A Reader produced for the ADAD Heritage Project 2007
Editors: 'Funmi Adewole, Dick Matchett, Colin Prescod

Voicing Black Dance

The British Experience 1930s – 1990s

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A Reader produced for the ADAD Heritage Project 2007

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Photo: Gail Parmel by Chris Smart

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Introduction

ADAD Director and Chair

Jeanette Bain and Carolene Hinds

The story of the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD) is a story of survival. The articles and interviews in this Reader demonstrate that the British context poses unique challenges to the expression of the aesthetics and themes emerging from dance artists within the Diaspora. This collection is by no means exhaustive but has managed to capture some of the 'Moments' of Black Dance in Britain. It is our hope that it will inspire others to commit pen to paper and tell their story. It gives an insight into the lives of those artists who dared, against all odds, to dance within an environment that offered very little support. It is about the perseverance, power of conviction and positive attitudes of people determined to share their cultural heritage and to make a real contribution to the British dance sector. This article gives a short history of ADAD's activities and a glimpse of the organisation's future plans.

In 1994, Marie McCluskey convened a group of artists who were concerned that their work was being under-represented and misunderstood. Since this time, ADAD has worked for over 13 years to move dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) from the margins to the mainstream of the British dance sector. The organisation was artist led by a steering committee with a part-time coordinator. Over the years, the part-time role has been held by June Gamble, Deborah Baddoo and Debbie Thomas (and later by 'Funmi Adewole and Pamela Zigomo).

In the first few years, this forward-thinking group of artists discussed the needs of the sector and created development opportunities through professional workshops led by both local and international artists including Bill T. Jones, Koffi Koko, Urban Bush Women, Peter Badejo and Jonzi D. ADAD has also hosted lectures and other educational events to raise the level of debate around DAD, and mounted choreographic platforms to showcase the work of DAD artists.

These platforms provided performance opportunities for then emerging artists including Irven Lewis, Kwesi Johnson and Francis Angol. As the strategic focus of the organisation evolved, honing in on support and advocacy, the original remit to produce choreographic platforms was handed over to Deborah Baddoo,

who developed this side of the work through her own company, State of Emergency. ADAD's structure continued to evolve further with Sheron Wray taking the helm as the first Chair of the Steering Committee in 2000, followed by 'Funmi Adewole who served as Chair briefly before being appointed as ADAD's first programme manager. Debbie Thomas also served as Chair of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee members, coordinators, managers and other supporters have made significant investments in the advancement of ADAD's mission at great personal cost.

In 2003, ADAD formed a strategic alliance with Dance UK. This alliance has strengthened ADAD's infrastructure and given Dance UK an opportunity to extend its reach to the wide range of artists practicing dance of the African Diaspora in Britain. It was shortly after the alliance was formed that Pamela Zigomo became ADAD's first full-time Programme Manager, at the same time that 'Funmi Adewole resumed her position as Chair of the Steering Committee. With the support of Sarah Gorton as part-time administrator, Pam continued to develop ADAD's vision through a diverse range of programmes, including the historic exhibition 'Black Dance in Britain: 1930s – 1990s, Moments', which was the centrepiece of ADAD's Heritage Project.

The Heritage Project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and was also accompanied by a series of educational forums, master classes and oral history evenings. The exhibition has been an undeniable success. Having aimed to be seen by 1,000 people, when it was launched in October 2006 at the Theatre Museum in London, it has been made accessible to over 40,000 people to date and continues to be in demand from new venues. This project did not come about without significant challenges as has been highlighted by 'Funmi Adewole, in this publication, in her commentary on the obstacles to producing the exhibition.

ADAD now has its first Director, Jeanette Bain, who will be carving new pathways alongside Dora Jejey as Communications Officer. The Steering Committee is now led by Carolene Hinds.

One of ADAD's most important tools has been the quarterly newsletter, Hotfoot, which offers listings, articles and other relevant information to the Black dance community. Hotfoot has been through several incarnations, first as a paper newsletter, then a glossy magazine. Most recently, Hotfoot was transformed into a web-based magazine, edited by Jeannette Brookes (2004-2007). The magazine continues to be a catalyst for debate around issues concerning DAD artists in Britain.

The gaps, incoherencies and absences with regard to accounts of the experiences of DAD artists in Britain, demonstrate the need for the work of ADAD to continue. Through the exhibition project it has become clear that an appreciation of the depth and richness of our heritage creates a foundation for artists within the Diaspora to build on, in the present and the future. Drawing encouragement from this, and looking towards the future, ADAD will continue to support and encourage the development of DAD-related heritage projects, and the archiving of current work for future generations.

Another significant ADAD achievement has been the establishment of Trailblazers, an annual fellowship programme for dance artists working with DAD forms. Through administering these fellowships over the years, ADAD has made focused investments in the work of 22 artists. Past Trailblazers have included Bawren Tavaziva, who went on to be a Place Prize finalist in 2004; Jean Abreu, who was also invited to take part in the Place Prize commission and received the Jerwood Award; and Adesola Akinleye, who went on to receive a Bonnie Bird Choreographic Award in 2006.

In addition to the fellowship programme, professional development opportunities have been provided for hundreds of artists through forums, master classes, lectures and oral history events, featuring outstanding UK and international artists including Peter Badejo, Greta Mendez, Carol Straker, Germaine Acogny and Othella Dallas. These programmes have provided examples of how we can give artists access to the encouragement, guidance and practical support needed to realise their artistic vision.

ADAD is committed to developing further opportunities for Continuing Professional Development, giving artists the freedom to invest in and enrich their creative process. We recognise that our communities of practitioners will be stronger and have greater impact if networks are developed to provide mutual support. As a result, we see sharing information and creating forums for creative exchange as priorities. We particularly value initiatives in which established dance artists can invest in mentoring and encouraging emerging artists. ADAD will continue to encourage this kind of investment by facilitating mentoring relationships.

ADAD seeks to support and promote a diverse range of artists practicing an array of dance forms within varied contexts. The diasporic African community in Britain is a whole, made up of seemingly disparate parts – some arriving as economic migrants from the African continent; others via the Caribbean through post-war migration; and most recently, those seeking asylum from war and civil unrest. Examined closely, this community reveals itself as many communities, each with its own rich and deep expressions of cultural identity.

It is this closer examination that ADAD advocates, as it is only with this insight that the value of dance of the African Diaspora can be truly appreciated. True diversity is enhanced, not only by cultural integration, but also through preserving positive features of difference and fostering pride in these features. It is absolutely essential that policy-making and funding bodies recognize the value of the work of this diversity of artists and that they support and nurture these artistic potentials. ADAD's aim is for dance of the African Diaspora to be visible and valued at the centre of dance activity in the UK. We now work towards a time when these expressions of British life, which have survived but remain hidden or undervalued, will be given the opportunity to flourish.

ADAD is conscious that DAD artists work within a complex socio-political framework and, as a support organisation, we seek to ensure that artists are equipped to surmount the obstacles they face, whether this means creating access to education and training or confronting cultural prejudice. Our recent achievements give us hope that the next phase of ADAD's journey will see the organisation consolidating our foundational work and partnerships; securing further financial investment; pioneering new initiatives; extending the scope of the work in the UK and forging deeper international connections. If ADAD's story thus far has been one of just surviving, we now look towards a time when dance of the African Diaspora in Britain will thrive.

Raising the Level:
The ADAD Heritage Project

by 'Funmi Adewole

I recently spent a day as a guest lecturer at a dance conservatory in London. I was asked to teach a class in African Dance and to deliver a lecture on the history of Black dance. Before beginning, to get an idea of where to pitch my lecture, I asked the students if they knew anything about Black dance. They said 'yes'. I asked them to tell me. Several students volunteered their knowledge. They started with Pearl Primus and went on to Katherine Dunham; spoke about Alvin Ailey, Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Urban Bush Women and Bill T. Jones. 'Great!' I thought, and asked them how they got to know all of this. They had been taught by an Asian lecturer. 'Great!' I thought again. The Black dance history of America is of interest to all communities. I was very impressed that the students had been exposed to this material. However, when I went on to ask if they knew any British Black companies – Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble? No. Kokuma? No. Badejo Arts? No. Irie! Dance Theatre? No. I even asked them about Bode Lawal who is still making and touring work. They had not heard of him. My task for the day was clearly defined. This is the context in which this collection of interviews and articles has emerged.

This Reader 'Voicing Black Dance: The British Experience – 1930s to 1990s' is part of a larger project: The ADAD Heritage Project. It was launched in 2006 with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England. The project aims were – to increase the opportunities for learning about the evolution of Black dance in Britain, to create opportunities for younger and older generations of dancers and audiences to interact with each other and to promote the importance of Black dance to the British public as a whole. The centre piece of the project was a photographic exhibition, which started out at the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden, London and then moved to the Peepul Centre in Leicester.

ADAD also organised a programme of educational events to complement the exhibition. During these events we looked more closely at specific themes within the extremely wide field that is Black dance. 'Celebrating Katherine Dunham' was a weekend which included classes led by Othella Dallas, a former dancer with the Dunham Company and her mentee, Dunham-trained dancer Michaela Leslie-Rule. The African Dance Day included talks with Jackie Guy

and Peter Badejo and classes with Judith Palmer and Mona Daniels. Black Dance in Musical Theatre was a day-long event including talks and film on dancer and choreographer Buddy Bradley, led by Stephen Bourne. It also included a chat show with Omar Okai the choreographer of the show Five Guys Named Mo. During this period we also had master classes with Senegalese Contemporary African choreographer, Germaine Acogny, and a Caribbean Dance Day, which featured a performance organised by Sheba Montserrat.

Within one month of the exhibition's opening, the ADAD website received 11,388 hits. A number of student groups visited the exhibition and their feedback was that they were amazed at the number of dance companies that had come and gone. Successes notwithstanding, the ADAD Heritage Project is much smaller and therefore less complete than we would have liked. This Reader also has many gaps and omissions. Due to constraints, we have been unable to publish all the material we have, or research many of the leads we found. The article 'Omissions and Mentions' seeks to address this situation somewhat.

This article discusses briefly some of the issues which arose in producing this project, which ADAD, as an advocate of Black dance, hopes will be useful to others with the same interests and concerns.

Definitions and Labels

One of the first issues which arose was the use of the term 'Black dance'. Some people were uneasy with the term. We were aware, even while using this term, that definitions and labels are a sensitive subject in the sector. Between 1993 and 2003, it was a key issue of debate as reports commissioned by the Arts Council during this era will show. In planning the exhibition we tried to avoid using the terms 'Black dance' or 'African People's Dance'. A number of names were suggested for the project which avoided the term such as 'Capturing the Continuum' and 'Finding Paths'. The public relations people and some of the dancers asked, thought that such names were too oblique. 'Black dance', though controversial, did the job. The ADAD Heritage Project was attempting to provide an overview of activities and events and it was one of the only terms that could be used in this context. It would be clear to most people who read the publicity that the project would be about Black people or dance practices that reflected Caribbean or African culture. Furthermore, the term had a history of use which spoke of the context the project hoped to articulate and visualise: that of British funding and artistic exchange between Britain, Africa, the Caribbean and America. The Educational programme which accompanied the exhibition sought to address any imbalances created by the use of this term by focusing on specific dance forms and practices of individual artists.

Challenges of the Heritage project:
The staff capacity of ADAD was a major challenge as we sought to plan and execute the project. The organisation struggled with one full-time staff member Pamela Zigomo and one part-time member, Sarah Gorton. Besides the efforts of ADAD's staff and a small number of freelancers, the project was carried out mainly by volunteers. As it stands, The ADAD Heritage Project took over three years of planning, £70,000, and one full year of implementation. A bigger event would have required the collaboration of more organisations, to contribute to the research and development for the project. It is ADAD's hope that this project will be a catalyst for further initiatives to unearth and showcase the hidden history of Black dance in the British context.

Another challenge that ADAD faced was related to the disillusionment of many artists in the sector. Some of the dance artists approached for photographs and information were completely disengaged. The ADAD manager, Pamela Zigomo, sent letters, phoned and even visited certain individuals. People were angry with a system which for so long had neglected and overlooked their work and sacrifices. ADAD was often seen to be part of 'the system'. Others were unsure they wanted to be part of the project. Some did not want to be associated with the idea of 'Black dance'. They saw it as a form of 'ghettoisation', which brought back painful memories.

In addition to this, ADAD was faced with the rude-awakening to the fact that some mainstream organisations just had not documented the work of Black artists. An exception to this was London Contemporary Dance Theatre, which has an excellent archive. However, Pamela Zigomo reported that archives, which should have at least had the photos of well-funded companies such as the Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, did not. This situation raises questions about which projects require the support of cultural diversity policies. It is mostly the staged performances and visual representation which are monitored by government agencies to ensure that ethnic minority groups are being included within Britain's cultural life. However processes such as archiving, that are outside the view of the public, are just as important to informing an integrated society. It would be helpful if government policies ensured that these 'unseen' processes are also inclusive.

Archiving and Black Britain
The importance of archiving to the inclusion of Black people in British cultural life cannot be overemphasised. Despite having a long, rich history, there are currently very few traces of past Black cultural activities that could serve as starting points for students and researchers. The fact that the students

mentioned in my introduction to this article were attending a dance conservatory in London and knew everything about Black dance in America and nothing about developments in Britain where they lived is telling. It is telling that they could recount seventy years of African American dance history and not even ten years of Black British history. It explains why each generation of Black British artists re-invents the wheel, looking for the African, Caribbean or new Black British aesthetic, from scratch. It explains to a degree why promoters ignore and do not support the development of Black British dance artists because they compare them to bigger better models from abroad.

The work of Black British dance artists should have a place within the British cultural and educational system. This, of course, would not negate the need to travel, research and train elsewhere but it would enable aesthetics which speak of a British experience to emerge, to be placed alongside similar practices that are performed internationally. Many Black organisations have struggled to develop initiatives in education and archiving because it is isolating, hidden work, which is often unattractive to funders. Support is required from the wider cultural sector and managers are needed who understand what it takes to confront a history of invisibility.

At the end of the class one of the students, a young Black man, approached me. He told me he had been thinking about what kind of work he would make when he graduated and wanted to know what I thought about his plans. He had found in Alvin Ailey the kind of aesthetic he wished to perform and he wanted advice on how he could make his way to America.

Black Dance In England:

The Pathway Here

by Hilary Carty

Hilary Carty is currently (2007) the Director of the Cultural Leadership Programme, an initiative to promote excellence in management and leadership within the cultural sector. Hilary has worked in numerous leadership and management roles including serving as Director of Dance at Arts Council England and General Manager for Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble. From the perspectives of both artist/choreographer in the 80s and policy-maker from the mid 90s, she experienced at first hand the highs and lows of Black dance in England.

Looking across Europe, Britain is fortunate in having one of the most diverse portfolios of artists consistently funded. The diversity of dance forms spans from the traditional to the contemporary with every nuance at the margins of both. Even with the decline in the number of companies witnessed in the last couple of decades, the range is notable. That diversity is undoubtedly to be celebrated – it also presents us with a challenge – that of definition.

Today's artists defy strict categorisations and, as we look at the many hybrid upon hybrid forms created in the diverse cultural environment that Britain has become, it is worth starting this discussion by exploring the rather unwieldy and unspecific term 'Black dance' itself.

Black Dance or African Dance?

'Black' is essentially a political term used in the United States during the civil rights movement to positively affirm the history and culture of African Americans. In the British context, however, the phrase 'Black', whilst being used to identify African descendents, was extended to identify and affirm a positive affiliation with people who have a history of colonisation and oppression by the British – hence it being used to include Asian communities and even the Irish in some instances. With such a loose coalition of meanings, it becomes difficult to comfortably use the word 'Black' in artistic terms – it is subjective and very much open to interpretation.

Within the arts sector, there has been serious debate on titles for over 30 years – many conferences and articles have tried to dissect every nuance without comprehensive success. I will not spend a lot of time on that here, but suffice to say that language is a living entity which develops as communities develop – there is little 'right or wrong' in a living language; terms that appear apt within one decade become tainted and discarded in the next.

This discussion of Black dance will focus around dance that has its roots in African cultural idioms, whether it be dance that is traditional, classical, contemporary, modern, modernist, new or hybrid development from that base culture. In the UK, when we use the term 'African' dance, there is often a connotation that we are talking about traditional dance – such as that performed by Adzido, for instance. But it is important to remember that, just as we can talk about classical ballet, neo-classical ballet and contemporary ballet, then we can equally use that range of terms for other types of dance such as African or South Asian dance forms. No living culture is static.

It is equally important in this artistic context to ensure that we are talking about more than a geographical entity… for any dance form to have longevity it must be capable of being codified through a language or vocabulary of movement that conforms to a known aesthetic – and it is in this sense that I use the term African dance. Whilst there is, as yet, little codified technique, there is a clear genre of movements that are common across African dance forms and lead us to the basics of African dance technique: grounded earth bound movements, a flexed or relaxed foot, bent knees and bent elbows, curved spine, rotating hips and a loose torso ready to flex both sideways and back. These are some of the key characteristics that define the African dance genre. We can look at Adzido with its classical/traditional style or Caribbean dance where Africa met Europe, where the interplay of cultures created both the Dinkie Minnie and the Jamaican Quadrille. Furthermore, when we look at some of the British exponents that trace a line directly from Africa (Badejo Arts) or via the Caribbean (Irie! Dance Theatre), we can see that there is still enough aesthetic vocabulary to trace it to the kernel of African dance forms.

The Trail Blazers

Perhaps some of the most significant developments in Black dance came after the war, with the creation of **Les Ballets Négres** in 1946. This group of dancers created works which drew upon an African/Caribbean heritage and began with a sellout 8 week season – a feat within itself. Les Ballets Négres could not get funding though and survived only on box-office receipts. Hence, despite tremendous popularity here and across Europe, it folded in 1952.

The 50s saw the building of the British Ballet repertoire. By the end of the 60s contemporary dance had gained a firm foothold in England, but it was not until the 70s that things began to move again here in terms of Black dance. The early 70s saw the arrival of some African dance pioneers of in the UK via the group **Sankofa** from Ghana. Following a very successful British tour many of the artists stayed here and became cultural ambassadors, travelling the length and breadth of the country and teaching the Ghanaian dance repertory. Soon there were dance troupes sprouting up all over the country – mainly doing Ghanaian dance forms.

It is hard now to imagine the explosion of groups that were around in the 1980s – it was a truly exciting time – over 20 groups of great popularity: **Ekome, Kokuma, Irie!, Lanzel, Kizzie, Dagarti, Delado, Dance de l'Afrique, Phoenix, Dance Co 7, Badejo Arts…** The range of work spanned from the traditional to the experimental – from the fundamentals to several different fusions of the contemporary.

Ekome was perhaps the most successful, touring to sell-out concerts in venues such as the Leicester Haymarket and Derby Playhouse. Based in Bristol, Ekome's repertoire consisted mainly of traditional Ghanaian dances taught by artists such as George Dzikunu (founder and former Artistic Director of Adzido). As a dancer trained in contemporary and ballet techniques, I had never seen anything like Ekome and it fairly blew my mind! It was amazing to see dancers Barry and Angie Anderson on the stage performing with such authority and style. And the fact that they were doing traditional African dance was a really powerful signal – a positive affirmation of identity.

Other groups producing traditional African dance included **Lanzel** (Wolverhampton), **Dance de l'Afrique** (Birmingham), **Dagarti Arts** (London) and **Delado** (Liverpool). To appreciate the scale and impact of these groups, it is worth noting that they all had work – some in mainstream theatres and arts centres whilst other groups performed in smaller scale community venues and festivals – but there was no shortage of groups from which to choose.

Contemporary Legacies

But doing traditional African dance was not enough – Germaine Acogny, a key exponent of contemporary African dance from Senegal, summed it up as follows: 'African dance comes from the villages of Africa – but there is now the Africa of cities, of skyscrapers. I hope the dance of the villages will always exist, but we cannot preserve dance purely as a museum culture. It must grow. If it does not develop it will die, and we will have nothing. What will our generation leave to our grandchildren?'

In Leicester the **Grassroots Dance Company,** started in 1974, was one of the earliest groups embracing a Caribbean aesthetic. It sought to give a voice to young Black dancers to express their own creativity.

MAAS Movers was started in London in 1977 by a group of trained contemporary dancers who were seeking to blend African/Caribbean dance with their contemporary dance training.

In London in 1978 **Dance Company 7** was formed when Carl Campbell sought to use Caribbean dance as a means of expressing his creativity and reaching out to young Black children growing up in London's inner cities.

In Birmingham a group of artists were seeking to use the traditional African dance vocabulary as a base technique but to move on to include something of the contemporary British Black experience. Having revelled in the culture of Africa, artists began to question what their generation of young people could contribute themselves? **Kokuma** emerged in Birmingham in 1978.

By 1981, **Phoenix** was formed in Leeds by three young men who used the social dances from the streets of Harehills – funk, reggae and jazz – to combine with a very athletic contemporary dance, which took the country by storm.

Corinne Bougaard established **Union Dance** in 1983 with a deliberate aim to embrace a broad multi-cultural approach to dance, hence its title.

Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble began in 1984, embracing a rounded production format. Whilst Ekome stunned audiences with its renditions of traditional works, Adzido sought to mould the traditional dances around a theme or poetry, creating a more epic style with a company of over 30 dancers and musicians.

Irie! Dance Theatre began in 1986 – arising out of the Caribbean Focus year-long celebration of the arts of the Caribbean. From the outset, Artistic Director Beverley Glean sought to work with young artists and use a fusion of the dances from the Caribbean with elements of popular Black culture to have relevance to London's Black youth. So works like Caribbean Suite and Reggae ina yu Jegge placed Merenge and Quadrille alongside popular reggae tunes.

The Midlands was incredibly strong in terms of Black dance, with a critical mass of groups and key individuals living there – not surprising, therefore, that it was in the Midlands where the **Black Dance Development Trust** was formed, under the Directorship of Bob Ramdhanie, a key activist in the field. One of the highlights

of the calendar from the mid to late 80s was its Black Dance Summer School – the first taking place in Leicester in 1985. The Summer Schools were amazing – tutors from Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria and Jamaica working in intensive classes teaching technique, choreography, history and social context. The debates were heated and went on well into the night, as we were taught how to trace the origins of contemporary movement styles and Caribbean dance styles to their African roots.

