© Foteini Christophilopoulou



Narratives in Black British Dance Book Cover

artists, whilst alerting the reader to the danger of thinking that all Black artists working with specific forms approach them from the same perspective. For example, dance artists interested in African dance forms are often thought of as searching for a lost past, and those interested in street dance as protesting their marginalization in the urban space (p. 80). Included is an article by Thea Barnes about *The Trails of Ado* (1987) by Kokuma performing arts company; another by Chikukwango Cuxima-Zwa concerning his contemporary artistic practice which combines symbolic ritual and body painting; and by Sandra Golding about her somatic practice based on African holistic dance. Hopal Romans writes on how the idea of “home” features in her personal development as a dancer. Other topics covered include the continuity of spiritual practices in dancehall (Patten) and embodied Ethiopian culture in urban-contemporary choreography (Courtney).

‘Products’ is not about artworks, but the “products of resistance”, the practices and methods

which practitioners have forged to sustain work, but which have also contributed to the development of the industry. The emergence of the UK jazz scene between 1970-1980 (Carr) is one such product. Others include A’Keitha Carey’s Caribfunk technique, curriculum development (Glean and Lehan) and youth dance theatre as a route to professional dance (Romans, Akinleye, and Joseph). Other themes emerge indicating possibilities for further research.

Forewords by Thomas DeFrantz, Peter Badejo and Anita Gonzalez help situate this book in a global context and make the point that “Black dance” manifests similarities and differences in aesthetics, economics and politics depending on geographical location. Though African American scholars have debunked the notion that Black dance is or should be considered a single genre, a British scholar argues this approach in relation to the British context. The book could be looked at as reclaiming the term “Black dance” from its co-option during 1990s into funding policies, which produced confusion. Now it produces narratives.



# THE HEAD WRAP DIARIES: PERFORMANCE REVIEW

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BY KARINE GOUDOUT  
UCHENNADANCE.COM

*Review based on the performance that occurred on Tuesday 20 March at The Albany Theatre.*

*The Head Wrap Diaries*, choreographed by Vicky Igbokwe and beautifully performed by three talented artists of Uchenna Dance Company, is a dance work that draws on African/Afro-Caribbean history and culture to question dominant beauty standards and portrays what it is to be a woman across time and place. The production explores African/Afro-Caribbean heritage, and how a woman's hairstyle can be a true testament to her style and personality!

To set the tone of the piece, with its central theme of hair, the audience is placed at the scene of the hair salon, BE U Tiful, and embarks on a hair journey from childhood through to elder generations. The powerful dance theatre work depicts the different hair journeys of the female characters: reminiscing back to childhood memories of getting their hair done by the matriarchs of the family, to issues of identity and how wearing their hair could - and would - affect ideals and social status, to the rebellious teenage stage where self-assurance starts to blossom, and how they grow into having a stronger sense of their identity - of who they are - and finally choosing to wear their hair in any style or form they see fit as they step into a confident state of adult (woman)hood.

As an audience member you feel you are part of this journey rather than a bystander as the performers engage you directly; inviting the audience to experience being in the hair salon





**"FEMALE  
EMPOWERMENT  
— CONFIDENCE,  
ATTITUDE  
& STRENGTH"**

Photo credits © Foteini Christophiloulou

and encouraging you to learn and understand their histories. You will find yourself laughing out loud at the sass and attitude these characters are not afraid to show.

*The Head Wrap Diaries* exerts female empowerment; three performers on stage who represent confidence, attitude and strength; not only through unapologetic imagery of their own roots but in the extensive dance vocabulary displayed on stage. The piece displays dance forms of the African Diaspora with African contemporary dance fused with waacking, vogue and house as well as highlighting more traditional/historical African dance practices. With such a strong representation of heritage, culture, gender and promotion of positive body imagery, you cannot help but feel uplifted and joyous when watching this performance, especially as the three different narratives, though different in eras, are a necessary educational experience for those less familiar with African/Afro-Diaspora/Afro-Caribbean values.

*The Head Wrap Diaries* should be added to any "girls night out" and would be wildly enjoyed by mothers, sisters, grandmothers and best friends as it is a truly uplifting show. This dance theatre work not only hones in on experiences of African/African Diasporic women, but also highlights how sharing these stories and recognising the particular issues in these communities are important. This is a work that deserves to be congratulated and celebrated in its entirety, and the talent of choreographer Vicky Igbokwe, creative collaborators, and performers Shanelle Clemenson, Sheila Attah, and Emmanuella Idris must be recognised.

A group of dancers in patterned dresses performing on a stage. The stage is lit with several spotlights, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The dancers are in various poses, some with arms raised. The background is dark, and the spotlights create a strong contrast.

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