As we moved into the 1990s, yet more contemporary-facing groups emerged, such as **RJC** in 1991 and Sheron Wray's **JazzXchange** in 1992. **Bunty Matthias** had a huge impact on London in the mid 1990s selling out the Queen Elizabeth Hall and more latterly, projects such as **Nubian Steps** and the **Hip Festival** have given a voice to young Black choreographers. Artists such as **Jonzi D** and **Kompany Malakhi** are currently using hip hop and other street dances to ignite audiences across the Country, whilst the **London Dance House** is seeking to establish a base for artists and companies.

Current Questions – Future Moves

If we look at the current state of Black dance we see a very mixed picture. There are artists developing new works, which are creative, exciting and accessible, but the overall picture is not one of great health. Time for Change by Hermin McIntosh (commissioned by the Arts Council in 1999) highlighted a key issue as being the lack of infrastructure – the infrastructure for Black dance remains weak and the picture is much the same across the spectrum of Black arts.

To begin to understand how we could have got here from such great times in the 1980s, one might perhaps look back at how Black arts have been supported. In the 70s and early 80s, much of the funding came through social rather than artistic sources – when Adzido began in 1984, it was under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission. Kokuma was supported by the probation service and the majority of groups received small pockets of funding from Local Authority Social Services and Education budgets rather than Artistic ones. Hence, it was not felt essential to apply high artistic judgments to the work and groups were not required to stretch their creativity or artistic competitiveness in this 'community/outreach' context.

It took time for the arts community to embrace the arts of other cultures from an aesthetic, rather than social/community development, perspective and this more inclusive approach clashed rather dynamically with a decline in resources.

The early 1990s brought about a time of recession – cuts in funding for the arts became commonplace and hard decisions had to be made about where and what to support. Quite naturally, the artistic criteria became paramount and, also naturally considering the recent history, a number of groups were found lacking. Peter Badejo OBE summed it up in his paper **What is Black Dance** in 1993:

"Within ten years half the companies in existence, performing African peoples' dance forms, have collapsed – there was no solid foundation for them to exist on. When funding decisions were based on non-aesthetic criteria, there were numerous companies, but they were denied artistic respect. When artistic considerations become the criteria – the base funding was removed and the structure collapsed."

The Arts Council acknowledged the gap in the infrastructure for Black arts. In previous years it pushed to reach a target spend of 4% for Black arts – a figure quickly achieved and consistently surpassed by its Dance Department. More recently the Arts Capital Programme provided no less than £29m to support culturally diverse projects across the country. The impact of this will be seen over the coming decade. But key to the success of future development is continuing the partnership, developed after Time for Change, with artists and activists to address the issues of development from multiple angles – covering aesthetics, creativity and artform development; presentation and touring; advocacy; strategic development; infrastructural development and training and education.

It is important to use the energies of today's creative individuals to match and stimulate the broad-based initiatives that will make a difference in the presentation, funding and structural development of Black dance in the future.

Reprint Courtesy of ADAD | September 2003

Omissions and Mentions

by ‘Funmi Adewole

This Reader contains only a fraction of the articles, interviews and commentary that it could. There are many additional people we could have interviewed and numerous themes we could have researched for this publication, had the resources been available. This article is constructed from fragments of information about people and events that deserve to be mentioned. It is published with the hope that it will stoke the curiosity of enthusiasts and researchers to find out more.

Initiatives and Forums

Over the years there have been a number of platforms and showcases which helped launch the careers of the present generation of choreographers – besides the ADAD platform, there was the **Black British Dance Platform** organised by Vicky Spooner and Loud Mouth Productions, **Nubian Steps** run by David Bryan and **Tilewa Platform** for contemporary African dance run by Badejo arts. The ‘Ancient Futures’ conference organised by Irie! Dance Theatre, which brought the companies **L’Acadaco** from the Caribbean and **Forces of Nature** from America to England is also one to remember.

Information on educational initiatives in the sector turned up in our searches. One of the most significant initiatives of the 1980s was the **Black Dance Development Trust**. It was run by Bob Ramdhanie from Birmingham. The organisation hosted summer schools and brought several international teachers of African and Caribbean dance to England. It also hosted jazz dance classes. Bob Ramdhanie was also instrumental in starting **Kokuma Dance Company** in the region. Recordings by Rufus Orisayomi show committed dancers, amazing energy and a sense that something groundbreaking was going on. The organisation was defunded in the early 1990s. Its closure triggered years of debate over the definition of the sector. Other organisations which have supported the sector are **Salongo, Kumba** and the **African-Caribbean Arts Forum**.

Vivien Freakley and Emilyn Claid both developed initiatives which raised the profiles of a number of contemporary trained Black dancers and allowed them access to mainstream infrastructure. Freakley was the drive behind the **Black Dance Choreographic Initiative,** which guided a group of choreographers in the West Midlands through a three year developmental project. This began

in 1996. Whilst serving as Artistic Director of **Extemporary Dance Company,** Emilyn Claid ran a scheme for Black dancers to perform and create work with the company. Hopal Romans and Sharon Donaldson were two of the beneficiaries.

A mainstream initiative which was important for the development of Black dance in Britain was the **Ballroom Blitz,** which was a two to three week festival of classes, performances, lectures and demonstrations at the Royal Festival Hall in London. It brought together dance teachers, choreographers and dance companies from diverse communities across Britain.

Artists and companies

Caribbean dance in Britain has benefited significantly from the contributions of **Carl Campbell** and the late **Elroy Josephs.** Elroy Josephs was a dancer with Les Ballets Nègres. He developed and taught a Caribbean dance technique and established a group in London called Workshop 7. He later moved to Liverpool, where he taught his technique at Liverpool John Moore's University for a number of years. He left his dance students in London to the care of **Carl Campbell**. Carl Campbell, an inspirational teacher, choreographer and performer, trained up the dancers to form Carl Campbell Dance Company 7. Campbell runs an informative website and has published a book marking the 25th anniversary of this company.

Peter Blackman was a strong advocate of African dance. He taught African drumming in the 1980s and started initiatives to combat racial stereotyping in schools. He supported dance companies like **Ekome,** which was an African dance company, founded by Barry Anderson and his sisters Angela and Lorna. It was hugely popular in the 1980s. The Andersons carried out research in Africa and created shows for British audiences. They also employed African artists such as George Dzikunu who later set up Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble. **Felix Cobson** created an arts centre outside London called **Akolowa,** which ran dance classes and other cultural activities. Other African dance companies that served as training grounds are **Digarti Arts**, **Lelado** and **Lanzel**.

'H' Patten has worked for over twenty years contributing to the development of both African and Caribbean dance practice in the UK. He was a principal dancer with Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble before he left to work as a freelance choreographer, performer and film maker, establishing his company **Koromanti Arts**. He presently teaches African dance at the University of Surrey. **Bode Lawal** is another practitioner whose experimental work with African dance forms, has raised the debate around African dance. His company **Sakoba Dance Theatre** is still touring.

Female contemporary dance artists, who were popular in the 1990s and would have been worth interviewing about their careers if time and space had allowed, are **Bunty Matthias, Cathy Lewis, Pamela Johnson, Thea Nerissa Barnes, Hopal Romans** and **Sharon Donaldson**.

Black Ballet

According to Dawn Lille Horwitz, the first Black ballet company that British audiences got to see was the American **New York Negro Ballet Company** in 1957. Her article in the book Dancing Many Drums, edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz (2002), describes the interest of the British press in all aspects of the production – the exotic costumes, agility of the dancers, the 'choreographic art' plus the meeting of 'African ancestry' and the 'European ballet tradition'. Though the company was a critical success, it suffered at the box office. The manager decided against the company performing in London or going to Europe and so, they returned to America. Horwitz suspects that this is because promoters did not feel audiences were ready to see an all-Black ballet company.

In the 1980s, however, Black British ballet dancers started coming into the limelight. They were celebrated for excelling in this field of dance. The English National Ballet, formally known as the London Festival Ballet, hosted **Noel Wallace** as its first Black male dancer. **Patrick Lewis** also performed with the company. **Brenda Edwards** was the first Black female dancer in the late 80s. Edwards has also performed with the Béjart Ballet, London Contemporary Dance Theatre and Martha Graham Dance Company. **Julie Felix** is another notable ballet dancer. She trained at the Rambert Ballet School in London and then went to America, where she performed, as principal dancer, with the Dance Theatre of Harlem from 1977 to 1987, performing some of George Balanchine's repertoire.

Other celebrated dancers are **Carol Straker, Mark Elie, Judy Phoenix**, **Malachi Spaulding, Brenda Garrett-Glassman, Evan Williams, Darren Panton**. **Ben Love** and **Denzil Bailey** performed with the City Ballet of London, formally the London City Ballet, and **Evan Williams** performed with the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Ben Love went on to create his own ballet company, Ballet Soul, while Mark Elie and Carol Straker established dance schools. Straker and Spaulding also started their own dance companies, which featured ballet and other dance forms. Black ballet companies have provided opportunities for Black dancers to perform. They have also allowed for exploration of 'Black' themes and experimentation with non-Western music.

Dance and the Media

Stewart Avon Arnold and **Claude Paul Henry** were amongst Britain's top

contemporary dancers in the 1980s and 1990s. They broke into television and had their own TV show, **Streets Ahead.** Under the management of Nick Grace Management Ltd., the duo, in collaboration with choreographer Anthony Van Laast, created what their publicity describes as 'a new concept in dance companies', **Souls in Motion**. The performance style of Souls in Motion cut across contemporary, jazz, tap, classical and African. It appealed to a wide range of audiences. Souls in Motion also toured theatres across Europe. Special guests on their shows included Wayne Sleep, Marian St Claire, Brenda Edwards, Union Dance Company, the classical pas de deux: Ursula Hageli and Richard Slaughter, Triple Threat, solo tap artist Nick Burge, The Urdang Academy of Ballet, The Performance Group and the authentic jazz company Zoots and Spangles. They also worked in schools and taught master classes for performers and mixed ability classes for primary and secondary school teachers.

Jazz in the 1980s

Though the discussion about dance tends to focus on activity in London, many places outside the capital also had strong social scenes of clubs and community groups, which served as breeding grounds for professional dancers. Birmingham, Leicester, Leeds, Bristol and Liverpool were five such places.

In terms of the promotion of jazz as an art form in Britain, Leicester was significant in the 1980s. Many well-known dancers started here, such **Melanie Josephs**, **Michael Joseph** (who went on to dance with Union Dance Company), **Sheron Wray**, **Lorraine Leblanc**, **Sonia Swaby** and **Carolene Hinds**. According to Melanie Josephs, teachers in Leicester included Will Gaines and tap dance teacher, Sidney Fern. Maurice Gilmour and Cherry Stephenson, who worked for Leicestershire County Council, were instrumental to the setting up of arts programmes for young people. The **Knighton Fields** dance initiative was funded by the County Council to run master classes. There was also another initiative called **Highfields Action Theatre**, which was 70 percent Black. One of the only Black teachers at the time was **Hilary Carty**. George Dzikunu from Adzido also came and taught master classes at Highfields, as did Barry Moncrieffe of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica. Outside London and Leicester there were strong club scenes and community dance settings in Leeds, Birmingham and Liverpool, producing dancers like **Robert Hylton** and **Kwesi Johnson** who went on to train formally.

London had an exciting mix of clubs and classes that produced dancers, some of whom stayed on the jazz circuit peforming and others who went into mainstream dance education. The latter group often returned, bringing audiences and performers from both contexts together. According to Ukachi Akalawu,

respected teachers were **Pierre Noël-Bright** (with his highly technical style of funky jazz, sprinkled with elements of ballet), **Michele Wallace**, **Ivor Meggido, Dolly Henry** and **Deidra Lovell** . The Holborn centre, Dance Works and Jubilee Hall were amongst the popular studios for open jazz dance classes. Debbie Thomas remembers **Molly Molloy**, **Charles Augins**, **Antony Van Laast**, **Paul Henry**, **Stuart Arnold**, **Arlene Phillips**, **Voyd (Yvonne Evans), Deidra Lovell** and **Pearl Jordan**. Popular clubs included Dingwalls and The Wag, where dancers improvised alongside musicians and there was a very competitive dance floor. **Irven Lewis** and **Brothers-in-Jazz**, as well as **IDJ (I Dance Jazz)** were dancers who featured here. The **Jiving Lindy Hoppers,** started by Terry Monaghan and Warren Heyes, was a major training ground for dancers interested in authentic jazz forms. Many of the authentic jazz companies in Britain today were started by dancers who once worked with The Jiving Lindy Hoppers.

Writing and documentation
Between 1993 to 2001, one of the major topics of discussion within the Black dance sector was that of definition: What is Black dance? What is African People's dance?

There are over sixty reports commissioned by the Arts Council on African People's dance and Black dance. Two of the most quoted are *Advancing Black dancing* by David Bryan and *Time for Change* by Hermin Macintosh, et al. Both reports broach this topic before exploring other issues in the sector. The *New Dance Magazine* edited by Ramsay Burt reported on Black dance in the 1980s, at a time when it was not recognised within the mainstream. Chisenhale Dance Space was one of the spaces outside the Black communities that welcomed African-based dance classes, street dance and research projects into non-western forms. Both *New Dance* and Chisenhale Dance Space were part of the 'alternative' dance infrastructure. Some writers within mainstream circles also wrote about 'Black dance', such as David Henshaw and Bill Harpe. There has been very little documentation within or about the sector, however, work has been carried out with a passion by individuals such as **Leon Robinson** of **Positive Steps,** who has a significant archive on Les Ballets Négres, and Susan Lancaster, who has documented the work of Elroy Jones. There have been useful and enlightening articles over the years published by *Dance Theatre Journal* and *Animated*. **A list of useful further reading can be found on the ADAD website.**

Visiting artists and companies
Due to the lack of formal training in non-Western forms available in Britain, dance companies and dance artists from abroad have been a focus for research and training for British performers interested in this genre.

Visiting companies and artists have also provided a space for dialogue, inspiration, solidarity and connection to homelands, both real and imagined. Some companies and artists toured their shows and went home, occasionally leaving behind members of their company, who would go on to teach their particular method of creating work or part of their repertoire.

American companies such as the **Katherine Dunham Company**, **The Dance Theatre of Harlem** and the **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre** have inspired generations of dance lovers. These companies presented sophisticated choreography and high levels of technical skill by Black performers. Black audiences and artists could identify with the themes of some of their pieces, which explored experiences of Black people. Also the choice of music and their use in some of their pieces of imagery, dynamics and stylistic signatures from social African American, African and Caribbean dance styles and performance traditions. According to Dick Matchett, London Contemporary Dance Theatre added Talley Beatty's *Road of the Phoebe Snow* and Alvin Ailey's *Hermit Songs* to their repertoire in the 1960s. Matchett thinks these were possibly the first pieces by Black choreographers to enter the repertoire of a major British company. London Contemporary Dance Theatre had employed **William Louther** from the Alvin Ailey company as a dancer. William Louther remained in Britain and continued to perform, collaborate and teach until his death in the 1990s.

On moving to England, Jamaican born **Berto Pasuka** joined with **Richard Riley** to form Les Ballets Nègres. With a line up of performers from Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, the company produced pieces which combined ballet with African and Caribbean dances. The company, which began in 1946, was an incredible success, though it lasted only five or six years, it is considered to be Britain's first Black company. The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica was another strong influence from the Caribbean on the development of dance in Britain, especially in providing a choreographic model, as documented in the book *Dance Jamaica Dance*. Founded by **Rex Nettleford** in the 1960s, the company developed a style of performance based on Graham technique and social and traditional forms of Caribbean dance. **Jackie Guy** was a principal dancer with the company before coming to Britain and brought the methods of choreography used in this company to his work with Kokuma. The company was also one of the research sites visited by **Beverley Glean** after her studies at the Laban Centre.

The national dance companies of Africa, through their international tours, made an impact in Europe. The dance companies of **Senegal**, **Les Ballets Africains de Guinée** and the **Ghana National Dance Ensemble** were especially celebrated.

Ghana produced several companies and dance artists that have influenced the development of African dance in Britain. Ghana's National Dance Ensemble toured large theatres such as the Bradford Alhambra in 1977. The contribution of Ghana to the theatrical presentation of African dances was unique, due to the cultural strategy introduced by Kwame Nkrumah, the president of Ghana. A committed Pan-Africanist, Nkrumah commissioned Professor Mamre Opoku and Professor Nketia to set up schools of dance and music. These were then to feed the Ghanaian National Dance Company. According to Ofotsu Adinku, in his book *African Dance Education in Ghana*, Opoku's contribution was to introduce 'traditional artistic features into new choreographic art'. **George Dzikunu,** who later set up Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, was a mentee of Mamre Opoku.

Arguably one of the strongest influences on the development of African dance in Britain was the show ***Ipi Tombi***. The show opened in Johannesburg in 1974, produced by Bertha Egnos and her daughter Gail Lakier, with choreography by Shelia Wartski. The company graced theatres in London's West End and toured Britain for at least eight years. According to the producer Ray Cooney in his programme notes for the show in 1977, *Ipi Tombi* was one of the top twenty musicals of the era, along with *My Fair Lady* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. After leaving the company, **Chief Dawethi**, who was part of the *Ipi Tombi* cast, joined Adzido Pan-African Dance Ensemble. These shows sometimes attracted protesters as they were produced by White producers during the apartheid regime in South Africa. When *Ipi Tombi* closed several dancers set up their own small companies, which performed up and down the country. There were also several other shows from South Africa that toured England in the 1970s that used traditional dance such as Kwazulu.

A major influence on the development of contemporary African dance in Britain is **Peter Badejo**. Badejo first performed in Britain at the *Lift* festival in the 1980s. He was a visiting artist for several years before settling in the country in the early 1990s and establishing **Badejo Arts**. Badejo became an advocate of African dance in Britain, wrote a number of pieces and taught at Liverpool Hope University. Badejo's performances drew on the structures of dance drama, traditional African dance forms and modern dance technique. Dancers such as **Gail Parmel (ACE Dance and Music)**, **Kwesi Johnson (Kompany Malakhi),** and **Francis Angol (Movement Angol)** passed through the company.

Badejo Arts' summer school, Bami Jo, ran for over a decade. It was instrumental in introducing British audiences to a wide range of teachers from Africa and the Diaspora. The summer school included week-long classes with international

tutors and ended with a seminar or talk. The school introduced the work of a variety of artists who worked with African and Caribbean dance in both traditional and experimental ways. They include **Zab Mbongo** from Congo and Canada, **Georges Momboye** from Ivory Coast and France, **Were Were Liking** from Cameroon and Ivory Coast, **L'Antoinette Stines** from Jamaica, and **Kofi Koko** from Benin and France. He also brought over artists from Cuba, Nigeria, and Madagascar. As a result of meeting these foreign practitioners, a number of British performers travelled abroad to carry out further research with them. Some of the summer school teachers, such as L'Antoinette Stines and Kofi Koko, also returned as collaborators with other companies.

Germaine Acogny is another artist who has inspired British dancers. Having developed a modern African dance technique, she held a number of classes in Britain in the 90s. She found an admirer in the late Chris Magingy who wrote on the sessions she gave at the Laban Centre in London for *Dance Theatre Journal*. Her technique is formed from a fusion of African dances within a framework derived from ballet and Graham technique. The technique focuses on the use of the spine and specificity of rhythm in African dance and its rigor set a standard for dancers in Britain. She inspired much discussion as to whether the way forward for African-based dance in the theatrical context was the development of dance techniques rather than the teaching of dance forms. It encouraged practitioners to start experimenting along these lines.

Conclusion

As this list of leads and incomplete investigations suggests, dance production, which relates to the globalised concept called 'Black dance', requires a great deal more attention. There have been a host of individuals and companies whose experiences and contributions remain 'unvoiced'. It is my hope that this article will provide a catalyst for further research and writing.

Photo: Badejo Arts
Dancer: Peter Badejo
Photographer: Eric Richmond

Reflections

MAAS Mover:

Interview with Greta Mendez

by Jeannette Brooks

Greta Mendez is a dancer, theatre director and producer. She performed with Scottish Ballet, MAAS Movers, The Royal Opera House and the late William Louther. She has directed for Talawa Theatre and Queenie Productions and has been involved in the Notting Hill Carnival, producing numerous bands and has been recognized as a winning masquerader.

Where are you from? What is your background?
Totally pure, unadulterated, undiluted Trinidadian! You know what Trinidadian means? To be a Trinidadian means: to be a person of the world, because all the world is in Trinidad; it is a very small island, many cultures infuse each other, though not in a very conscious way. We live side by side with each other, although we do have villages where certain groups predominate, such as 'Debe' where the majority of people are of Indian decent. When I was growing up in Fyzabad as I walked from the oilfield compound, which was then owned by British Petroleum, to the main street I walked past an African shop, to a Chinese shop, to a Syrian Shop, to an Indian shop, all with wide-open doors whose culture and energies spilt onto the street mixed, with the air and created a hybrid of a culture, which inevitably seeped into the very essence of ourselves.

So, when I came to England, it was very weird to have this separation of Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean and all of these things because we, the people of the Caribbean, are such a melange, a cacophony, a mixture of the world people; whose cultures reside in the Caribbean basin in a little cooking pot. Therefore, I would best describe myself as a callaloo, not the Jamaican callaloo, but the Trinidadian dish, which is a fusion of many ingredients including dasheen bush, coconut milk, okra, crab, onion, hot pepper – all of which, like the culture, go together to create one delicious and complex dish that cannot be dissected or separated. I come from that richness but when I came to England, suddenly I became, we became, one thing and that I think is a very bad thing as we are a very good model of how many cultures can live and grow together.

Where did you come to?
When I left the Caribbean I wanted to go to Russia. I was trying to do everything myself, which was rather stupid, as this was the 1970s and I did not have

the links necessary for me to get into Russia. So I went to Sweden for a while, as we had family friends there. In Sweden I did classical ballet and folk dances of the region but this did not fulfil my ambition, which, unfortunately, I have never been able to achieve. My ambition was to travel the world and live a minimum of 2 years in every country and learn the dance of that country, and by the time I was 40 years old, return to Trinidad and really be filled with knowledge in a unique way. That never happened! I did, and still do, feel passionate about world cultures but finances and circumstances dictated otherwise. Dance was and still is my first language. In Trinidad we learnt, Scottish, Irish and Morris dances. We tasted African and Indian dance. We learnt the waltz, the foxtrot and, of course, Samba, Rumba etc. But the world is much bigger than that in terms of dance language. Therefore I knew I had to travel abroad in order to learn more but I didn't really want to come to England, as most of our education at that time focused on England and its culture. I wanted and needed to experience other cultures.

While learning ballet in Sweden and Denmark, I didn't feel ballet was really my language; it wasn't really speaking my language or saying what I wanted to say. You know the whole attitude in ballet is really upper class, aristocratic, always seeming to be looking down your nose at people, so it didn't seem right for me. So I auditioned for The Place, London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) and got into that. I think, but don't quote me, it was 1972. I auditioned late in 1971 and began the three year training in 1972.

You did the undergraduate course?
Yeah.

And did you join MAAS Movers after that?
No I didn't. MAAS Movers wasn't even in anybody's mind at that point. I went and worked with several dance companies – which no longer exist – including Basic Space, Artistic Director Shelley Lee, and Cedars of Lebanon, with whom I did my first Edinburgh Fringe in a freezing cold church. I followed this by working for a year with the Junior Company at Scottish Ballet. This company went ahead of the big company to do outreach work, opening up the avenues for the big company. We did all the schools and small theatre venues and the smaller bits of work/choreography. Then I left that and came down to London and I was on my mission.

At that point I didn't have any kind of thing about Black dance, I just wanted to dance, baby, I didn't know what these definitions were about Black dance. I grew up dancing and that's all I'm basically still interested in – dancing and expressing myself through dance. So Black dance – I just didn't have that

consciousness. I just wanted to dance, because, at home, that is what we do: at home, we dance. We don't have this thing about … all of us are Black and all of us dance. We just do it. Here – England – it's a phenomenon to have a Black woman MP; at home that is not a phenomenon because you have grown up with Black woman MPs, your Prime Minster, Dr Eric Williams, and all the MPs are a combination of Black – African and Indian, Chinese, Syrian, etc. There is a great liberation in that. Is it Black dance because Black people are doing it? So, when you grow up in the Caribbean/Trinidad, especially after Independence, you have a global, all-embracing sensibility. You don't have the same sort of artistic freedom when you are in the colonizer's country.

My next move was just to go and dance, whatever, wherever. I was dreaming about going to two other sources of my culture, Africa and India, that was where my head was at. I never wanted to go to the States, although I was told one hundred and one times that I should go because I was technically good enough to get into a company. It wasn't what I really wanted to do. I think, in a way, without being very conscious, I did have that political sensibility, as still we lived in a situation where the dominant culture is what most people aspired to. Therefore it was either dance American style or dance British style and now dance Hip Hop, right? You find that most people are not saying: I want to learn the entire dance forms of India or Madagascar or Bali, etc. It is still the dances of the dominant cultures even in this age of 'globalisation'. It's the dance languages of the not very visible that I wanted to know more about – Yugoslavian dance, whatever, it didn't matter – I just wanted to learn more and find connections. Therefore, I didn't have that kind of Black dance aspiration. I was on my way to finding out about dance.

Then I came down to London and I think it was Evrol Puckrin who said to me that he and some other people were thinking of forming a dance group and would I come to a meeting that was happening at Kentish Town Weekend Arts College – Interchange it was called then. I was part of the genesis of it all, together with Ray Collins from Dance Theatre of Harlem, Jan Murray – journalist, Louis St Juste and Naseem Khan, Director of MAAS (Minority Arts Advisory Service) – hence the name of the company. There must have been other people there, but I cannot remember at this moment. There was a big need within the sector. There were companies who were doing purely African sensibility dance and people who were doing – and I have to put this very carefully – a watered-down kind of 'Caribbean' dance. I was brought up in the Caribbean and we were doing interesting and innovative work, but here it was narrowed down to the 'big skirts' and 'look at us we can be so exotic, we can be so beautiful, we can keep smiling and we do the entertainment dances at the end of party functions', right?

Hence, the reason I never did Caribbean dance. When people/work asked 'You do Caribbean dance, right?', I would say 'No' because I knew in my head that it was the exotic they wanted, so I passed on to those who did that style.

Back to the Movers. So, I thought 'Oh, great'. Because we did need, and we still need a Black dance company that speaks strongly of the issues that are affecting Black people today. We can be entertaining and I believe we must be entertaining. I believe we must spread our joy and our laughter, but we must also spread our pain and our angst. So, I felt very strongly that there was a need for a company that expressed situations from a Black perspective, so that's why I got involved in it. I thought I'd put my life on hold, my thing on hold, for two years and get this going and then I'll get on with my thing, whatever it was – God alone knows what – it didn't have a hold. I'm still like that when I'm creating, I'm never sure what it is, but I know there is something out there. I still believe that. So that's how I got involved in the company we named MAAS Movers.

Naseem Khan was instrumental in building up the structure of the company. MAAS had an office somewhere in Central London and they gave us essential administrative support.

Around what time was this?
In the late 70s, I think it was 1977.

And do you wish to speak about a specific time in the company's existence or of the company in general?
I was with MAAS Movers for two years as a dancer, choreographer and director. We were earmarked to receive revenue funding – because you know in this country, which is rightly so, you have to do two years before you are considered for revenue funding – so I did the two years, and then left it for them to continue. Unfortunately, which is a real pain in my soul, although I have got past the anger of it, getting MAAS Movers to where it was in terms of creating a unique choreographic and dance form, developing an audience, outreach work, potential funding and inspiring young dancers, meant a lot of hard work and a great deal of sacrifices. We were not paid for rehearsals, neither directing the company. We were able to secure funding on some choreographic projects. The performance fee, which was negligible, was equally paid out to all the dancers. One year after I left, MAAS Movers disbanded. Sacrifice, hard work, talent and potential was squandered, for us to be now like a footnote in people's writing. I find it sad and feel a sense of waste. It was two years of very, very, very good work and they could have had a company that would have achieved high standards. We had a fantastic track record. We were filling auditoriums.

The work was wanted and was needed and there was an audience there for it. MAAS Movers and Shades of Black packed out the Crucible and many other venues up and down the country. There was a need and we inspired many other dancers; because at that point, if you had looked at the statistics about the amount of young Black dancers going into the dance schools like LCDS, there were very few. MAAS Movers gave them a hope that when they finished full time training there would be a company that they would be able to join. Harehills and the original Phoenix Boys emerged after the Movers. There was a big change and I think the Movers played a major part as the catalyst of that change. Dance schools began admitting many more Black dancers as we proved that there was a market for work from the Black perspective, plus there was a company that would embrace their talent. But it went down the hill, which it shouldn't have done.

How long did it last in total?
Three years, mainly unfunded. Sometimes we got project funding which was for the choreographer and costumes. The dancers rehearsed for nothing. I have some receipts: here – we get into memorabilia. Here – twenty five quid after all those months of rehearsals and working after-hours and on Sundays.

So it ended after you left?
No, it lasted a few months after I left.

What led to its demise, in your opinion?
Well, darling, I would only be able to surmise. You should ask the people who were running it at that point in time. But, I think it happens all too often. You see something succeeding. You do not understand why it is succeeding but you want it. Most Artistic Directors' jobs are 24 hours, 24/7, paid. So, when you are trying to run a company while having to do work that would give you money to live, and then you have to fly across London for an afternoon rehearsal with six of the dancers, because the other six are at work. Then you have to stay back in the evening and rehearse with the next six dancers, because the other six have gone off to work, because they need to earn an income to live. Then on Sunday mornings you have full company rehearsals, usually at Battersea Arts Centre, which we had to clean before we started class and then rehearsals, as there was always a gig in the space on a Saturday night. Louis and I were very good at cleaning up. Whoever is running an un-subsidised company, which MAAS Movers was, that person would have to make considerable levels of sacrifice, the dancers paid jobs had to be accommodated, therefore the split schedules for rehearsal were tough. In those days it is what had to be done in order to achieve the performative standards necessary for a mainstream company. I suspect the

next person who sees the potential cherry and takes it on, does not realise the level of unpaid commitment needed; they have to give up part of their life and live cheap if they want this thing to work, as someone has to commit to running the programme, who is going to be doing the organising? I think that is part of it, the person who took over running the Movers did not realise how much personal sacrifice was needed in order for it to survive.

A simple but very important thing like eating was problematic in the late 70s and early 80s places where you can grab a healthy salad or sandwich did not exist. In those days I would finish teaching a 9am class at Middlesex University, they then did not have the bus out to the station which is half an hour's walk from the campus to the train station. As soon as I finished teaching I had to make a mad dash to the station. I could not sit down to eat, as missing the tube would run the risk of being late for rehearsal for the dancers who could only make the afternoon rehearsals. Louis was great at finding us rehearsal space all over the place – but to reach Brixton from Middlesex University, you haven't time to eat. You could not just grab a sandwich like nowadays. When they finished the afternoon rehearsals, we usually had to go to another space to rehearse the dancers who could only do the evenings. I think maybe whoever took it on did not realise, how much was involved.

Are there any 'stand out' moments for you in the long history?
Of MAAS Movers? The Crucible was one of them, because we packed it out. Every time I am looking at the snooker championships, which is at the Crucible, the snooker players always state that reaching the finals at the Crucible is one of the pinnacles of their career and how daunting it is. And I am thinking 'We filled it out! We filled that space!' The other place, and I think it was either Bristol or Leeds, I tend to forget and I have few programmes, but I think it was Leeds. We did the show, and my abiding memory is that after the show we went to a community hall for a party. One of things I remember, when I was training in dance, was being amazed at how many dancers are not natural dancers. They would go to a party and they would be doing fouettés, pirouettes, etc, but not just dancing and celebrating their bodies in space; they did not appear to have their own movement vocabulary, you know, when you party it is a whole different kind of thing. At this party this guy walked in, a Black guy, he had on a top hat, tails and a cane and he jazzed. And that was one of the most beautiful, powerful…to see him in space and his whole ownership of his dance and his self, and his sense of... oh! For me that was my best memory of being with MAAS Movers, experiencing in this community hall, people who can really dance, whose bodies celebrated dance. It transformed the dull community centre into a magical space. I never knew his name, but I can see him now.

Another abiding memory – which is a very interesting one, as it is about muscle memory. We were performing at Warwick University. I had a severe groin injury, which was also inflamed and I was in stacks of physical pain. I was on stage doing a pas de deux with Stewart Arnold and I blacked out, but I did not collapse. My body, the muscle memory, the choreography in muscles continued to dance although my mind was not engaged. Stewart realised and gave me the support needed while waiting for me to collapse, but I came around before that happened. That is another interesting memory. The same thing happens for awhile after you have died, the body still moves.

I really enjoyed most of my time with Scottish Ballet Moveable workshop, especially when Peter Darrell – the erstwhile Artistic Director of Scottish Ballet – choreographed us. He brought out the best in us. He used to give out chocolates during rehearsal breaks. He used to say 'Chocee time'. I think I might have been even the first Black dancer to work for Scottish Ballet – I never actually checked! It might even be ground-breaking.

Going back to MAAS Movers, how would you describe the artistic output of the company? What kinds of dance forms were used?
Oh, darling, again we are back to that callaloo thing. We had Evrol Puckerin whose choreography drew mainly from his Trinidadian perspective of Shango and folk tradition forms. Ray Collins, who did, I think, a kind of Alvin Ailey-esque thing called Woman and Journey. Then there was Mikloth Bond – I don't know where he is at the moment – but he drew very strongly on his contemporary training. One of the works I choreographed for our opening show at The Oval House failed as a group work, I later reworked it as a solo, which was loved by both audience and critics. My choreography drew on my natural callaloo, diversity and complex movement style; which is a combination of Africa, India and Europe, I do not separate out things, so I would easily switch from the flat foot – the flat foot for me is one of the most poetic – to the pointed foot. I use my hips strongly, but at the same time I have a cross between a classical and a contemporary training, so anything I do is a symbiosis of all of those things. With this range and diversity the Movers never did anything in purely one style. We were just trying to find a way of expressing what we felt.

We had an American choreographer come across and did this mad, mad piece at Riverside Studios. And then we worked with the divine, absolutely profound genius choreographer William Louther. The work was Peace Be Still. It was a very profound piece looking at the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, gospel – singing and clapping – and the gradual peeling away into a state of stillness and silence, which Malcolm X began to advocate prior to his

assassination. Every time we did Peace be Still, I found something else in the work. I learnt a lot from William Louther, as well in terms of choreography. He worked very much to people's strengths. If there was a dancer who could only get their legs at 35 degrees but had stunning arms, he would make their legs close in and use the top body. So everyone just looked brilliant in his work and he worked to people's strengths. Do you know William Louther?

No.

That is where I think ADAD's work is so vital, because this history is just not getting passed on. William Louther was very pivotal in terms of the Graham Company. He came here and was one of the founders of London Contemporary Dance Theatre in this country. He came before Namron. Namron is a very good dancer, but Louther was profound. When you saw him dance, every core in your body, every corpuscle in your body, would pulsate…he was a cheetah, he was a lion, he was a saint when he danced. He was just amazing and you should know about him as a young Black dancer. He revived my faith in dance. I came to this country and after a year and a half at London Contemporary – I hate to tell you – I did not want to dance, because this obsession with self in the mirror, everybody just so myopic, I just didn't want to do it anymore. But when I experienced William Louther dancing…that's when I regained my desire for dance: and passion was set alight when I experienced Alvin Ailey Dance Company at Sadler's Wells in the 70s. Dance is not about being a dancer. It's about the whole being. It's not about standing up and looking bloody pretty, it's about expressing something so profound that we cannot put words on it. It's about reaching, communicating, about touching, tasting, smelling people. It's like really good food and how you eat it. It is not just about how you look and the aesthetic lines. As much as I bitch about aesthetic lines – I am a stickler for technique – it must not override whatever it is that we are trying to communicate but technique is important. I just love dance as a whole. But unfortunately I got ill.

Anyway, William Louther, ADAD should have him in the history project as an artist of dance, you should know about William. So go and find out about him.

You can imagine, we are complex people, and trying to find a unique style is not easy. When I came to this country I was actually quite amazed that people looked at Martha Graham and contemporary dance, and did not realise that this whole thing is rooted in Black culture, baby, it's Black and Eastern. Contemporary dance starts on the floor, the use of the pelvis, the use of the floor – it's Black. Eurocentric dance, White dance, did not do that before, they were always trying to get off the floor, pointing their feet and much held pelvis and torso, prior to Graham.

Remember Graham was in New York, which is a reservoir of cultures. She mixed with people like Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus and Beryl McBernie. Graham, like all the great musicians, astutely tapped into all those cultures including the Japanese and Eastern cultures. When I walked into LCSD and saw a class, I thought, 'but this is so Black', the way you use the pelvis, all the movements emanate from there, the use of the floor, etc. Now everyone is using their bodies, which includes their pelvis, in a much more fluid way – it's because of Blackness. It's us who did it, but because Graham took it into another dimension, somehow Black dance is not acknowledged as a vital ingredient in Contemporary dance. Music from Elvis to The Beatles to the current music, has acknowledged its indebtedness to Black music. Dance does not sit outside of the influences of life, so why don't we embrace the wonderful and diverse cultures that make up dance as we all know it today. As Black dancers, we need to reclaim our role in the evolution of mainstream dance. I am also very sure MAAS Movers had a role to play in the re-evolution in dance. MAAS Movers were playing to full capacity audiences in the first year of Dance Umbrella 1970.

In terms of the company, what kinds of themes, what kind of music was used?
Music! Woman and Journey, a work mainly for women all dressed in white, choreographed by Ray Collins, was in the style of Alvin Ailey, recorded blues music. Save Me, choreographed by Pat Banton, used Joan Armatrading and dancer Vivien Smelly – now Rochester. In my own work, In Limbo, I used a solo drummer – Selwyn Baptiste. The work was a dialogue between the drum and the dancer, a conversation between them. My other piece, The Chair and Me, which was my first piece of work, was done to the music of the creaking chair as it responded to my movement, my breath, silence, the shifts of the audience. In this work I took away all the usual external music influences. I think as a dancer, if you take the music off, you should still be able to dance. It is not about being 1,2,3,4; the music is in your body and you are an instrument in it, so therefore the music can disappear and that's ok.

Cathy Lewis choreographed a piece looking at Billie Holiday, looking at the extraordinary life of Billie Holiday and the men in her life; of course the music was Billie Holiday singing. What was fabulous about this work is that she explored the many facets of Holiday, and used three women to play these different aspects. Then they had this mad piece that came from an American choreographer; it was so mental I couldn't even tell you what it was about, and we all had trays on our head, painted faces, bits of objects all over our bodies and all sorts of madness. I can't remember much more than that.

You haven't asked me about NIN Dance Company. NIN Dance Company was

Directed by Michael Quaintance, who is American, and me. This was after MAAS Movers. Our work explored themes such as sexual violence, betrayal, drug abuse, sexuality, and of course moments of pure joy. Lloyd Newson's – Director of DV8 – work was dealing with such themes. Michael's work was very much dealing with human relationships. It was very grown-up work dealing with what happens between a man and a woman. Not the pretty aspect of it at all, it was all those deep things that when the doors close, what happens; all the brutality in relationships. The pieces were really, really hard to do. At that point we got limited support from Greater London Arts and Lloyd was also having a problem getting funding for his work because they thought that they were not the kind of themes that dance should explore, you know; dance was only meant to do pretty work. So, they found the darker aspect of that work too challenging. The music we used: from a Japanese score to Brian Eno, to the poems of T.S. Elliot and Linton Kwesi Johnson. One of my favourite pieces at that time was Racks or Mingus 1, this was choreographed by Michael who was a child of the Black power movement. He was six foot tall and angry. The work was for four women. It was fast, furious and unforgiving. It was wonderful to let the body rip, to explore space and human encounter, with the speed and depth of Mingus. Michael's work did not make any compromises to us being women and smaller than him. This was great. It fully extended us. One piece I did had specially commissioned music by Jon Kellior. That was with NIN.

NIN also performed in Wormwood Scrubs Prison, Hackney Mental Health Ward, Stratchon Mental Institution and Holloway Women's Prison. All of this work was interesting. Mainly, the response and outcomes were positive. I have many strong memories of working in these institutions. Our work was also profiled on television. Due to illness, I had to leave NIN Dance Company. This is when my body started to break down, from doing too much work, not eating, nobody to take care of me – you know I don't have any family here – so, I get up in the morning, have a cup of coffee and then you would be running all over London like a mental patient; working and then running to rehearsals and then running somewhere else to rehearse somewhere else, that's how we used to do it in those days. We didn't have nice rehearsal rooms and we didn't have much money. Rehearsal space was kindly given to us when available at varied times – two hours in one space, then another two hours somewhere else, maybe in Clapham, then from there to somewhere like Shoreditch. You don't have time in the middle of that to sit down and eat. It takes its toll eventually.

NIN's work I will remember a lot more, because I think it tapped into experiences that I had not explored. My specific work, my choreography with NIN, was very different from Michael's. I got this really fantastic review, it's really super! I called

this piece Only a Memory and it's in this laundrette. This woman is looking at her washing and she remembers her days in the Caribbean, washing by the river and then, we have this character, this folk character which I love, she is called 'la diablesse', she was played by a classical ballet dancer with one pointe shoe and the other bare foot. La diablesse is pretty on the outside but really has this bad on the inside, with one cloven foot. The work morphed Caribbean folk and Classical Ballet. The review said 'why does Mendez keep hankering back to the Caribbean? When she tries more contemporary work, her work is much better than this Caribbean hankering'! Now there are companies getting much acclaim who are working with those dynamics such as Ron K Brown who was recently part of HIP. At that time it appeared they wanted us to forget our Caribbean selves. They said 'Mendez and this Caribbean stuff' – and I just thought, piss on you all, I am a Caribbean woman and I am going to do things that talk about my experience. I grew up in the Caribbean. It was interesting, I laughed. We didn't have very good reviews, because Michael's work was very dark. Lloyd Newson eventually broke through and became DV8, so if NIN had lasted I guess we would now be hitting the same kind of work. But it was really hard. It wasn't easy for Lloyd either, he had to work hard and push at it for the funders, because they were thinking, 'oh my god, he is so macabre'. Michael Clark emerged onto the dance world at that time. All of that work was bubbling and we were part of that, Michael and me. Kenneth MacMillan was also addressing these themes. People used to be saying, they can't do this kind of thing in dance, and now there is no theme too dark for dance to explore.

How long did NIN last?
I don't know, I was ill, maybe two years, and then I just got very ill, physically. They thought I was getting Multiple Sclerosis. My body just collapsed and I couldn't move. I was advised that I shouldn't dance at all. We won't even go into that period, because the one thing I grew up with, my first language and only language was dance, taken away from me as I was sucked into the bottom of a black hole. I took a long time to get onto my legs. I then worked in theatre for a long while as a movement director, working with actors is challenging and rewarding but also limiting, as they do not have the extensive movement vocabulary of a dancer. I eventually decided I just needed to perform, because my performance life ended long before it should have. So I put my body back on stage, the legs can no longer go above 90%, the body is no longer 6 stones, but my body dances with a knowing voice.

When did you go back to dancing?
I did my first one-woman show in 2003, the years go by so fast, at Riverside Studios, Albany Stages and Jazz Café. I had a real psychological problem with

putting my outsize body on a stage. When I was a dancer, I always said, dancing is not about size, it is about what the body can manifest. It's about manifestation, it's about transformation, it's about communicating with an audience, it's about all of those. It has nothing to do with size, pointed feet, those lines; and I feel that very strongly. But in a way, I do not feel this is my body; this is a body that – who knows whose body it is. I eventually had to say, you know, it's fine, so it's big, and I cannot move the way I used to move, but I can still move, still articulate, still express. So put the fatness on the stage, put the rolly jobilies on the stage, and it went down very well. So back on!

You mentioned some other companies like DV8 – what other companies were working at the time?
You have Kokuma I remember very strongly. You had Shades of Black. You had Carl Campbell. You had Barry Johnson and his sisters. The divine Phoenix Boys were on the cusp of emergence. Those four guys...I was at a conference when they came on – those guys could dance, man. I can remember that conference. I can see the room. I have no idea what the conference was about, don't ask me, it was something to do with dance, but I remember when those guys launched, with little fragments of costume, ragged, that kind of thing, and you went 'Whoooa!' That was in Leeds. Those people can dance! I love when I see people that can dance and have something to say. They weren't just pretty people on the stage, the original Phoenix guys were phenomenal. Whenever I had nothing to do, I would go and see them, because it wasn't just seeing them, it was a wonderful experience. It was really their language.

Then there was Extemporary Dance Company, which was fabulous. Corrine Bougaard and Stella Mae, fabulous Barbadian dancer, worked with them. She kept her hair cut down to display the sculptured shape of her head. Corrine's Union Dance started just after NIN actually, not before. Irie! came in after. I even think Dance Company Number 7 started after MAAS Movers. And then there was a fantastic dancer, who was at Rambert, Keith Hodiak, a powerful Black dancer.

So, all of those dancers were very pivotal at that point in time. The ground-breakers never get the benefits of being there, but they opened the doors for the others. And Keith was one of those from Ballet Rambert. He teaches at Pineapple now. Namron. Cathy Lewis – she was the first Black female with the new London Contemporary Dance Theatre. After that of course they got Anita Griffin. I can't remember much more at the moment.

The thing is when you are creating you tend not to be sharply focused on other people's work as you are also performing or in rehearsals and rushing. It is only

when you stop that you can actually know what is going on. You miss so many things when you are actually rehearsing and performing.

Midlands Dance Company, Janet Smith and dancers, Mantis Dancers were all on the dance scene at that time.

Do you know what the former members of both NIN and MAAS Movers have gone on to do?
Michael is in Chicago doing very well with young people who were angry like him, which is great. He is an actor occasionally. He is very good, because he was an angry young man and a child of the Black Power movement. He was a child of passion and change … that's why I liked working with him. He had absorbed the passions of that time, he had a need for dancing, which is why I liked his work. He is at the University of Chicago and I think he is about to do his PhD, but he is very good at working with kids in gangs and getting them out of gangs. He has a way of being able to relate to them.

Vivien Rochester went on to acting. When William Louther – the deceased, he is now no longer physically on this earth – came to London, Vivian went back in to dancing a bit with him. She is also a drama teacher at a university, so she stayed within the sector. Then you have Gary Hurst, deceased. Stewart-Arnold and the sublime Paul Henry still dance.

CODA – Greta
Listen, I need to pick your brains before you go. This is to do with my piece, but I am not very good with words. It is very ironic, because here it is, you have a race of people, a group of people who come from a culture of street, of how to use street and how to use open space – because we did do our dances under the tree, we did do our dances at funerals, and we did do our dances at parties. So we are people well accustomed to creating our dance for different spaces and open spaces. Yet somehow now we seem totally incapable of doing it. When we choreograph it, we still choreograph it from a cross-arch perspective. So we are not taking our space; we think cross-arch, and we are doing it totally en face. There is not that multi-dimensional aspect to it where it doesn't matter if you are looking at it from the top or looking at it from the side; it is pure and it fills the space. We have lost that carnival. When most people go down the street for carnival, they think it is an army! But if you look at the Brazilians, they know how to use that space, man, they know how to use that street! And it's a different format from the cross-arch. It's very important how something seems to have happened on the trans-Atlantic journey. We seem unable to celebrate that circular nature of our lives.

The journey is still continuing:

Interview with Carol Straker

by Jeannette Brooks
October 2005

Carol Straker trained at the Legat School of Russian Ballet and the Urdang Academy and performed with MAAS Movers Dance Company in the UK, before launching an international career including performing with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and the Martha Graham Ensemble. She returned to England and established the Carol Straker Dance Company. Carol Straker Dance Foundation, set up in 1987, also consists of a Dance School, Education Outreach Unit and the Constellation Change Screen Dance Festival.

When, how and why was the Carol Straker Dance Foundation started?
Basically it got started because, when I came from America, I didn't think that it was right that all these dancers were leaving England to go and dance abroad because there weren't that many Black dancers in companies in this country. Although there were a lot of them training in different dance colleges, they didn't have a company that was embracing them as dancers in general. It didn't have to be a Black company, but there just weren't many companies that were taking any Black dancers at that point in time – I think London Contemporary had one or something like that – therefore you had a lot of dancers leaving to go to Europe into major dance companies – people like Patrick Lewis, Michael Noble and Noel Wallace; there were a lot of different dancers leaving.

The dance company was officially launched on 18 September 1988, but we registered the Foundation as a company in 1987 and, in that year, we did a lot of the paperwork and also started the dance school classes, in September. We did the autumn term with the school, getting that up and running and then in 1988 the company launched in September at the Hackney Empire. So we had about a year's lead into it.

Who were the other founding members?
There's Andrea Whiting; Alexandra Lamptey; there was Kevin Atkins, but he has passed away; there was Mark Elie; Chia-lan O'Grady; Karen Croal and Alison Charles. But some of these girls have now got married, so they have changed their names! There was also a friend of mine called Shell Benjamin, who was American, who flew over to dance in the opening performance with us.

What are the outstanding moments for you, in the history?
With the company in general – you really see the growth of a company, and it's difficult because we went through a lot of different stages. There was one stage in particular, when we had a piece called The Acid Test, that was ballet to acid music and it took us nearly a year to learn because it was really fast, but it was a real ballet as well. It was a bit like seeing ballerinas coming off conveyor belts, but also taking steps and twisting them up and doing these things that people thought might be harder than normal – like, instead of doing piqué turns going forwards, we would do them in reverse going backwards. Technical things, but because it was to acid music, we kind of used all the raps within it, so we had one girl doing fouettées on the right, one doing them on the left and one girl in the centre who kept on changing feet and they would all end up waving at each other: Hello, Hello. So that was quite a fun piece, but it was also deadly serious because it was The Acid Test, but we had to do it as a bit of a joke. At the end, we all did pirouette turns, tick, because you think you've passed it, when you finish it with three or four turns each. That was an amazing piece, with these Black women, really strong and a strong sense of poetry; it had poetry and we used to dance a lot to poetry, and music that had words in it. That was a beautiful piece.

Then we had piece by Adesola Akinleye and Allan Hutson to Billie Holiday's music and she dedicated that to a guy that got shot in South Africa, that was called Some Of Us Are Strong, And Some Of Us Are Brave. That piece was also a gorgeous piece to watch. I think all the things about the company were kind of mystical, just fun, good, and things that God wanted to happen. Adesola was trained here in this country and when we did our launch performance it was filmed for Breaking the Mould – a BBC television programme – Eye to Eye series. They went back to America to film Dance Theatre of Harlem and she happened to be there. So she spoke on that side of the world and then she ended up coming back to this side of the world to dance with us. So we had all these different connections made through people who heard about us, or people who wanted to come and dance with us, or people who were scared to come and dance with us, but did it anyway! So, it was like a journey and the journey is still continuing.

It's hard to pick one particular thing – we performed at the London Palladium –

but really I am not very into accolades, you know; we went to Barbados and toured around, so it's difficult to say what was the best part.

At one point we had children in the studio. That was new, as the dancers started having babies. I had my first child when I was in the company. So maybe it sticks out in my mind that we had children in the dance studio, and the children wanted to dance a little bit, or they were always watching us. At one point, dancers didn't have children and I think maybe that was a significant point when the dance world was beginning to change, in a good way. It's good that a lot of dancers now have their own children – watch out the next generation!

There were lots of good things that happened. We used to have these sessions called The Last Dance of Choreographers – Black teachers and Black dancers in the studio. It was always joyful, hard and inspiring – used to be really funny. We used to get a dance teacher in from whatever style: ballet, jazz, contemporary, tap and everyone used to go onto high alert trying to do every dance step put before them. It was dance diva's having fun! But it wasn't about competition; it was just being able to dance free, without us having to feel that anybody was looking or thinking you can't do this, or why can't you do that, or who or which so-and-so trained you? I used to just dance at the back trying not to laugh, because it was so nice to see teachers giving steps and style and the dancers going at them! So I used to find that was really sharing the gift of dance.

When it was my turn to teach, I thought most of technique was fun most of the time. Carol, what is that step you are giving us now? I don't know; it's not that hard! I always, most of the time, just enjoyed dancing, even if it was a bit painful, because I have always thought it was a lesson. I mean, you go to ballet and you don't want to be completely bored; you should learn something. Dance is one of those places where you can speak into someone's soul and shake them, and say, have you heard this, or did you see that wonderful bird or that awful thing that just happened? You can take people on journeys, with them just sitting in their chair. You can touch them and if you do it well you can touch them quite deeply, even if it is not in that very second or two minutes after they have got up, but it might be a couple of years afterwards.

How would you describe the artistic output of the company? What kind of dance forms were used, what themes explored, what were the interests of the choreographers and the stories told?
I used to have this concept that, because we danced to a lot of Black music, we had 'handprints' in different dance music styles and therefore we could dance anything we wanted to. If we wanted to do African style we could;

or if we wanted to do ballet, jazz. Although a lot of us were trained in ballet techniques, it was any dance language to execute the words, or the movement, or the thoughts that the choreographer wanted to put in place. It wasn't as if we were holding ballet as in a hierarchy of dance forms, it was just a means of expressing something and if we wanted to say something through the movement, then ballet was just something we could use as one of the steps. Making it clear, I think that's what we were really into.

As I said there was Some Of Us Are Strong, And Some Of Us Are Brave, the Acid Test, and there was The Day After The Day After. That was choreographed by Leslie Bryant (Les Child), which was really technical, fast and very strong. You had to have a lot of technique to do that, also quite a lot of tension and suppleness at the same time, so that was a bit of a challenge. Then we had Dream States which was Thea Barnes' piece; Anansi, Turtle and Pigeon which was a West Indian folk tale; Songs of Motherland which was another major piece we did, talking about all continents and all people's struggles. We did touch on a wide range of things, and all the dance styles got muddled up together to tell the story or to show the image of what we wanted to do.

What other companies, especially pertaining to Black dance, were working around the time when you formed the company?
When we formed the company there were quite a few dance companies around. Some of them are still going. There's Bunty Matthias' company, Union Dance, Sheron Wray's JazzXchange and Irie!, still going. Kokuma were still performing, but they stopped soon after that, and that was also because a lot of funding came out of place with companies. There were also a lot of solo dancers as well; quite a lot of dancers had their own companies or were doing a lot of solo performances. I remember talking to dancer/choreographer Lewis Johnson in America and he said that Black American dance companies went through that as well, when all of them had their own companies. It's not fighting exactly, but it is just a kind of place that companies have to be at where everyone is searching to find what is best to do and expressing their own viewpoint of how to do it.

Adzido was also around. There were quite a few African based dance companies, especially when I got back to the country, around 1985, because at that point in time they had just discovered African dancing, so they thought that every Black person in this country wanted to do African dancing. In a way, I think that people got forced into doing African dancing because all the funding was towards African dancing and they didn't recognise anything much outside of that for Black dancers. They were doing their categories or boxes;

so it was like, you have to do African dancing because we can't do it really! We have ballet and jazz and contemporary. So they felt like they had certain dance styles under their belt and they didn't want people to come in and dominate them or even have their own companies in those particular styles.

Whenever I have to go and talk to anyone about Black dance, I always say that you have to realise that the majority of Black dancers went out of this country. They danced with Houston Ballet, Béjart Dance Company, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Alvin Ailey, Ballet Gulbenkian, Poland Ballet Company, Danish Ballet Companies; and they danced with major dance companies. They didn't go out of the country to dance with nobody. So you had this level of dancer, but they kept saying they hadn't found any Black dancers who can do ballet or who are trained. There were dancers training at the Royal Ballet, but they never wanted to have any of them in their company; they would send them up to Scotland or something. There was one guy, Vincent, I can't remember his surname, but when I was training he was at the Royal and he was really a good dancer, but he went up to Scottish Ballet and he veered off into different places. Brenda Glassman, she was trained at the Royal Ballet and then went to Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH); Julie Felix trained here at Rambert and Michael Moor both went on to dance at DTH, Richard Majewski, Van Jean Charles, Michelle Ballentyne, Bruce Evans, Emmanuel Obeya and Edsel Scott, so you had all these dancers who just were exiled to dance with other people some place else! They couldn't really associate themselves with England.

I thought that wasn't really very good, because we were trained by a lot of these dance companies. Some did come back to dance with White dance companies as well as Black, and some of them got confined to dancing purely with Black dance companies. I think that the Arts Council and people like that helped to dominate and disturb Black dance in this country, because it was never allowed to just excel and have the best dancers go to the top. And, like all things, that needs to happen sometimes, especially in an art form like this. I always say, Lindford Christie is a better runner than I am, so you are going to pick him to run for England, rather than me. You have to pick the best in a way, so people can see, I'm going to excel, I'm going to try and do it like that, I'm going to try and get it to that level. You might not get to that level, but you still have something to aim for. Believe you me, whoever is supposed to be the person sitting on top, they are not going to be horrible – they can't be – because they have to help everybody else get to that next level. We can't do it by ourselves, we have to do it together. So it's that thought pattern. And people wonder sometimes, oh but why can't I?; me, me - not you. Maybe it's because sometimes you're not as nice as you think you are! You have to stick at it, Be yourself and you have to be very nice.

Yes, you can shout and scream, but you still have to be able to deliver and be good. And if they say I can't do it, I'm not going to stop somebody else from doing it. So you have to be very careful with the politics of it all, but also be quite strong in your belief about what you can and can't do.

What do you think made the work of the company popular with audiences?
I think one would be the music, because people could relate to the music. Also, because we always tried to make the dance balance with what the music was trying to portray. What we used to find with the dances, was that when we finished, people might just be silent; they'd be stunned and then they'd start clapping! Because people didn't quite know how to take us at first, because it was just so different, and they didn't expect to see a Black, English dance company perform at such a high level.

So it was the music, and it was the themes we used to do. We tried to always pick a balanced programme, because you knew that the dancers could do all different styles, so we tried to balance it. And sometimes it was difficult because if we had choreographers who came in they might all want all their pieces to be the big finale! I found it myself when I choreographed. I would sometimes need to put balancing pieces in it.

I did the Anansi, Turtle and Pigeon and that was to calypso music. It was a comedy ballet, a kind of pantomime ballet, and used to have this character called the Pig. At the end of the story, she gets tricked by this turtle who sings calypso to get out of trouble. The Pig wasn't just a big woman – actually, it was a man playing the part, first Mark Elie did it and then Allan Hutson later – but she used to have this food everywhere, with onions in her bosoms and everything! She was really made up of food. Always got food in her bag. I think people could relate to that, because it was things that they knew, or that they could see in their own life. If you had a piece that was very touching, especially in the Black pieces, people knew about certain stories that people had told, or things that had happened, and I think it touched them more because it related to them more. We have always been more into those truthful things that are happening and going on. All ballet is about fairy tales, which are fine, but now there are modern day fairy tales or modern day tales which have to be told, and I think it is just to do with culture, what different cultures have to experience. So when they bring it to the table to serve, then if it is something you know, or you know its origin, you might be more interested in tasting it, or it might just be better for you because you like it, or because you know the history it came from.

So I think people could relate to us a little bit more, or maybe people were more

inquisitive to find out more about what this particular choreographer was trying to get at. I'm not saying it was like a history lesson – that makes it sound boring! – but it had things that people could relate to; we involved carnival into the dances, and different things. In the Turtle piece, the pigeons were on pointe, because pigeons have this turned-in way of walking, but no one said they couldn't do it on pointe! So some of them did it on pointe and some of them didn't. So it was interesting the way we tried to capture all that history.

What year did the company end and why?
The company ended in 1998 roughly – that was our 10th anniversary year. It might have gone on for two or three years after that. It just became really difficult to run a major dance company on that level. We were touring a little bit, we went to Barbados, toured around in London a lot and in Europe. But because we were never funded by the Arts Council, as a dance company, it just became increasingly hard to raise finances for it. A company is like a money-eating machine – you have to keep the dancers in class, you have to keep... When we started getting stronger as a dance foundation organisation, we did pay the dancers a bit to come into rehearsal, we did pay their travel expenses and we tried to do those kinds of things. We literally came from nowhere, when the company first started – the dancers dedicating their time and their effort and getting paid for performances only. So we did graduate ourselves but it got harder and harder, because we weren't getting any funding. We weren't getting the major support that you really do need if you are going to do a company, especially on that particular level of dance. And also the dancers became increasingly under their own pressures – they had to do more teaching, or they had to go and do more degree things – you find with a lot of dancers now, they seem to have done a lot of degrees in different things like administration as well as different dance style, pilates – they have gone into more fitness style as well. I think that it became just a little bit too much. We had a long gap in between performances and we always had to make sure dancers were ready, but it was hard to keep them ready and hard for them to keep themselves ready as well. So that was, I would say, the downfall of dance companies.

It didn't just happen to our dance company, a lot of dance companies were not getting supported, or they would get supported and then their grants would be pulled. I kind of worked it out – because I love thinking about these problems! – and all of a sudden it just came to me and I thought, you know what, we are not going to get major funding from any of the things around us, Arts Council and things, because we sit in our own building with our own studio and that is half the equation. The other people who get the funding, they don't have those studios and they get the funding. So you either got one or the other. In that sense

it was not such a bitter, hard pill to swallow, because you know, although you don't want to admit it, you are getting half the deal. I danced with Michael Clark and Company and Michael Clark did get funded by the Arts Council, but we would go and meet at Pineapple and Rambert Dance Studio to rehearse. Things were set so it was a little bit unstable for everybody, even companies who were getting funding. At one point you had to go and perform in certain places; or you were doing an Arts Council application form and you had to try to tour to certain places, so you had to book tours, not knowing if you would get funding; then if you didn't get funding you had to pull out of the venue. So I think these increasing pressures on the whole thing made it difficult, and make it difficult nowadays, for people to run companies even if they are getting funded. You have to look carefully into what you are trying to do and why you are trying to deliver it.

Did the school start the same year as the company?
Well, the company started in September of 1988 and the school started in the autumn of 1987, so there was a bit of a gap between. It enabled us, when we did launch the company, to have students from the school come and give flowers to the dancers – we did have that connection. So the school is a tiny touch older than the company – they started that way around.

The school has continued and goes from strength to strength. We have loads and loads of children in the dance school in our main building, but also we do a lot of outreach in other local schools in and around London and also we are teaching at Hackney Summer University. We do other levels of dance and different short courses and everything. The educational part of it has continued, but in a sense, you are also getting the next generation ready to want to be dancers and want to be teachers. One of our students, Nicholas Norman, he ended up getting a scholarship to Urdang Academy and afterwards, he came back to be a student teacher with us for a little bit, but then he got into Fame and into The Lion King. He did The Lion King for a couple of years and is now on tour with Fame. Another of our students, Danielle Bryce, she has just finished Rambert Dance College this last August, doing three years there. So these are all teenagers, young people and they chose to go to that part of the system. But we have another one who went on to become a doctor. So you make them stable on lots of different levels. You will have dancers now who might want to become dancers, or you find that a lot of the ones that are changing from primary school to secondary school, they might choose some kind of performing school as their secondary school. Even if it is not a high level secondary school, like Royal Ballet, it might just be a secondary school that uses dance as a specialist platform. So we tend to have to do references for the kids and they get all their ballet exams and it shows their stability, that they have been in the school a long time.

The school plays a different role within society at the moment. Until we get this generation of children, Black and White, Green and Pink, that come to the dance school and just don't understand why they just can't be dancers, because they have been trained quite well, we will continue to see this problem. But I think it will change, because the structure of dance companies has changed a lot and we have all those things with instant fame, the X-factor and all that. At least they might be a bit better prepared for it.

What do you think the lasting impact of the company has been on the dance scene or on dancers?
I still have some people who say: Oh Carol why don't you start that company up again? There are quite a few people who say that, and yesterday I had a call from somebody wanting me to get the dance company to do something. So I suppose people still miss it a little tiny bit. We always seemed to bring a lot of dance people together and we still do in a way. Sometimes when I am doing the end-of-year show for the kids – we have two, upper and lower school – and because we go to the Hackney Empire or some big theatre, we are sometimes able to ask another artist to come and perform with us. We got Will Gaines, the famous tap dancer, he became part of the show, because the story allowed him to be part of it. So we do ask other dance people to come and do the shows with us. I think it is an opportunity for people to come together and work together and get a nice platform to perform.

We have one disabled, deaf dancer who has started doing some stuff with us, who teaches street dance. He had previously been through lots of highs and lows at his previous college, where his ability was questioned. But he has done some excellent volunteering work at the school, so we put him up as a volunteer within Hackney's Young Gifted funds. He won that through Hackney. He became Volunteer of the Year, so he will be going off to Buckingham Palace. All those people who said he couldn't do it…now he has excelled very quickly to a level, because you gave him an opportunity and believed it was worth giving it to him. I think we have to be able to give people opportunities like that. It's not so much you even think you are doing anything, you just do it because it's possible to be done and if it isn't, you can question it. It's better just to do it, to help people to excel.

I don't even know if the dancers who have danced with the company realise how many dancers have danced with the company, because sometimes it's been a lot of dancers, sometimes a few, but it's like with any company. I danced with Ailey for a little while and there are Ailey dancers that I know I don't know, I wasn't even in their year, but they know me! But you just know that you are part of this big dance family and you have to be good and you have to be nice. And I think

you can only be nice if you are nice, and sustain it. The dance world is small, so you have to be careful with each other. So just be nice!

What have the core members of the company gone on to do?
I still know what they are doing and still hear from them or talk to them. In general, people have gone on to work with different companies, or started their own schools. Alan Hutson started his own company and Mark Elie started his dance school in West London. Quite a few of them have had children now, but many, like Andrea, still continue to teach.

ADAD Asks:

Interview with Jackie Guy

by Laura Griffiths

Jamaican-born Jackie Guy is an international choreographer and one of Britain's leading authorities on Afro-Caribbean dance forms. He was the artistic director of Birmingham-based, award-winning dance company Kokuma Dance Theatre. He continues to teach and to choreograph.

In your wide experience as a director, what would you say are the most essential qualities needed to manage/develop the dancers working with you?
It is important that dancers you employ know and understand the mission, ethos and history of the company they are working with.

This is key, especially for dancers working within the African People's Dance (APD) sector. Experience has shown that dancers who are not trained in the particular style are at a disadvantage in articulating and understanding the particular dance aesthetics. Once you overcome this, managing and developing the company becomes less of a struggle in defining who you are and what you are about, within the dance ecology.

Also as an artistic director you should have a solid dance background and some knowledge of management.

In an ideal world, what training events would you regularly schedule for the ongoing needs of a dance company?
While today's dancers are physically stronger, it is advisable that companies who practise African and Caribbean dance forms, where traditional nuances are utilized, continue to implement training courses, such as history and music. These additional events will enhance the skills of those dancers and choreographers who draw on traditional dances for inspiration and synthesis.

As your career has progressed what has been the most significant or defining training or study you have undertaken?
I have personally gained from the various courses and international forums and dance conferences I have attended looking at dance culture of people from the African Diaspora.

In addition, I have further researched my own Caribbean heritage, which helped me to advance my own JaGuy Technique, as well as studying the dynamics of archiving and, to a less extent, dance notation.

What new courses could the UK dance establishment include in its vocational training of Dance of the African Diaspora?
There are people teaching dance that perhaps lack certain essential requirements for effective instruction. Possibly, the APD sector could look at Training the Trainers, for example in teaching methodology, principles of movement and anatomy.

Nevertheless, there are also experienced teachers and lecturers who can offer training and advice and we can look forward to the continuation of the Irie! Dance Theatre Diploma course in African and Caribbean Studies.

What steps can still be made with the sector itself to build resources including artists' development?
A proper survey and needs analysis must be undertaken within the sector, so an effective developmental programme can be implemented.

There is a need for show-casing young choreographers work, and a dancehouse/ space for experimentation with links with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, The International Institute for Blacks in Dance in Philadelphia, the Jamaica School of Dance and other dance institutions throughout Africa, Cuba and Haiti is also critical.

What is your present interpretation of African Peoples Dance (APD) / Black dance?
There are so many interpretations of the practice of African Peoples Dance or Black dance in Britain that at times it leads to tension. It is unfortunate that the legacy of Black Dance Development Trust, established in 1986, has gotten lost along the way of progress.

I personally feel that artists within the APD sector should celebrate their cultural heritage and be sensitive to the African Diaspora while embracing the dynamics of the contemporary world we live in today. Issues begin when the 'fertiliser becomes the soil' and we lose the essence of purpose by over-blending and then placing APD in a category defined by someone else's ideas on what we should be doing culturally and who we are.

Is the APD / Black dance sector relevant to the overall British dance scene and why?
Yes, APD is more than relevant to the British dance scene, it is part and parcel

of the multi-cultural society we live in and demands respect in terms of its diversity.

Dance forms which came out of the blood, sweat and tears of Black people need no justification in contemporary Britain. The fact is, it was through these artistic expressions that we have overcome adversity from the up-rooting in Africa, through to the Middle Passage and migration to England.

As a son of the Caribbean, I salute the work of Irie! Dance Theatre, Kokuma Dance Theatre, Carl Campbell, Caroline Muraldo and others whose contribution to Black dance forms (especially from the Caribbean) since 1979 often gets lost in the recognition chart.

So the 'and why' in the question is – we need to constantly pay homage to our ancestors.

Career path. Are you at the point in your professional development you hoped to be right now?
Yes, but not resting on my laurels. I like to have the opportunity to diversify my skills. I teach and lecture in various universities, schools and colleges and recently choreographed the stage version of the movie The Harder They Come. I work with elders and I am about to do a short solo for the Royal Opera House. Presently, I am the chairman of (ECAS) Education Culture Arts and Sports committee of the Jamaican Diaspora UK. Finally, I have completed my research to write my book.

What keeps you focused and motivated?
My Christian faith underpins all what I do: to love, serve and to be proud of my cultural heritage. I am motivated when human beings gain self-confidence and express their talents to the fullest.

What advice or 'words of wisdom' could you offer to those people working in the APD / Black dance arena?
Remain focused. Strive for excellence. Encourage positive debate. Celebrate each other's achievements. Try to help ourselves more and avoid justifying what we do and who we are.

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Even before we start to move, there's a story…

Interview with Beverley Glean

by Jeanette Bain

This interview was part of a wider research project conducted in March 2006 during the MA Choreography programme at Middlesex University. The research focused on how cultural identity influences the choreography of London-based 'African-Caribbean' dance artists, and fed into an investigation of the context in which my own choreographic language was developing.

First of all can you give me the context of IRIE! dance theatre? What is IRIE! about, and what is your involvement with the company?
IRIE!'s mission since inception has been to heighten the profile of Black dance and Black dancers in Britain. We do this by developing a range of programmes based on stimulus from Africa and the Caribbean. Twenty-two years on we haven't veered from that vision. We continue to raise the profile of Caribbean dance specifically. However, changes in circumstances have lead us to explore different avenues to initiate and widen that process. We do that by creating work, which is strongly rooted in African and Caribbean heritage. This informs the dance language that we present. We do it through education work; through working on accredited courses; through soliciting partnerships with other like-minded organisations and individuals; through research, all of which contributes to the current shape of the company. In essence IRIE! is about promoting African People's Dance culturally, artistically and academically.

I am the Founder and Artistic Development Director. The 'development' part of my title was added because of my increasing involvement in writing funding bids as well as developing projects for the organisation. Black dance in Britain faces a number of challenges such as funding, resources and basic staffing needed to operate normally. This lack of resources inevitably leads to one person doing the job of several people. In the near future I hope to return to simply, Artistic Director.

And just a bit of your personal history – how did you find yourself in the UK, or how did your family find themselves in this country?
It's really interesting that you ask that question because I've just recently written an article for LEAN – our local education arts network, the article is called Made in Lewisham – basically, looking at Lewisham-based artists and how the borough has helped to nurture and develop the individual. I came to England aged nine. My parents came in the late fifties. They came to make what they believed was a better life – "the streets of London are paved with gold" generation. Education was very important to them, my Mother is more enlightened but my father would be turning in his grave at the thought of me pursuing a career in dance. Actually, my initial introduction to dance had very little to do with a great cultural desire to express myself – it was an activity I was doing at school, that I really enjoyed. As a youngster I loved physical pursuits; I played badminton, squash, I loved running and dance. Believe it or not, I was told that I had a natural aptitude for dance *(laugh)*. I was invited to take part in the youth dance group at school. My dance teacher saw my potential and I was often chosen to lead the dance workshop sessions and so got involved in creating dances. I was good at dance and soon found myself leading classes at the local youth club. When you think about it, in the early to mid 70s, there weren't that many Black youngsters teaching what we would term now as community dance. I could be wrong! Ironically, my style of teaching was labelled 'Afro-Caribbean' dance, it sounded good to me so I went with it. Actually, what I was teaching was simply a mixture of what came naturally from my social dance scene, my sense and experience of carnival, reggae and what was happening in the pop and soul charts. It was popular and participants loved it. In cultural terms people were none-the-wiser. I guess there was nothing at the time to judge what I was doing against.

I was enjoying the experience and my interest in and for dance developed. Fortunately I had a really fabulous teacher who was Laban-trained and she encouraged me to explore my interest in dance and in 1977-1980 my formal/professional training in dance started at the Laban Centre. The more I became aware of dance and where I stood as a Black dancer in Britain; the more I embraced my fusion of dance and questioned where I fitted within the contemporary dance scene. Graduating from Laban was a rude awakening. There really was nowhere for me to practice the style of dance I was interested in, there was nothing out there that reflected me.

Once again, I was very lucky – I believe that the early stages of my career in dance have been a series of fortunate incidences. Like many artists leaving training, you undertake a number of freelance jobs. During this time I was able to use dance in a variety of institutions. My year spent with SHAPE was invaluable

in terms of using dance as a tool for therapy in a number of social settings. One of my many freelance sessions took place at the Deptford Albany. The Albany was one of the most progressive fringe theatres working in culture and diversity long before this label was made popular. It was the theatre's mission for the work done in the building to reflected the people in and around its community, not only as audiences but developing local creative talent too. Deptford and New Cross are working class communities with large Black Caribbean communities. My dance classes were very popular and the Director of the Albany felt it was time to profile dance, particularly dance that was popular with the community. My role and the role of dance were fast becoming integrated into the creative and artistic culture of the programming in the building. I was engaged full time in 1982 and encouraged to further pursue my interest in Caribbean and African dance. My next formal/professional training experience was at the School of Dance, at the Edna Manley School of Performing Arts in Jamaica. The experience was overwhelming and left me hungry for a deeper understand and more training in Black Dance as well as satisfied that a dance language existed that represented me. I needed to know more, much more. Since then IRIE! was founded in 1985, a company at the cutting edge of Caribbean fusion choreography. We created over twenty-five works, which have toured nationally and internationally. I have undertaken a number of research, training, development and creative projects in a number of countries: in Africa, the Caribbean and the USA. This will probably sound a little trite but I really did find myself and was able to realise my ongoing vision with no apologies.

OK – what would you say are the main challenges in the UK context?
There are many challenges. How African and Caribbean dance is perceived within the wider dance community is the biggest challenge. The nature of the form when set against the understanding of classical and contemporary dance means that the dominant dance community feels that African and Caribbean dance has no form or technique. Basically what we do is traditional or social dance without any real substance.

Education is needed; cultural, historical, creative, social it's all-necessary. That's a big challenge isn't it? Understanding the difference, encouraging the dance and education sectors to recognise what we do as a valid art form. There is no denying that African and Caribbean culture has informed important cultural development in relation to contemporary dance.

The greatest challenge *(laughs)* is the need to educate our own young people. Encouraging our artists to recognise the importance of African and Caribbean heritage as valuable and significant in this society. The natural way in which

the body moves in African and Caribbean dance, I believe, is often construed as simply having a good time, it's not challenging or has little intellectual significance. The call for informed critiques of our work is a loud one. There is certainly not enough written about Black dance in Britain and that has to change. Black dance has a vital role to play in education but is not reflected formally. This sector possibly has the most prolific presence in terms of freelance dance artists going into schools on a casual basis, doing work that supports curriculum learning and yet none of our dance forms is integral within mainstream dance education. Despite previous work done by IRIE! dance theatre there is still no Higher Education qualification in African and Caribbean dance. Accreditation in African and Caribbean dance is an area that is very important to me and one that I will continue to champion until the forms sit firmly as part of the teaching of dance education in the UK. Then there are the artistic and creative challenges, but one step at a time!

Are you involved in choreography now?
Not as much as I would like to be. Actually we have this fabulous new development on the horizon. In August the company will be relocating to a purpose-built space (Moonshot) – this is very exciting and another key milestone for IRIE! This would make the organisation the first Black company to be based in a fully resourced dance space. This also means that we have the opportunity to develop African and Caribbean dance practice, an opportunity to provide a focal point for the practice and development of African and Caribbean Dance, Black Dance, African People's Dance (which ever term you wish to embrace) in Britain.

So much of my focus has actually been on our relocation. We are a small team, therefore each time we embark on a sizable project something has to give. We recognise that not having a performance company will have its impact on the organisation. The Arts Council dance department will no longer fund our performance work. It appears that they believe it's no longer relevant and feels the work lacks artistic quality. When you come across such views, particularly from an organisation that is possibly the company's only avenue for funding for a national touring programme, one has to adjust in terms of exploring other ways to create and tour work. We are hoping that the nature of the company's work and its significance in relation to next year's Bicentenary of the passing of the act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807 may attract funding for creating and touring a new work entitled Warm Sands. We still do performance work. For example, IRIE! celebrated 20 years in 2005 as part of that celebration and the Mayor's Summer in the City Festival. We were commissioned by Greenwich and Docklands Festival to create a site-specific work for the fountain in Trafalgar Square. It was very exciting and a great challenge, the piece entitled Fontlife

was actually re-commissioned the next year also.

I'm interested in the movement vocabulary – what are some of the issues that inform the movement vocabulary?
I draw my understanding from both my Caribbean heritage and British experience. Both those influences form the basis of the way in which I fuse my work. My cultural perspective is key – even before we start to move there's a history – obviously rhythm is very important. I am interested in nuances, as so much of Caribbean culture is based on nuances. Every nuance has a story behind it. When I work with dancers like musicians there is an added advantage, an added quality when an artist has 'really' experienced the culture. This supports the shape, quality and interpretation of the movement. Once that relationship is understood by the dancers my role as a choreographer becomes a delightful one.

Many of the artists working in APD realise that they have to go to Africa and the Caribbean in order to develop their skills and do research. There is the migration of artists from Africa and the Caribbean to Britain that is having an impact on the development of the form. The fusion of African and Caribbean dance with western contemporary dance is happening more and more. Sometimes it comes from a place of knowledge and understanding, and other times it's simply because an artist has taken a liking to the movement. Nevertheless, the more the form is practiced the more scope there is for debate, which can only be a good thing particularly when it comes to issues such as aesthetics. When fusing, one has to be careful to make the connection seamless and organic without totally losing the essence. My Caribbean heritage has given me so much colour, contrast, rhythms and stories to work from. The creative canvas is endless.

What kinds of responses have you received to the work of IRIE! over the years?
It really depends on who is watching and the context in which they are watching. For the most part, the response has been positive over the years. Sometimes negative responses come through lack of understanding of African and Caribbean aesthetics. That's not to say that the work is always great, indeed there are times when you feel that more could have been done creatively to make a work stronger. There are also occasions when performances just don't go the way you envisaged. The most rewarding times have been performing in an inner city venue to a predominantly Black audience who identify with what they are seeing on stage, they totally get the story you are telling. That's when the feedback comes, not after the show but during the performance. The gratification is immense because the call and response is what signifies there is a mutual understanding, you are communicating – it's all about feeding off each other and the performers

are encouraged by it. We are an oral tradition; therefore verbal communication is greatly appreciated (when it's constructive). There is also that boring debate in terms of where the work fits. Why does it have to fit anywhere, as long as there is an audience for it, as long as it's educating and entertaining, then it should just be. The APD sector has to find its own values and standards conducive to assessing the quality of its work.

You do a lot of education work. What role do you see that playing? What's important about that work?

It's more than important; it's critical. Education, both informal and formal, is the only way Black dance will overcome the barriers it faces in the mainstream dance sector in the UK today. The company has an excellent reputation for its education work. This is something we take great pride in and have worked very hard to achieve. It is important that the experience for the participant is one of quality and value. Also the tutor delivering the programme needs to feel a sense of achievement as part of the delivery process. As a number of our tutors come from a contemporary dance background, many are of third and fourth generation African and Caribbean descent, who may not have visited Africa or the Caribbean. It is important that we introduce a training and development programme for these artists, which informs them of the philosophy of the company. Training for IRIE! tutors is at its strongest when the company has a touring programme. The education work is linked to that programme; therefore the tutors are delivering from work they are actually performing. It also affords us full-time access to the dancers where training and professional development are more consistent. We are widening the scope for the inclusion of African and Caribbean dance in mainstream education. This started with our pilot Certificate and Diploma in African and Caribbean Dance, the certificate in Further Education was accredited by OCN and franchised by City and Islington College. The Diploma in Higher Education was accredited by Birkbeck College University of London. The programme ran for three years from 1998-2001. We are continuing the drive for the inclusion of the form within formal training. We are currently undertaking a three-year action research programme entitled Dance and Diversity. The research looks into cultural diversity in dance training with particular focus on African and Caribbean dance. Phase 1 investigated practice in the UK. Phase 2 will look at what is happening internationally in countries such as the USA, the Caribbean and Africa. In Phase 3 we intend to bring national & international key stakeholders together to look at the way forward.
The company's overall education programme is varied in order to address the key areas of community education, formal training and professional development. Our classes range from one-hour sessions to week residencies. We have to be flexible when it comes to planning our programmes, particularly

for schools. We support teachers through INSET, providing valuable training that will help them to develop material for their classroom work once the company leaves. I firmly believe that through quality education and training, especially within formal education, the APD sector will better position itself for recognition in mainstream education.

Is there anything else you would add?
Only that it is a continual development process. Our new space at Moonshot in New Cross will provide a platform for that development. A space to debate, explore and create. A space to fail even, and feel ok about it, because it's all-essential for the growth and legacy of the APD sector.

We were already ready-made:

Interview with Chief Dawethi (of Ipi Tombi)

by 'Funmi Adewole

Chief Robson Dawethi grew up in Johannesburg in South Africa. He learnt to dance within the community and took his first step into professional performance with a show called Meropa, later named Kwazulu. He joined the cast of Ipi Tombi in 1974, touring world wide and performing in the West End, until the show closed in 1984. Whilst with Ipi Tombi he trained in stage management and lighting at Mountview Theatre School. As a founding member of Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, he worked as a dancer, stage manager and trainer. He is now the assistant building manager of Toynbee studios, an Arts centre in East London.

The first question I want to ask is, who was the person that started to organise Ipi Tombi?
At the time, Ipi Tombi originally was organised by Bertha Egnos. She was artistic director, she used to dance in her young days…and I think she was a musician as well. She used to play piano.

And what happened, Bertha Egnos started the project. She made the music first with her daughter, Gail, who wrote the lyrics and that is how Ipi Tombi began. It started with the music first and then they wanted some dancers to go with the music, so she gathered about 12 people to join this band to play this music. This included Margaret NcIngana and Andy Chabedi. The music group went to Australia and New Zealand and everything was fine, so I think when she came back from promoting that music she decided to make a show.

Um hmm. This must have been during the apartheid system?
Yes

So did they allow people to travel like that? For the Black people to go to New Zealand?
Yes, they used to. You know, South African musicians they could travel, they used to travel. Musicians like Hugh Masekela were well-known, a bit like

footballers, so it was easier to travel.

But I remember one guy, Kaizer Mtau, who went to America to play football .

So how did she find the dancers?
What happened – when Bertha came back she auditioned for dancers. She got in contact with Andy Chabedi. He was more like a modern contemporary dancer, so she put Andy as a choreographer, because he knew everybody. So they invited people in, a lot of good dancers. There were so many people in South Africa who did this kind of thing, sing or dance. So most people came in, like Margaret NcIngana, who were just singers and couldn't dance. Then they got people like Ruby Morare to come and sing and dance. That's how the whole thing started, as a small company of 12.

And then…I don't know how....they got a contract with the Brook Theatre in Johannesburg, which was a theatre which had been bringing shows from England to South Africa. It was during the days of apartheid.

So that is how Ipi Tombi came up. And then for the auditions, they also brought people from Zulu Land, people from everywhere, Gail wrote the music and lyrics. So it was a family business, even the husband was there on the technical side.

Some of the lyrics are in South African languages?
Bertha got people from the cast to translate what she wanted; like Mama Temba *(starts to sing 'Mama Temba is getting married tonight');* like Margaret NcIngana. They were very naughty. They used to pay people on the spot. People were very desperate for money in South Africa in those days and if they said 'oh can you translate this' so you translated it, and that's how she got most of the music.

('Funmi hums a tune.)

And there was the Zulu music, people like Elliot Ngubane, who still lives in London, brought in some of the traditional Zulu songs from Kwazulu-Natal. So everybody at that time wanted to be involved. We were desperate to make it happen, they would just ask for our suggestions – 'Is there anything we can sing in this part?' (like the church song is sung by Count Judge who came). Martha Molefe was a good singer. Oh we had some good singers then.

So what were the rehearsals like?
So the rehearsals took a long time you know? Because we were living in Soweto,

to travel to rehearse in town was expensive, but we spent about something like 3 months rehearsing.

In the beginning I was not involved. We were doing our own show, Amabutho, and we were doing some other shows in town. So we were doing another show called Kwazulu. At that time it was called Meropa, the Drums of Africa…meropa means drums. They changed the name, I never knew why they changed that name to Kwazulu, maybe because the English people don't know Meropa.

So I was working with Meropa and other friends. Tapelo, Josh Makhene, Khulu and all those people were doing Meropa. So it was like the two shows competing you know, but this one, Ipi Tombi was more modern, it was mixed, so it used to sell out. The business was good and they wanted a second company, so that's how we got involved. They were getting good pay, they were working more than us, they had shows everyday, we would just do one show a week. I can remember we went to audition. It was a straightforward thing. They wanted people like us, ready-made, because we were already ready-made.

Because you already knew the dances?
We knew the dances what they were doing, which is Shangaan. We were doing Shangaan as well. They were doing Shangaan, but their Shangaan was different, nearly the same thing, but different style, you know. Our one was harder than theirs. And we knew the Zulu dance, but not that version. We were ready-made for them really. So when we went, I remember we were 12 to audition, and they just took the whole 12.

We came in and they mixed us with the cast. And then it was 3 months rehearsal. We were so happy – it's a job.

My family thought I was not working. They said what kind of job is this? The whole day you are at home and I leave about 4 o'clock. When people are coming back from work, I'm going. I remember my mum…'are you sure you are working?' I said 'yeh I'm working, we are dancing'. She said ' what kind of work is that – dance is not work, you can't tell me you're working?' I mean they were good to us, I know that time was still apartheid time, but they were treating us very nice. These White people, they were on our side you know, it's just they couldn't…couldn't be too open about it.

So then there are two companies now. So this one company went to Cape Town, the first company to go and perform in Cape Town. Now we are starting touring and then in Johannesburg, the first company, something happened and they

decided to strike. They wanted more money and also because our brothers and sisters they couldn't come and see the show and they wanted our brothers and sisters to come and see the show. This is not fair you know. So the first company they said 'no, something has got to be done here.' So they started to strike and it was a big thing you know. One evening they said 'no we are not going on stage if we don't get more money'. And then we were in Cape Town. We were called the following day from the show. We just got the message – everybody is going to Johannesburg. So we fly Cape Town to Johannesburg to perform in Johannesburg. So we performed there and it was a big fight among us now. This cast says 'we are striking and you people come and perform.' We didn't know, so when we found out what it was all about we all joined them and said 'look we want a show at least once a week to be a show for Black people'. I mean, they were not arguing about it, it was a law of the government, they had to find a permit, they had to write letters to the municipality and get the permission to do that. But they got it, but they said it's only once a week that can happen.

So they managed to have a show for Black people, once a week?
Once a week. They said the only way it can happen is once a week. It was Thursday, because Thursday the Black people, who live in town, all the domestic people working for the Madams and bosses – that is the only day they are off. Even Bertha Egnos, she brought the people working for her. They couldn't bring them anytime. The only day they could bring them would be on Thursday to come and see the show. That's how my family came to see the show. That's when they believed.

They were saying 'oh so this is what you are doing!'. I remember my mum sitting down in the front row, sitting there because the first night we had to invite all our families. It was free to everybody, to make sure because people didn't want to go to the theatre then, even though there used to be theatres in Soweto, but this one's in town. People they didn't like to come to town from Soweto, because by the time the show finished at 10 o'clock going back was difficult. Thursday was called Sheila's day, because Sheila's day is when the people from the kitchen, domestic women, they are off. It's their day off, so they would come and see the show. They used to attend the show, Thursday, the drivers, their mates used to come and see the show – you used to see mates coming in their cars to see the show.

And then we went to Israel and from Israel…and then we went straight to Nigeria… That was the cream of the whole tour. I remember that one, going to National Theatre, to Panafest.

I have never seen something like that in my life. You know all the girls here they have hair like yours, straight hair, and…because in South Africa we didn't have that. In Nigeria, people had long, straight hair. In South Africa we had this thing of cutting hair, so most of our girls they used to short cut all the time. So in Nigeria it became a fashion. They thought maybe it's a fashion, so everybody was cutting. All the barbers – you see the big sign 'Ipi Tombi style'. So all the girls you would see them with the short hair cut. I tell you, I won't forget that, those days. Nigeria was Nigeria.

We were staying in the Federal Palace Hotel. They really looked after us there.

And then the show came to England?
Then the show came straight from there to England. We came to that Heathrow …so cold…the show came to England. By the time it came to England the first company was already here, it was already here opened at Her Majesty's. So by the time we came here, they were going back home.

We just came to replace them on the spot…because… at that time, before '76, children were dying in Soweto. People were shooting – uprisings were going on, so some of the members really they didn't want to stay in the country. They were thinking of the families and what's going on, you know? So by the time we reached here that thing was already cooling down, so few wanted to go.

So they put the two companies together to make it stronger, because they had a long contract with Ray Cooney Productions.

I think it was on for about eight years?
Eight years on West End. We started at Her Majesty's and then moved from Her Majesty's and we went to the Cambridge…we were in the Cambridge for a long time and then we moved from the Cambridge and we went to the Whitehall….

This is all in London?
All in London, just West End alone. So from there Whitehall, because the business was good, they brought another company…a third company from South Africa. So they came over here and they rehearsed here for about a month, and then off on the road again. They started in Brighton, doing all the summer season. Brighton, Portsmouth, Birmingham. They started touring the regional theatres. Now some of the old members from the first company who went back home, there was nothing happening. They ended up coming back with this company to join again.

So they came with the third company?
They mixed them up again, reshuffled. So what they were doing…they were taking the best and leaving them in London. So if you are not good, you go on tour. The best stay in London, so that's how I end up staying in London… because when I was young I was very good…*(laughs)*. I was very good I know that...because we used to compete you know in Ipi Tombi. There was competition because there was parts…witchdoctor, the priest, the bride and the bridegroom you know all these parts and Mother Mary all everybody used to compete for the parts.

Yeah, eight years is a long time.

And because we were only working in the evening, during the day for two years I went to Mountview Theatre School, because I wanted to learn something different. So when I was doing the show, I was going to college studying stage management and lighting during the day, which I knew one day that's what I would like to do. Because I started when I was still in the show. When we were touring Holland and places like that, the lighting designer used to come on Saturday and set up everything and then Sunday he's gone, or Monday night he just stay for the opening. If there's anything wrong he would just write a note down and then give it to me to solve the problem.

That's how I started…it was some problem with our management who said I would be tired for the show. I said no, I would not be, they thought, maybe I want double wages or whatever…*(laughs)*. Some of our members, that's what they thought…'Oh, Chief would be tired for the show'. I know sometimes I would be tired, but I used to make sure by the time I got to that show I am fresh again, to be strong for that show, because I didn't want to give them that chance to talk about it. Because I was getting extra money – not much money, maybe something like £50-£100. And John Litton is the guy who was my mentor for that thing. Soon I got to London, I went to stage management course for two years at Mountview Theatre School.

In America the Black Consciousness groups said things, 'Bertha couldn't dance, you can't move'…which was true she couldn't move her waist that woman… but she understood it. She used to tell you, do this…I know I was good… she can tell if you are not doing the right thing and she was one of the people who got it…who can see and said 'no, do something with your back' and you say 'What Bertha? Show me'. And she would say, 'No I can't show you, but know there is something you are not doing right', she said, 'It must be your waist, move your waist, Africa is here Africa is here'. But she can't do it, you see.

So we were performing and then the pickets…the anti-apartheid groups in London. They came to the show to talk to us about this thing, why we were doing this thing. The Ray Cooney Productions, they couldn't take it anymore. They said, look they can't be going on like this…every time people come to see the show there's people with coffins outside, picketing the show…big coffins outside. There was so much problems you know…if not for that, the show would have run for longer.

Yeah, because it was so popular…

I think the production people said OK they are closing the show so everybody is going back home. So a few people just said they don't want to go. I mean I was one of the people who didn't want to go back because that time South Africa was still not free. I said no way, I'm not going there…to do what? I think we were about 12 of us, we didn't go…Julia Mathunjwa, Elliot Ngubane and everybody we said 'no we are not going' so we formed our own group called Mantombi. It's a girl's name now, but it was similar to Ipi Tombi. So we just wanted a catchy name , we started rehearsing in Euston doing our own thing. At that time I was working in the evening in the theatre, Shaftesbury Theatre, it was the same company as Ray Cooney Productions, because they owned some of the theatres. They used to own the Astoria, in Shaftesbury Avenue. They knew that I could do this kind of stage management job, so they offered me a job backstage, so I was working there.

So then this show called Mantombi, and the people who were working with the producers from Alex *(Alexandra)* theatre in Birmingham, they put in money. They said they want to make sure it is happening. So we are all looking forward to this. But I don't know what happened. They started having problems with Bertha Egnos' lawyers. They said 'No, they can't use that name Mantombi', so we had to change everything.

So you changed the name?
Changed the name, we called it Eyethu…Eyethu, it means 'it's ours'…so...(laughs) Eyethu, it's ours. It didn't last. By that time everything just went to fade out. And then I continued working in the theatre, and that's how I ended up in Adzido and I met up with George Dzikunu and Ricky Stein. He called me…when they were doing MSC community thing for Manpower Services.

That's how Adzido first started, it was a Manpower scheme. And then I was called in by Ricky and I went in for an interview as a...technical supervisor. So I got into that scheme as a technical supervisor…to work full-time…so George was a senior supervisor…George Dzikunu. Emmanuel Tagoe was the musical

supervisor and Nomsa Caluza, also from South Africa, was a dance supervisor, ladies supervisor. So there was four of us sharing the office. George was always the head…in that scheme. So we're doing Adzido…Adzido Community Project. And then, Wednesday and Thursday, George and Emmanuel came up with the idea that we rehearse dances in the evening…after we finish work during the day from 6-9pm…

What work would you do in the day?
We were doing schools workshops based in Archway. So in the evening George would choose a few people from the group. We used to have about 50 people working there...school kids and…so the best ones, like Charles James, Ditsebe, Pauline Hawthorne, Rubba Stevenson, Stephen Blagrove they would stay over to rehearse from 6-9 and Patricia Ruttie and, yeh, Robert Hardware, Angela Barnes, Mona Daniels…so they would stay.

They were young school kids, just finished, and they wanted to do something. The whole idea those days was to get Black people to do something. Some people didn't want to go…but because of the school, they would come in, train 3 times a week to do dance. Some of them wanted to play drums. So that's how the whole thing started…and…by the time we realised, Adzido was strong.

George formed Adzido after that.

My parents always reminded us that we were special:

Interview with Corrine Bougaard

by Ukachi Akalawu
June 2006

Born in South Africa, Corrine's distinguished career at Ballet Rambert preceded her role as founder member, choreographer, teacher and Associate Director of Extemporary Dance Theatre. She went on to found Union Dance in 1986. Besides choreographing many productions for Union Dance, she is an Associate Lecturer on the MA Course in Design at Central St Martin's College of Art & Design, London. Union Dance celebrated its 21st Birthday in 2006.

What was your pathway into dance?
My pathway into dance started when I was about 6, first by taking mime, then studying ballet from the age of 7, until my entry into contemporary dance at the age of 12. Even at that young age, I realised that the politics of the time would prevent me from pursuing a career as a professional Ballet dancer. And politics can be anything – even down to the state of where dance is. So at that time, there weren't that many choices for young dancers. There wasn't really contemporary dance anywhere near the level of what exists now. I did actually meet London Contemporary Dance Theatre in Leicester with Robert Cohan doing a lecture demonstration, so I had actually met the company before I went on to study at the school later on.

The first piece of theatre I ever saw was Shakespeare's Othello with my mother when I was about 7, so there was an interest in theatre from a young age. When I was about 12 years old, I trained in drama with the director of The Killing Fields – Roland Joffé, and I worked backstage for my pocket money at the Phoenix Theatre in Leicester. And coming from the Apartheid regime in South Africa, from which my parents had fled, that experience was politically and historically a factor within my life. We left behind our home, money, everything.

My father had to redo all his qualifications in order to find work in England. So issues of identity and immigration have always been relevant in my life. But my parents always reminded us that we were special and gave us a very good education and work ethic, as that was the basis of making progress. I went to a good school and did my 'A' levels at The Place in the evenings, as I came to the London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) when I was very young. I must thank my parents for giving me that excellent grounding, as well as the Heads of LCDS at that time Pat Hutchinson and Jane Dudley. They all nurtured me very well, considering the fact that I was quite young in comparison to others at the school – I was only 17 and had never lived in London before. I also participated in theatre with Ed Berman in InterAction Theatre, which then became Interchange / Weekend Arts College. So I was involved in dance and theatre from a very young age.

As a Black person, do you feel that there was anything remarkable about your particular experience whilst training?
I performed with the LSCD's 4th year performing company, now known as 4D, after which I was invited to join London Contemporary Dance Theatre. I, however, decided to join Ballet Rambert as a soloist. I then went to New York to train with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Dance Theatre of Harlem, as I wanted to see what else was happening in the dance world. Upon returning to the UK, I became a company member and subsequently Associate Director of Extemporary Dance Theatre over a nine year period.

I admit that I had a broad interest in the arts in general. I was originally more theatrical than dance oriented, as I found dance a little too specialised and wanted to stretch my boundaries as an artist. I always worked really hard at whatever I did, as I never thought I was good enough! I took extra classes in the evenings. I did summer schools, and actually worked all day long, as I decided that if I was going to do something, I had to do it really well, or not at all. I had quite a strict upbringing and I like the idea of reaching a higher level and having the attitude of producing work of quality. That's always been part of my parents' lives too, which is what they instilled in me.

The whole experience of training in those days was such that so much was passed on from the source. I had teachers directly from the Martha Graham Company, which really helped to inspire me. Working with Anna Sokolow and Robert Cohan, we gained very directly from fine teachers and artists. I also explored Caribbean dance and other dance forms. When I came to London, I initially stayed with Vera Hyatt who worked at the Arts Council (and then went on to the Guggenheim museum in New York), so I received lots of preview tickets

for art exhibitions. I was able to explore London quite avidly. I worked with Dick Gains and Dick Kuch from the Graham Company, Carolyn Carlson, Matt Mattox, Noemi Lapseson and Bill Louther. I had a great training. And it was a remarkable time, as I met some exceptional people. And one thing that was really important was the fact that I did Pilates constantly with Alan Herdman at The Place throughout my training and professional dance career, which really strengthened me physically (especially my back), so I never had any real injuries.

After completing your training, what was your experience on entering the professional world of dance?
I entered into the professional domain at quite a young age (19 / 20), and I found it all quite intimidating. I, however, took to choreography early on through doing the Gulbenkian dance summer school, so I became a choreographer early on in my career. And in my own time, I taught on summer courses.

What professional Black dance companies/dancers were around at the time?
There weren't many contemporary dance companies around at that time when I was working with Extemporary from 1977, let alone Black dance companies, so there wasn't anything in the way of competition. Extemporary had a special group of people who had drive, commitment and passion, which is why I stayed there for so long.

Apart from myself, there weren't many out there – of course there was Hopal Romans (who danced with both Extemporary and Union). MAAS Movers were around (Greta Mendez). William Louther, and Namron in LCDT, and Brenda Edwards. Michael Joseph, Desmond Harris and Phoenix came later also. Union Dance is responsible for giving opportunities to many Black dancers.

In terms of dance performance, what or who were your major influences?
Alvin Ailey was a big influence. The other big influence was a theatrical one and that was Kantor the Polish surrealist theatre director – who was awarded the Key to Florence. I was influenced by his great works; Dead Class and Weipole, Weipole. I had the opportunity to meet people who became friends and whom I admired, like this special company.

The writer James Baldwin was also a great influence and Nelson Mandela Archbishop Desmond Tutu, all of whom I was fortunate to meet. In terms of classic dance performance, seeing William Louther, one of my teachers, perform to the Peter Maxwell-Davies piece Vesalii Icones at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1970, was one of the best things I'd ever seen. Another influence was Mikhail Baryshnikov and Judith Jamieson in New York. I don't think I've seen anything

like that duet ever – that's knowing it! Pilobolus were another influence, Steve Paxton, contact improvisation and choreographer, Bill Forsyth.

There might be people who are unaware of your particular standpoint regarding your cultural heritage and whether or not it relates to your artistic practice. Bearing this in mind, as a young dancer in the 70s and 80s, did you feel any need to make a statement about your cultural background, or was your main concern your self-expression as an artist, and not necessarily a Black artist?
My main expression was, and is, as an artist – first and foremost. I do have a historical context but my whole theme with Union Dance is unity beyond diversity – that's our mission. My values are very much to do with my identity within the context of dance. The whole empire, the whole empirical context in the 20th century has affected who we are today. We are living in the aftermath of it, so it's unavoidable. I think it's important to reflect upon the past and know one's historical references because you learn a great deal from it. I've always wanted to stretch and cross the boundaries and apply my imagination through that – at a qualitative level. Complete professionalism and depth in work is essential.

Were you aware of the politics of Black dance and did that have any influence on your practice?
I'm aware of the politics of Black dance and in general. I'm from a very political family and background and my family were also part of the church in Cape Town. I was lucky in that there were people who supported me a great deal – and South Africans like Leonie Urdang, who supported me because they believed in what I was trying to achieve. Dick Matchett sponsored one of my first choreographic works and I'll always thank him for that. And in turn, I have supported others – more Black artists have been through Union Dance than any other professional dance company. The company has won awards, travelled all over the world and we're still excited by that. Every project has been strategically run. And I'm very strategic in my approach to running Union Dance, I quite like the business and strategy side of the company – I actually enjoy it, rather than feel like I have to be like that. The company has had vision beyond politics, because I've enjoyed it.

Union Dance started in 1973 as a concept in my head and it relates to holistic elements of Quantum Physics, a world of possibilities. Union also relates to the Hindu deity Shiva who represents transformation, (the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth), and is also known as the King of Dance. I explored Hindu gods and goddesses when working with Chitra Sundaram, so that became an influence in the company. Union is about the unity of all arts, rather than separation. It's about improving upon one's way of thinking – that has been part and parcel

of the movement research on which my work is based. Union is about bringing people together – it's about equality, however not to the lowest common denominator. It's equal according to merit. It hasn't been easy, especially when raising a family and dealing with the stress of the business funding for dance.

So regarding improvement, growth and learning, I completed an MA in design and was a senior lecturer in design at Central St Martins and I'm now an associate lecturer. I really enjoy working with MA students and putting them through the whole aspect of design, from marketing to branding, etc. All my life I've been interested in design and visual arts, and I've tended to gravitate towards other people with the same interest and so my own personal and professional interest in the subject area just grew. And my husband Peter Emina, a producer / director of television, has been a major supportive influence in my work.

Do you think Black dancers in current times are aware of the politics affecting them?
Some of them are – some without realising. There is less support for Black dancers because of lack of financial backing due to parent's circumstances. We tend not to inherit on this level. This puts us more at risk and so it has taken longer for us to progress within the system. We are all immigrants (both in the actual and conceptual sense) in that we have all been, and continue to be, disinherited. And this takes a long time for a dancer to address, whether consciously or subconsciously. So we are often more vulnerable compared to others. Everything is culturally diverse these days. However there are specific political reasons of course why everything isn't the same for everybody, and the knowledge and awareness of history is essential to gain understanding.

What drove you to create Union Dance?
I wanted to give audiences something different. We are still ahead of our time, but sometimes people try to package us in a way that they understand, but in a way that is not necessarily what we are. But it is still exciting that the company is successful, having toured the UK and toured the world and still continues to do well with the company appearing in festivals in Italy and Austria this year. Union Dance aims to be a vehicle for growth and change. We tune into what is present, survey contemporary perceptions and lure them into the open. Through the art of dance we forge a union between the world of mind and matter and the world of spirit, heart and feeling. Mind, body and spirit are viewed through the lens of myth and symbol and related to the challenges of culture and identity.

Every performer and artist in Union is nurtured to explore and express a higher

level within themselves and in the work, to deliver a performance that inspires audiences. We employ a range of movement styles including martial arts, yoga, and capoeira – a union of the discipline of contemporary dance and the energy of street culture. We care for the body and the inner self whilst drawing intellectually on connections between the arts, science and religion.

Exploration has kept us on our toes and will continue to do so. Our commitment to creativity, education, training, research, as well as innovation, experimentation with digital technology, sound, video and sensors have been fundamental to our growth.

In the 21st century Union Dance is 21 years old.

Union has also inspired many generations of people to dance. One time, a parent came up to me and thanked me, as her daughter had loved her time in Union Too, the company's youth group. Union Too has filled the life of young people and made a positive contribution to their lives especially in their teenage years, which is wonderful and which, to me, is a reward in itself. And it's also rewarding to me that so many dancers have stayed in the company for so many years, because they enjoy the work and still find it a great challenge.

What continues to drive you?
I love exciting projects that I can build on. I love devising new ways of producing new work, giving dimension to issues and themes connecting people to the rhythm of life through dance. I find it exciting to produce something from nothing and I find new ideas always stimulating. Union continues to pass on skills and create work that still inspires new audiences and that's a reward as well. I'm committed to motivation – the belief that one must continuously motivate oneself and others.

In African dance, all the performers are choreographers!

Interview with George Dzikunu (with Zagba Oyetey)

by 'Funmi Adewole

George Dzikunu founded Adzido, then Europe's leading traditional African dance company, in 1984. It gained regular funding from the Arts Council in 1991 to support a large full-time contract company of dancers and musicians with a remit to tour Britain and overseas. **George Dzikunu retired in 2001 and returned to Ghana. He now manages a commercial music outfit which tours internationally.**

'Funmi: I am interviewing a number of practitioners about African People's dance….

George: Who qualifies as belonging to the 'African People's dance sector'?

'Funmi: I have my opinion but my opinion is not important at this moment. It is the opinion of the practitioner.

George: I understand. Continue.

'Funmi: What is your background as a dancer?

George: I come as a package. I was born with it, I grew up with it. I am still in it. My family are all musicians and drummers and singers. I started to be involved in African traditional dancing in the family. When I got to an age when I could sustain myself as a professional dancer I went to Accra and went to the Arts Council of Ghana…

It was 1964. That's when I joined an amateur group performing in schools, hotels and festivals around Ghana. In 1970 I then moved on to join the Ghana Dance Ensemble at the University of Ghana. Then I worked under Professor Mamre Opoku. As a personal friend of mine, I used to accompany him to villages

to research and find out about more styles of dancing for our repertoire. This way I learnt more about how he worked. In this way I was with the company for three years. Then I decided to quit and form my own company.

I got help from one man called Amos Opoku who owns a restaurant at Circle (an area) in Accra and we formed a company called Sankofa Cultural Group. Then we came to England in 1974.

'Funmi: I will start from your family…You say you grew up in the village in a family of performers. Was your family paid to perform or did they perform as part of their traditional duties.

George: They performed as part of their traditional duties. As part of that we have a special religious cult in our villages called the Yeba cult, of the deity of thunder. My father was one of the lead dancers in that cult. If someone from that cult died in the village, they would organise dancers and drummers to go and pay homage to the deceased. It was like a performance.

'Funmi: So you learnt that form of dance (of the Yeba cult) at that time?

George: Yes.

'Funmi: When you joined the amateur group were you a paid performer?

George: Yes we were paid. I mentioned only one amateur group but I worked with about six at the time. We were all paid. We went to perform in places like hotels. Actually we were only given allowances but we did it because we loved it. If we did not dance we did not feel happy at the end of the day. If you didn't get chosen to perform you felt you had a problem *(laughs).*

'Funmi: You said the amateur groups were sometimes invited to perform at festivals. What kind of festivals?

George: They were festivals organised by the Arts Council (Ghana) and institutions like that. The festivals were to encourage the amateur groups to compete – there were competitions for Best Costume, Best Choreography, that sort of thing. That is how we developed our own style of presenting dances.

'Funmi: Was there a cross-over of performers, for example the sort of performer your father was and the sort of performer in the amateur group? Did the performers in one context also perform in the other?

George: No. It was two different contexts. The village style is quite different. It is something you will notice even now. If you go there it is still done the same way. Within the Art context and in the Commercial context it was quite different. You had to use the space. You had to use the theatre.

'Funmi: There was theatricalisation.

George: Yes exactly.

'Funmi: How different was the Ghana Dance Ensemble to the amateur groups?

George: The Ghana Dance Ensemble (at the time) was similar in style to the amateur group. It was not like the Ghana Dance Ensemble you have today under Nii Yartey. It was quite similar to any group you saw in Ghana of the day. Opoku really liked traditional dances anyway. Look at Adzido…He took his dances from Ashanti, from the North, from the Volta region: Pan-Ghanaian *(laughs).* The style he worked in, that's where I got my inspiration.

'Funmi: Talking about Opoku, how would he choreograph within that Pan-Ghanaian method?

George: Opoku choreographed with the aim that those who came from the ethnic group of the dance being presented could still identify with the dance. For example, if I choreographed a 'Bata dance', a Yoruba person should be able to see it and still consider it to be 'Bata' and still feel that he or she would be able to join in (if the situation allowed). It should be based on the form itself.

'Funmi: Watching Adowa dancers and some I saw back in Ghana, I saw that Jeanette and Lucas and some of the expert dancers were creating their own movements, though they still retained the basic pattern. Is this the difference between someone who can dance the form and somebody who has just learnt a routine?

George: By saying that…it shows you are ignorant to the form. You might think it was Adowa but it was not Adowa. The first sequence they do is Fontomfrom. We play the big drums. It's more aggressive. It is a war movement. Then in the Ijsu scene they perform Adowa, which is softer.

'Funmi: So the movements are quite specific.

George: Yes when they are dancing they are communicating. Some watch it like

an exhibition if you like, but at the same time they are communicating something. They have an abundance of vocabulary to draw from.

'Funmi: So if you are in the audience, what you get from it depends on who you are. If you are not from the culture you might just enjoy the beauty of the movement. But if you are, you will read other meanings.

George: This is what I am trying to achieve. So that people can enjoy it but also so that people can get to the meaning behind the dances.

'Funmi: Now going back…When you were in Ghana and started Sankofa did you have a particular aim or artistic ambition with that group that was different from when you were part of other amateur groups.

George: When I started the Sankofa group in Ghana I still looked upon Mamre Opoku as my mentor. I copied what he did. My moving now from his style in to the Pan-African style is still similar to what he was doing in Ghana. My mind however is now open to styles from different parts of Africa. But I am still doing dances based on traditional dances and music, having each dance on its own course bearing the same name as it does in the villages. That's how I have gone ahead.

'Funmi: You say 'Opoku's style'. What made Opoku's style, 'Opoku's style'?

George: He would go to the village to research, like I do now, and take the raw movement…and pick out of the movements…Okay in the production we see Atta and Lucas performing Agbaja and they are doing exactly the same thing. This is a style stage. If you put them in a village setting, you will see Atta dancing the same music differently from Lucas. They will all be coming from different angles – depending on where they are coming from and where they want to reach. Depending on who they are 'talking to', who they are looking at in the audience and what they want to communicate to that person. So they will be performing different movements.

But what we tried to achieve on stage that time is to have the same music and have three or four people doing exactly the same thing, so they all communicate the same thing.

'Funmi: So they will be in unison.

George: Yes.

'Funmi: The choreography here is that you, the choreographer, is telling them what to say, whilst in the village context each dancer would interpret what they want to say on their own.

George: Yes.

'Funmi: That means that in the village context each dancer would need an in-depth knowledge of that dance language in order to perform and that means that you, the choreographer, would require a deep enough understanding of that language in order to be able to choreograph a piece.

George: Yes.

'Funmi: Do you find it difficult then when you move from Ghanaian to a dance from another culture, for example you moving into working with a Tanzanian dance, or a dance from the Zulu people?

George: I don't have difficulties because if you know how to walk then you know how to work. This is the same knowledge I have of Ghanain dances I bring to work with them. It depends on whether that dance has a story or whether it is a social dance. What (exactly) are you trying to ask me?

Zagba: There is a mindset that says that the traditional form is complete in itself – because you are trained in a traditional dance you understand the signalling system in it which you can then bring to stage. If you go to another context, and he doesn't just go into another context and say 'I like that and I like that' and watch it and bring it over. There is a process of interaction with other practitioners. They spend time together. If they are speaking Swahili and he does not understand it, he will learn what he has to of it. He will spend about a month there and practitioners come here for a month or more. So that process of observing the traditional form, participating in it and a process of training – which happens during the post-research visit.

But what intrigues me in what you are asking is about choreography. You say choreography here is based on selected items of the dance. So how is that different from choreography anywhere else?

George: I am sure she has a reason for asking that question. Maybe she can complete it.

'Funmi: Yes… I can be clear. I know that choreography depends on the dance

form you are using. So the way that one choreographs ballet depends on what ballet is. You can only, this is my point of view anyway, you can only define what choreography is in the confines of the dance form (or tradition) you are using. For example, if Salsa is 1, 2, 3, 4. You have to base your choreography on the pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4.

Zagba: Can you choreograph on 1, 2?

'Funmi: You can. But the thing is that someone who knows what Salsa is will know that you are making a point or someone who does not will miss the point. You have to know it to know if someone is deviating from it.

Why I am asking these questions is because I want to understand, when it comes to working in the frame of traditional dance – what is choreography?

George: You have to define what choreography is first. In African dance…I always have a problem when we get to this point. We don't have a choreographer in African dance, if you like. Because for me, all the performers are choreographers. People in the village who perform these dances like Achebko are all choreographers in their own right. When we use the word choreography we borrow the idea from another dance art form.

For example – you know, in the Yaa Asantewaa production we are doing now – all the battles, I choreographed them. You will never see them anywhere (other than in this production). Now the storyline is a typical Asante storyline. But I have used war movements (of the battle scene) I have taken them from different parts of Africa. But I have made it look like a battle dance. That is what I have choreographed…

'Funmi: Sorry to interrupt…And the music for the battle, where does it come from?

George: It is all a mixture of different forms. The only typical Asante music is in the Ijsu scene. The battle music is a mixture. If you see the drummers they are playing different drums. If you see Charles he is playing the Zulu rhythm. I pick Charles playing the Zulu rhythms to give the dancers some steps to do. I pick Sammy playing something from my region to play for the Achabeko steps, within the same music. But all rhythms in the music have the same time signature. But then I use their different movements. I am choreographing here. So you have to know where you are coming from.

Zagba: You have to define it…

'Funmi: I think you are both anticipating that you know where I am coming from.

George: *(Laughs)* No…we are talking.

Zagba: No, it is just we don't always get intelligent questioning. Implied in what George is talking about is a need for a re-definition of what choreography means and the appropriateness of European dance terms. You have people asking us 'Do you do dance or do you do ballet?' That does my head in. There are these terms that make us…like the word 'contemporary'. There is this notion that we don't do contemporary dance but what George has just described to you is contemporary. They are contemporary in that we have linked a range of traditional dances…

'Funmi: I understand….I would like to go back to the village….to every dancer being a choreographer. Why do you say that?

George: Because the way that we create dance in the village is that everybody… the drum inspire you. We might dance the same dance step for one hour, two hours, three hours – everyone copying one another. Someone then might say, 'I have a new style', and perform it, and if the community or villagers who dance that form likes it, they keep it. If they don't like it, they might do it once or twice and then it fades away and it is gone. Like so many traditional dances…People say traditional dances are dances of the past. I don't agree. These dances move on. Am I making sense?

'Funmi: Yes.

George: It moves on. Within the village…you can go to the village. We have different styles. If my father is dancing Agbekor and I am dancing Agbekor with him you can see the change. Agbekor was Atamga – the great Oath – that's when the dance was a war dance. We danced with swords. What do you do when you swear an oath? You kill or you fight. But now it is a social dance – Atsiagbekor means 'Stylish dance' and we dance it with horse tails (in hand).

'Funmi: We are even talking about different contexts. The dances were used in different things.

George: No but the dance has changed. It came to another generation and we said 'Why are we using swords. We are not fighting any community. Let's dance with horse tail.'

The Dance Architect:

Interview with Sheron Wray

by 'Funmi Adewole

Sheron works across performance, choreography, writing and directing. She has danced for London Contemporary Dance Theatre and Rambert Dance Company. As Artistic Director, she led her own outfit, JazzXchange music and dance company, for 12 years. Her primary focus is currently on the use of technology as an interface between the audience and the performance.

Throughout your career, who have been your major and most memorable influences: teachers, artists, companies, musicians, etc?
Some of my early teachers – one was Jackie Mitchell and another one was Michele Scott, they taught jazz at the London Studio Centre and Week End Arts College. They were people who actually opened my ears to the music; they specifically used jazz music in their classes and this was a revelation to me, as well as the technique, which was really fulfilling for me at the time. Michele Scott went on to develop a jazz dance syllabus for a Dance Society in Italy (Dance Arts International), she's continued to inspire me because she's continued on the jazz trajectory of research and creation. She went on to study anthropology and she was someone who went in for a depth of understanding. She was always supportive of other dancers and artists – through her teaching she was a great and important influence, and still is.

And then in terms of choreographers, I would say that Christopher Bruce was a huge influence. His work was always a joy to dance. There was a fullness within it, which just made the experience really satisfying. Other choreographers I've enjoyed working with are Darshan Singh Bhuller and Dan Wagoner (a choreographer from the States, who has a really eclectic way of putting his dances together). Obviously Jane Dudley was a great influence and being able to dance her solo work has always been a challenge, but also – again – something that is hugely satisfying. I've also enjoyed collaborating with other choreographers like Rudolfo Fournier from Cuba, Tobias Tak (through JazzXchange) and another Cuban choreographer called Alfredo Velazquez. I've really enjoyed bringing

those influences into my own work, but also appreciating these individuals as choreographers and dancemakers and teachers. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre has always been a company that I've admired because of the level of artistry, and because of the commitment that a group of people have shown in taking the vision of Alvin Ailey into the 21st Century, and because of what they've achieved now in their new building, with the development of their programmes and their various companies. They are a real beacon, because they've maintained, sustained and continue to grow. They are one of the most significant companies in the world.

And then, in terms of musicians, there are many people that I admire; from Julian Joseph, Byron Wallen, Derek Bermel to Zoe Rahman I've been fortunate to work with these artists. One of my mentors, Wynton Marsalis, is simply one of the people that I've met with, that I feel has the greatest of integrity and honesty. They all continue to be beacons and real positive influences.

And there are other women like Corinne Bougaard, who I admire for her tenacity and Beverley Glean, whose vision of Irie! has evolved, she's managed to now reach a point where she has a building base [Moonshot] and from there she'll just continue to go from strength to strength. And that's really, really significant because buildings are what we don't have to support our development. To me, Beverley's development is a signal that things are evolving and that we have to maybe take a different path from what may have been one's original vision. I guess flexibility in this instance is key, as well as fortitude in spite of setbacks. Setbacks will come and they are part of it and you just have to figure out, at some point, that actually – this is part of my growth and there's no such thing as failure, but really that there's a lesson in continuing to grow. I'm very much in admiration of that.

What was your experience of working within LCDT and Rambert, both as a dancer and as a Black person?
As a dancer with LCDT I was one of five dancers of colour and the only female – however there had been a history of Black dancers since the inception of the company,including Bill Louther, Namron, Cathy Lewis, Paul Liburd, Richard Witter, Kenneth Tharp and Brenda Edwards. So, the feeling was that I was just coming into the company completely based on my abilities and my potential to be a company soloist. I was only 19 at the time, but I was clear in my desire to be part of a contemporary dance company. It was a very nurturing environment, the artists were secure in their abilities and there was a hierarchy that was self-evident, based on experience. However, if a new choreographer came along to create a new work and a younger dancer fitted the bill, this was never overshadowed by fixtures of hierarchy. I experienced a range of works

and challenges as a dancer and developed my skills as a teacher, presenter and workshop leader in the 6 years that I was part of the company.

When I joined Rambert, this was on the invitation of Christopher Bruce when he took over the company in 1994. I loved dancing his work and had learnt virtually every part in Rooster when it was in the LCDT repertoire. Rambert had much more of a ballet history and an atmosphere that was more restrained than that of LCDT, and the working atmosphere was less fun and ingratiating of young spirits. When I joined the company, I was a well-established company dancer so had little to be insecure about, but I felt that new young dancers to the company had to prove themselves emphatically, not just with the Artistic Director but also among the dancers.

My experience was very positive overall and being Black made no difference until I was asked to dance a black-face role in Christopher Bruce's Cruel Garden. This went completely against my grain and I could not do it. I did address it directly with the Director and I made the choice to leave. Christopher Bruce remains one of my most admired choreographers, it was a deeply personal decision and, in a way, looking back at it, this episode tells me that there are more important things in life than dance. I did spend four very fulfilled years in the company. When I left, I also reflected on the fact that it was unlikely that I would experience anything truly emitting from my own heritage and my growth as an artist required me to step off from this treadmill – as fun as it might have been, it reached a threshold of development for me.

How did your experience of working with LCDT and Rambert expand you as an artist?
Being in a company showed me all the benefits of being in a nurturing environment and also how much sustenance can be obtained from being in a repertory company. I have continually kept the ideas of nurturing at the heart of what I do and how I work.

Did you take particular ideas or skills from your time with LCDT and Rambert upon setting up JazzXchange?
I took the ideas of rep to JazzXchange. I also was able to expand my notion of what jazz dance can be, as opposed to just adopting what someone else had done historically. I learnt about Dance Organisations and developing a Board of Directors and this led me on the path of developing JazzXchange into a charity. It also taught me about the range of skills that I have and that there is always a point to extending one's knowledge and research base.

Tell me about the development of JazzXchange.
I was in the middle of Soho, New York, and I just had the vision of the name and wrote down some very enthusiastic aims and objectives. I came back home and called up many of my contemporaries – friends and people I hadn't seen since we'd graduated (it was about 4 years on from graduation) – and a lot of the dancers that I had graduated with were still not really working fully in dance – I was already with LCDT, so I was fully engaged. And there were a lot of really talented people that just weren't doing anything really significant with their talent. So I just called up about 11 people and we all decided to put together one performance, most of us choreographed part of it and then we also invited Michele Scott to make a piece for us. And we put on one performance which was part of Weekend Arts College's 20th anniversary celebrations. And that performance was really well received, other people were really enthusiastic about it and excited about the energy and the people that they saw dancing. So, then we continued to do a few other one-off shows. And what was a collective then gradually became very much down to my drive. Not because I wanted it to be, but because circumstances were such that the other people had other concerns and so, over time, it became more about my own work, and finding financial resources to bring other choreographers in. There were a lot of people who danced with the company in the first few years, who then became much more confident and had more really good opportunities in other companies and other more high-profiled productions, such as Stomp and the Lion King. So I believe that it was something that set people on their way and raised people's awareness of certain dancers and their talents. I did have aspirations for it not to be just my company, but maybe that was naïve idealism – the reality was different from that.

So were these dancers working within jazz, or were they dancers that you just knew had the ability and would gel with your vision?
They were people that were really well-trained jazz dancers and they'd also trained in contemporary dance, but their focus really was jazz. People like Melanie Joseph, Lorraine Le Blanc, Suzette Rocca, Alison Desbois, Leon Morris Jones, Denzil Bailey, Nikki Woollaston and Bonnie Oddie. And right from the beginning we collaborated with musicians and had live music; the essence of the company was about us bringing the music and the dance back together, without the commercial boundaries defining what jazz should be.

Over the years you've shown yourself to be somewhat eclectic, through choosing to explore many different forms, e.g. Cuban, African, Jazz. What draws you to these dance forms and how do they inform your choreography? And is there a bigger picture that you are looking at, or are you just separately choosing to explore these different aesthetics

as more of a personal investigation?
For me, it's very much about going to the source. So, when I studied jazz technique, particularly Matt Mattox/Jack Cole – if anybody knows anything about that technique, they'll know that it's actually built upon lots of different influences, from Bharatanatyam, West African dance, Flamenco – it's all visible within the technique. So, my thinking was; well this is a person that has acquired and devised this technique and this way of training the body and developing a vocabulary that has come out of his exploration of these various forms of dance and he was hugely influenced by Jack Cole, who also studied those various forms. And for me it's about not necessarily purely adopting these principles as a given defining technique of jazz, but actually this is someone's version of a jazz technique of expressing this style, this music, this way. So my exploration is all about expressing my version, my aesthetic, my vision of what jazz is – it's all combined, it's not separate. It's about deepening one's own knowledge and having the freedom to be able to move within and without those received boundaries.

So, do you see yourself developing a 'Sheron Wray' form of expression or technique?
I haven't had that in mind but I think it's probably something that will come.

As a dancer who's worked in both mainstream companies and within independent projects, you wear many different hats; you've been the dancer, the choreographer, the researcher, the Black role model and then there's the areas of politics that you may have found yourself within, through the work you've done with ADAD. What particular challenges have you faced within these roles and how do you balance and deal with these challenges?
Well I've been very fortunate; I've also worked very hard. But I have also been very fortunate to have had very good people around me as mentors, far away in some cases, but I've always been able to talk to someone when I've reached a point of frustration – which happens. And I think it's been about when I've got to a point of frustration, where I feel that I'm not able to articulate or communicate whatever it is that I want to do and see a way through which to do it, I've often turned to developing myself in another way, such as going back and studying further. When I did my MA, I focused the study on the development of my improvisation methodology, so coming out of that, I then have something that actually may not be a technique as such, but it is an approach which is quite distinct in the practice of jazz dance performance in relation to live music.
So that's often how I've dealt with points of frustration. And also, I've spent time writing and looking at other people's work and using my other skills in terms of, again, expanding my mind and understanding the breadth of possibilities within the dance world. Through my NESTA fellowship, I was able to really look

at technology in a very new way, in terms of performance.

The whole political arena, as far as Black dance is concerned, is very interwoven with other art forms, so the issues that we face within dance are not so dissimilar to what they face in visual arts, what they face in film. And so, for me, it's been about building allegiances, bridges, relationships with people from different art forms and understanding that it's not all personal and actually there's a bigger picture that we're all trying to navigate our way through.

And then lastly, and probably most significantly, I give. If I'm not giving, I don't feel balanced, so I've actually started to develop a mentoring role with other dancers, some younger, and some of a similar age, but who are looking for a different way through their careers and I've found that to be really satisfying – just to share my experiences and help where I can help and give out information that I have, or people that I know that people need to contact, or lobby. I don't claim to have the answer because, if I was to ask myself if I am where I want to be, I would say no, but equally I'd say I'm very happy at this point because I'm active and I'm giving. So, that's the critical point and I have the energy to do that. There's a lot of apathy within the Black dance sector in this country and it's not difficult to see why it's like that, but that kind of malaise is toxic and it just takes away all of what we have. So, for me, the giving dimension is really important and that in itself is very satisfying.

You've spoken a little about it already, but tell us more about your vision both for JazzXchange and for Sheron Wray, the dance architect? I see Sheron Wray, the dance architect, as being separate from the work you've done with JazzXchange.

Yes in some ways it is separate, but I suppose that, when I called myself a dance architect, that was to actually refine what it is that I do, because I'm very much a collaborator and I very much work with different art forms. And thinking about architecture and what an architect does, I made that comparison or used that as an analogy for what it is that I do, in terms of creating work, collaborating, advocacy, writing about dance – it's all about bringing dance forward to communicate its possibilities. I'm very interested in making work that can be accessed from different points. For example, the work I'm doing with technology is actually looking at people who wouldn't necessarily choose to involve themselves with performance but, with the use of mobile phone technology, it becomes another way of engaging people so, by default, they will actually get involved in seeing and taking part in a dance performance in a new way. But also, that whole area comes out of much of the work I've done in jazz, because actually the whole thing is about improvisation and extending the

improvisation within the audience, so it's allowing the audience to influence what's happening and that performance unfolds and, in part, it's an improvisation that's got very clear structures and its points of entry, which are given and shaped by the architect, but they are non-linear. So for me that's an interesting way to extend what dance can do and also using the thinking beyond the dance space and that's what I'm doing now with Texterritory – taking the format and looking at other contexts where there is an audience and there is a performance or presenter and how one can use the technology to engage the audience in a new way. So in a way it's taking the research and the work that I've done within dance into another sphere altogether. But the underlying principles of that are still performance and communication. So that's the place that I'm focused on; it's quite a revolutionary proposition and we will see whether it will work.

So would you hope to bring together a company at some point?
Right now, the desire to have a company is the same as it ever was. But it's about having the right resources and to have a project company that's under-resourced at this point is not something that I'm aspiring to. There are other collaborative projects that I'm working on with composers that I'm hoping will be fully realised, but in terms of JazzXchange being that company that I had the vision of 10 years ago or so, I'm not sure that that's really on my agenda right now. My project has now expanded to incorporate the integration of technology in this very audience-centric way and I have a much more international perspective now. London is just one corner, it has a lot, but it also has a lot of hype, once one starts to look beyond the British Isles, there are some marvellous examples of creativity, artistic excellence and achievement.

The UK doesn't have a major jazz dance company at the moment…
No it doesn't, and it's been that way for some time. But you see, that's because there isn't really an understanding or an appetite to understand. And also, there have been particular things that have happened to me at various stages of my life that have prevented me from being able to take advantage of certain circumstances, which would have maybe allowed me to push things more. So it's not all about infrastructure and stakeholders and all that, but actually it's just about things being aligned. But I think in time, once I've established where Texterritory is going, that there'll be a means for me to be able to do a lot more. It's that same old maxim – you may have to go a long way to go a very short distance and, in the meantime, I hope to live my 'other' life on the route of this journey a little bit more.

To find out more about the work and research of Sheron Wray, go to:

www.sheronwray.com

www.texterritory.com

How you feel the dance:

Interview with Peter Badejo OBE

by Ukachi Akalawu
September 2006

Peter Badejo is an outstanding Nigerian choreographer, dancer, African performance specialist and academic. He is the Artistic Director of Badejo Arts, which he founded in 1990. He was awarded an OBE in 2001 in recognition of his work with and commitment to African People's Dance.

In 1993, Peter Badejo gave a position paper at a conference facilitated by the Dance Department of the Arts Council. The theme of the conference was 'What is Black Dance in Britain?', which was also the title of Peter's position paper. This meeting of minds was attended by, amongst others, Delia Barker, Julia Carruthers, Hilary Carty, Donald Edwards, Mark Elie, Shreela Ghosh, Rachel Gibson, Ruth Grosvenor, Jackie Guy, Carolene Hinds, Jean Johnson Jones, Bode Lawal, and Judith Palmer.

Peter Badejo, when presenting his paper, talked about the myriad issues which seem to have surrounded Black dance for too long:

- Definition
- Multiple functions of African People's Dance
- Investment
- Survival versus Art
- Convenient funding labels
- Funding to fail
- Dealing with venues
- Education, Training and professional development of artists
- Administration
- Leadership

In 2006, ADAD spoke to Peter Badejo to get his reflections on his seminal position paper and to gauge his thoughts on the last 13 years of Black dance in Britain.

Peter, the issues that you highlighted in your position paper – do you still stand by the viewpoint you took, back in 1993?
Yes, for the most part I do stand by what I said in 1993, although many events and situations have affected my views since then; particularly in the African dance sector. If anything, I've changed my mind about the term African People's Dance, which has become so polluted, that I have completely turned my back on the term. I've gone back to the original term itself – African Dance. People can do aspects of it, they can use various forms of it, but the term African People's Dance has become so encompassing that it is meaningless, in the sense that the term represents a bleaching of culture – you bleach the essence of Africa itself. Ten years have passed and we are still unable to identify our dance via a technique, so we are still basing it on a broad, yet undefined, concept of Africa. Africa is a continent of many meanings and it is many things to many people. So, we are still unclear about what we mean by African Dance, for me this means that – things have not improved and, if anything, there is a decline.

Where do you stand within this argument, in terms of the direction of your work?
Quite a number of things have changed within my work – some are for good, some I have regrets about. For example, if you look at my ideas about training, I think I have deviated a little bit in the sense that my initial understanding and belief that music, dance and movement in Africa are interwoven and must be taught as such, have changed. In my earlier work, I used to teach both (the dance and the music) so that people could clearly understand the relationship and I think now, because we lack institutional development, I have inadvertently slipped a little bit in terms of my work. I've put more emphasis on dance as movement and not really given the two qualities the equal attention they deserve. So, in that sense, I think that the approach to my work has changed. But, in another sense, I've also gained in that I've been able to push my work into certain directions where I think we should be aiming.

But again you must realise that part of the problem is that in Britain, we don't have the institutional support for the development of African Dance and the exploration of the range of techniques that would support its future development – the support is not there. We don't have institutions; we've never even had an incubating centre up untill today. African Dance on a professional level has been going on for at least 50 years in this country, yet we cannot name one theatre or arts space where we can find African Dance artists really developing their work, or showing the development of their work to audiences. So we are still at the same place, in fact because of the lack of institutional support and experimentation, we are even in a worse situation.

When I first came here, quite a number of venues would take a risk on African Dance productions. In fact, many were eager to try it, despite the significantly fewer number of Africans in this country at the time. They wouldn't just see it as something incomprehensible, or assume that audiences wouldn't be interested. But now, fewer and fewer venues have presented African Dance over the years and consequently there are fewer opportunities arising for people to create work; for example – an incubating centre or laboratory, where people can develop their work without fear. Many artists are now so scared, because they think that maybe if they receive £1000 funding, and then don't do exactly what the funder wants to see, they will lose that money and any subsequent opportunities. People are faced with the stark reality of survival and possible starvation if they get it wrong. Given that most African Dance practitioners (in common with their contemporaries in other dance forms) have no other interest or expertise, the danger of falling out with the funders weighs heavily on their minds, knowing that the alternative is a penurious life – working as a cleaner or minicabing, at best. There appears to be a direct correlation between our work and poverty. Yes, it's true – the poverty that faces them when they defy the wishes of the funders and their funding is withdrawn. As a result of this, people are so poor they are not in control of anything, not even their own artistic expression or the presentation of it. They are forced to perform in certain ways, they are forced to teach in certain ways.

Where are all the subtle dances of Africa? Where are they? The subtlety that you find in traditional African dances, where are they? Lost and gone, to satisfy what the artists think is expected, all sweat and no brains style of dancing? Everybody's talking about building a six, seven, ten pack, so that they can show off their bodies in African Dance, is that what African Dance is? It's not! If you look at the forms there are quite a number of dances, even in traditional African dances, where the nuances of the movement are within the body, so it's how you feel the dance, not how you look. But we have become exhibitionists.

Well, people have a certain perception of Africa and they are comfortable with those perceptions. And it causes confusion when they are presented with something different, because then they feel they can't understand the subtleties and nuances and complexities and thus can't engage with it.
Yes. People who shout and call for contemporary African dance, I'm sure if they were slapped in the face with the reality of Contemporary African dance, they would not recognise it, because that's not what their perception is of what Africans are in the contemporary world. So, it's one thing to say that you want the development of contemporary African dance, it's another thing to accept what contemporary African dance actually is for the Africans themselves. Occasionally we slip through the net – one African dance company does one

thing that interests one person among the funding authorities, or the economic powers, and that company is sponsored. Finished! Because it's rootless. There is no building of understanding, no critical mass, no academic support, no intellectual support for such work. So, that company will last for a few years, then it dies off and that's the end of that. Then a new one is sorted, it is all about changing fashion.

We have spent over 10 years since that conference and we have not been able to access the tap root of what African artistic expression is in terms of dance in this country. It's a shame. If you look at it, every artistic expression that was developed 10, 20 years ago has contributed to the present development of those forms. However, look at Adzido. Where are the experiences, the 20 years of experience that was built by Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble? Everything couldn't have been bad with the company. But where is that knowledge and experience today? For African Dance here, there's no storehouse, there's no powerhouse for us to tap from. Can we say 'Alright, these are the things that worked with Adzido, these are things that did not work with Adzido, that our young people can follow and build on?' Adzido is not the only one. Look at Kokuma. What happened with all the experiences of Kokuma? Look at Badejo Arts. You begin to believe that we are programmed to start, develop, and fail within a particular period of our existence.

So, now new faces are around, new Black faces are on the block. Give it another 10 years, they will also be gone. Whether it's Hip Hop, whether it's street dance, give it whatever name you like. It will be the same situation. Now we can see what's going on in MOBO [referring to the MOBO Awards 2006 decision to drop their Jazz category]. And I'm sure it's going to happen in what they are now calling DOBO (Dance of Black Origin). It's just a matter of time. What is DOBO? What is MOBO? Music of Black Origin? What is that, what is it supposed to mean? It has climaxed in this MOBO of 2006, where the origin of Black music and songs was flipped out. Are we saying that jazz is no more? If jazz is not there in the music of African peoples, what is black music? Are we also going to say that classical European music is no more? Music, especially in the West, has gone far. Music is already an industry, but dance is not an industry. But we are always nibbling their heels, following the music industry. And sure enough, people have been talking about DOBO. Dance of Black Origin. I don't know what that means. I hope that by the time that term begins to be used seriously, I've left the scene. By that time, anything will be acceptable under that term.

What is painful is that before we even begin to crawl they want us to run. Some people will say 'Are you then saying that there is no British Black Dance?'

What is that? We all live in Britain. But what makes Britain so interesting on the world stage is the multiculturalism that built this place called Britain. The British experience is the bringing together of, and respect for all those artists that make, this multi-ethnic expression in Britain. That's what makes it interesting. Otherwise, what is British? But to do it, you've got to respect, you've got to value, put equal value on those cultural aspects. And to do that, you have to remember that training and education are very, very essential. That is the heart of it. It is a shame that today, 80% of the people who started African Dance, when I first came into this country, are doing menial jobs, care work, cleaning, driving and other unskilled work. They have not been able to develop their artistic talent and skill. Dance was a 9-5 job for them and there was no place for them to develop their artistic talents. So, when they got older – what happened to them?

Nowhere to go! From the beginning, in the African dance sector, practitioners weren't encouraged to think as artists. When you look at Western contemporary dance (mark this, the word contemporary is not the preserve of one particular group), but when you look at Western contemporary dance, because quite a number of those practitioners are trained, they think as artists, they think about self-development, they think about their own artistic expression, they think about developing choreographic skills and becoming better performers. If they want to be dancers at their old age, the sector has the facilities to develop them. The sector benefits from the developed institution. But if you look at African Dance, 80% of the people who practice traditional African dance didn't get the opportunity to go to school. We've gone beyond using the farmer's experience in the London street. It doesn't work. We live in an era of technology, era of television, where there are hundreds of TV stations. Sometimes you sit in front of the television and flip from channel to channel, which is a reflection of how the minds of present day audiences work. They want to flip through cultures. So if you present kpanlogo[i] today, kpanlogo tomorrow and kpanlogo the next day, the audiences will be bored of the same thing. That's why we must talk about developing techniques of dance to give the practitioners the necessary tools to create new works in African Dance. I'm working on Bata[ii] dance. Working towards developing BataBade dance technique. I don't have the support I need, (not just money but the institutional and infrastructural support) but that will not stop the process of the development. I'm not saying Bata is the only dance technique that is needed. Other African dance techniques should be developed. Once this is done, it will provide the tools for practitioners and a better understanding for audiences and analysts. People who are interested in that form can pick it up and say 'Alright now, I have the ABCs of this particular dance form and now I want to be able to use it to create my own expression, to say what I want to say.'

And then, of course, it makes it more accessible to all sorts of people, regardless of their heritage.
Yes, it wouldn't matter. For example, if you study ballet in Jamaica, and you study ballet in Nigeria, and you study ballet in China, you go through the same plié, rélevé, bar exercise and training. So when ballet is mentioned, there is a common language that everyone knows. The same thing should be true for African dances.

So, in your opinion, is the direction of creating tools for education and training one solution for the development and stabilisation of African Dance practice in Britain?
Absolutely! For example, take River Dance. It has a specific heritage, style, technique, music and form that is recognizable anywhere that it is learned or performed. It has a location, a place in time, in a culture and in history. I don't mean that it is stagnant, no! Not at all, but I do mean that if one wants to learn River Dance, then one must learn those aspects of it that make it what it is and not something else. Creativity will follow from an understanding of what River Dance is. The same should be true for African Dance. No one denies that it has a specific heritage on the African continent, but we have yet to codify it with respect to its style, techniques, music and forms that distinguish it, no matter where and no matter who teaches or performs it. And I am not saying that there is only one African Dance, no I am saying that there are African dances that have their own credibility and cultural context, by which they must be identified and respected. These are the tools for education and training that I believe will help to develop and stabilize the vitality, spirit and meaning of African dances. From here we can institutionalize African dances.

[I] Kpanlogo is a particular dance from Ghana

[II] Bata dance is a dance form of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Bata has a history of flexibility and hybridity – since the Atlantic slave trade it has been adopted and adapted by different diasporic Africans from Cuba, Trinidad and Brazil

I have been labelled a Black dancer, but never a White dancer!

Interview with Kenneth Olumuyiwa Tharp OBE

by Laura Griffiths

Kenneth danced with London Contemporary Dance Theatre (1981-1994), where he created many roles including Death in Kim Brandstrup's Orfeo. In 2003 Kenneth was awarded an OBE for services to dance. At the time of interview, he was Artistic Advisor and Lead Artist for The Royal Ballet School's Dance Partnership and Access Programme and was Assistant to the Head of Contemporary Dance at Millennium Dance 2000. He assumed the role of Chief Executive of The Place, London in September 2007.

When did you develop an interest in dance?
I started classical ballet at the age of five, while living in Glasgow. My parents saw something in me that they felt needed an outlet. In hindsight, it seems rather unlikely – a mixed race, half Nigerian, half English, young Glaswegian boy should have discovered a love of classical ballet at the age of five. However at the time it seemed quite natural to me and once I started I never really stopped. It was in my mid-teens that I made the decision to pursue a career in dance and began to focus more seriously on my training. I realised that I wanted to do more and more of it. My parents supported me wholeheartedly and provided me with opportunities that nurtured my passion. Without them, my talent would have remained unrealised.

Did you participate in any other dance forms during your formal training?
At the age of seven and a half I moved to Cambridge and began training with a Russian ballet teacher, Nina Hubbard. She introduced me to Russian and Hungarian folk dance forms. The folk forms were peripheral to my ballet training, which was the core of my dance experience until the age of 18, but nonetheless very important to me.

What are some memorable/inspiring moments during your development as a dancer?
There are numerous influences and a long list of people who have supplied many memorable moments…I have been very lucky, especially during the early stages of training with Catherine Marks (Glasgow) and Nina Hubbard (Cambridge). These two figures had a huge influence on me and instilled in me a sense of discipline as well as a love for dance. I was regularly the only boy in class, or at best one of two or three. By the time I started my full time training, I was desperate to experience an environment with other males, to be in a more competitive environment, which had been absent from my training up to that point.

Two years before beginning my training at The Place, I was lucky enough to attend the Yorkshire Ballet Seminars and to be taught by members of Les Ballets Russes, including Dame Alicia Markova, Irina Baronova and Alexandra Danilova. This was an immensely memorable experience. I remember being inspired by their stories and meeting numerous knowledgeable figures of dance through the talks, performances and workshops. There were also other boys present and I appreciated this, as I was able to raise my game. One of the boys who I met that summer was Russell Maliphant.

What were the differences between your training at The Place and your earlier classical training?
Having mentioned Russell Maliphant, who went to train at the Royal Ballet School when I went to train at The Place, I remember an observation he made fairly early on, that 'contemporary dance is not just another way of moving, it is another way of thinking'. I've never forgotten that statement; even now I am struck by what an astute observation it was for a young dancer. The shift from one genre to another is greater than simply a physical adjustment. I began my contemporary training with a rather narrow/particular set of aesthetics, which didn't allow for much else and needed to make an adjustment. This process of changing ways of thinking takes place gradually in the dance studio. Now, as a teacher, when working with dancers who have had a huge amount of classical training, in order to change their approach, I am aware that it is not necessarily a process of taking something away from them, but of opening

a new way of thinking. The concept of aesthetic value is something that changes very subtly and imperceptibly over time. Suddenly one realises that they are seeing things differently, or finding value in something that would have been dismissed before.

Shortly before I started training at The Place, I went to see London Contemporary Dance Theatre in performance and I was completely bowled over. Some of the work seemed strange and alien to me, yet I recognised a refinement in the dancers that, up until then, I had only really seen in classical ballet. The difference was that I could recognise the individuality in the performers. I was incredibly drawn to this and it became my goal. This was a large shift from the work I had seen before and it caused me to be extremely motivated and driven whilst at The Place. I was very focused and I gained more than just technical dance training. The way people taught, the connections they would make and imagery they used…one was not just learning about dance but something much deeper. This is something I am especially grateful for, the array of fantastic teachers I've encountered have taught me so much about myself, about life and about how to be. To me, contemporary dance was more than just steps. It was a fantastic vehicle for discovering more about myself. Learning and practicing what it means to be totally present every day, the hard work, the constant pressure. It was truly a gift to have access to the training I received.

While I was a part of London Contemporary Dance Theatre (LCDT), I was offered countless opportunities to work with outstanding choreographers, including Jane Dudley, Robert Cohan, Robert North, Dan Wagoner, Christopher Bruce, Richard Alston, Siobhan Davies and Bill T Jones. Working with Robert Cohan, in particular, made a huge impact on me, but each of these people has made an impact on me through their individual expertise, I can't compare them to each other. I felt an incredible sense of responsibility dancing for such significant figures.

As I look back on my experience I also recognise that my fellow dancers (at LCDT), both inspired me and nurtured my talent with a sense of great generosity. As a younger dancer I was fortunate to begin my career in a nurturing community.

Which pieces did you most enjoy performing?
I particularly enjoyed dancing Paul Taylor's work, especially Esplanade, which was a marriage of my passions for dance and music. Secondly, Robert Cohan's work Class, which was remounted in 2005 in Cologne as part of Cohan's 80th birthday celebrations, and I was reminded of how demanding yet exhilarating the work is. If only I could have the experience I have now with the vigour I had fifteen years ago!

Another landmark was the first time I worked with Kim Brandstrup for LCDT. Because of its narrative nature, Kim's work challenged me to dig deeper in order to embody a different persona. Without the inspiration of these choreographers, I may not have had the drive to continue my career in contemporary dance for as long as I did.

How has your passion for both music and dance influenced your choices in your own work?
In Western culture, a person tends to train in either dance or music. The result is that musicians can lose touch with their bodies and dancers become disconnected from music. I feel most alive working in the place where music and dance meet. I find it interesting that in African and Indonesian cultures for example, the two disciplines are almost inseparable. In Western culture, we have incredible freedom of choice but somehow have to work much harder to bring the two separate things together. I have worked on a series of works using live Gamelan to accompany choreography and dance classes.

Was being of mixed race a hindrance to you throughout your career; were you ever aware of any negative perceptions at the time?
That sense of identity is an interesting area for me. My own sense of identity is something I take seriously, however the way other people perceive me is something I tend not to dwell on, simply because often people can hold fixed views and are unwilling to change. For example, in Nigeria because of having paler skin I would be identified as a White/English man and in other predominantly White cultures I may be perceived as being a Black man. I am very aware that people react to me in different ways, which probably says more about them than it does me. People see me through whichever lens they choose. I have sometimes been referred to as a Black dancer, Black choreographer and even an avant-garde choreographer. None of these are labels I would give to myself. Being of mixed-race and growing up as a product of two cultures, I often end up in the privileged position of 'other'. I am neither Black nor White, however I have never been labelled as a White dancer, which I find interesting. If I am ever labelled, it is as a Black dancer. Even though I am a product of two very different cultures, I am still very conscious of how British I am. I am unable to choose the label Black or White at the expense of the other without cutting off a part of myself.

I am not sure whether it is a result of my personal experiences, but I rarely want to look at things from one point of view. For me the truth always seems to fall outside of what I am presented with; there is always another point of view.

During my time at London Contemporary Dance Theatre, I remember being asked

a question by some young teenage interviewers: 'As a Black dancer how do you feel about….'. I had to pause before answering, as I felt I could not answer the question because the assumption had been made that I thought of myself as a Black dancer. I could not answer the question based on that assumption, as I didn't think like 'a Black dancer'. I did not want to deny my identity, however I felt I could not carry that label, or speak with that identity because that is not how I think of myself. My identity as a dancer has come through my contemporary heritage and the classical ballet in my earlier experiences. This is where I feel I take my artistic identity; anything else comes second.

The idea of labels such as Black Dance are nonsensical to me and raise questions that I am unable to answer. Take, for example, a choreographer like Maliphant, who takes his influence from Capoeira and other cultures, how would he be labelled? When a person embraces another culture in an artistic entity, how are they labelled? It is what they do, rather than who they are. For me the label is unhelpful. While travelling in South Africa when I mentioned this idea of Black Dance, this label was an absurd concept to them. I am very uncomfortable with labels. Whereas I can understand that my work has been judged under the label Black Dance, being labelled as an Avant-Garde choreographer took me by surprise. I think this may have come from the fact that I worked with a composer under the title of Artyfartyarts.

How do you describe your own work?
My work changes so much depending on the context in which I am working. Each approach leads to a different product, although how I work with professionals is increasingly similar to the way I work with people with no dance training – just at another level. My responsibility as author means I have a loyalty to the dancers, the generation of their work and the creative process. I always acknowledge choreographic collaborations, regardless of directing the work. I don't feel comfortable taking sole authorship where the process has been much more collaborative. Also, by allowing a more autonomous and creative process for the dancers, they tend to develop a greater sense of ownership and individual artistic integrity.

Any other notes?
I feel that my identity is not singularly as a choreographer, regardless of the fact that I have choreographed over 40 pieces. Having so many other interests means I do not relate to one single identity. For me, it is about individual development and as a teacher seeing someone embark upon a journey and watching him or her grow is what truly motivates me.

Aesthetics and Form

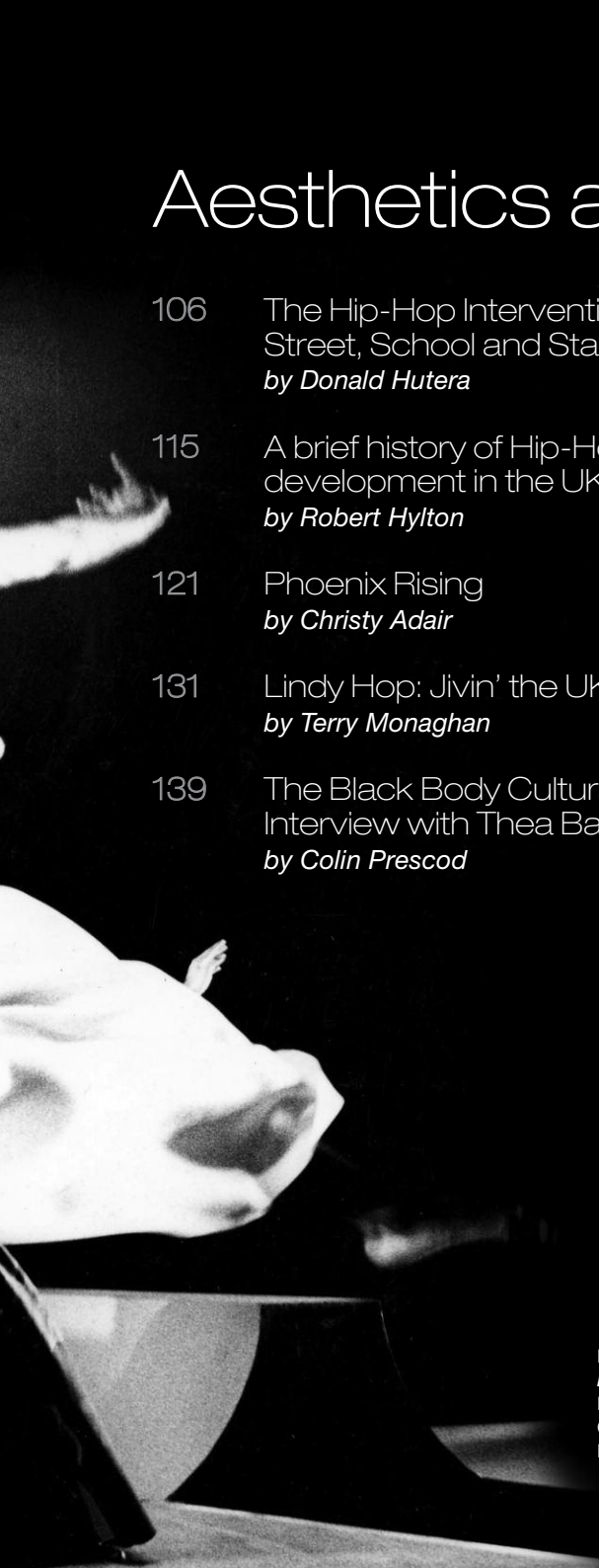

Photo: *Consolation of the Rising Moon*
London Contemporary Dance Theatre 1971
Dancer: William Louther
Choreographer: Robert Cohan
Photographer: Anthony Crickmay

The Hip Hop Intervention:

Street, School and Stage

by Donald Hutera

Born in the US, but resident in the UK since the early 1980s, Donald Hutera has been writing on the arts since 1977. Publications in which his work has appeared include The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and The Chicago Tribune, The Times, Time Out, Dance Europe and Dance Now. Donald co-authored (with Allen Robertson) The Dance Handbook and has contributed to the Chambers Biographical Dictionary and the International Dictionary of Modern Dance.

As fashion, philosophy and commercial force, the ever-expanding hip hop empire transcends race, class, age and economic status. Generally acknowledged to have originated in the Bronx circa the 1970s, this international phenomenon has become a powerful influence on what we wear, listen to and see. 'When you jump on a train and see graffiti,' says British hip hop theatre artist Jonzi D, 'that's hip hop culture.'

In dance, the jump from street to stage is shortening too. Hip hop's global reach has done more than fuel the music industry and make multi-millionaires out of ghetto brats. In countries like Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and, of course, the United States, street and club dance keeps on developing as entertainment and/or artistic practice with potentially huge crossover appeal.

Britain appears to be lagging in terms of public recognition and funding for hip hop arts. This needs to be rectified, especially given the quality and imaginative reach of such home-grown talent as Jonzi D, Benji Reid, Kompany Malakhi's Kwesi Johnson, Robert Hylton, Allan Irvine and others. In the dance field moves are afoot to raise the artistic profile of these and other UK hip hop practitioners and widen their educational and production possibilities.

Judi McCartney, of the Brixton agency Independance, is in the vanguard of such activity. Having produced Kompany Malakhi's touring hit A Hip Hopstory, she is spearheading the formation of a performance and workshop ensemble dubbed The Hip Hop Collective. This fusion of British, French and American B-Boys and Girls has been available for touring and teaching since 2004. The Collective is also expected to be central to The Art of Hip Hop, a collaboration between Independance, East London Dance and Sadler's Wells Theatre. This joint initiative was launched at the Wells as a hip hop jam. Spilling between public areas and the stage, the day-long event encompassed amateur battles and demonstrations alongside professional performances by established British artists, as well as international guests, including Montreal's Rubberbandance Group.

My hunch is that there is an audience ready to dive into this or similar high-profile occasions. They may not necessarily be dancers themselves, much less regular dance-goers, but they are probably young and culturally up-to-the-minute. But how familiar are they with the movers and shakers of hip hop dance and dance-theatre from the UK or abroad? And do they know what's currently available to themselves?

Many of Britain's national dance agencies, as well as virtually all commercial dance studios and arts-focused community centres, feature classes in hip hop or other street-derived styles that help cultivate a taste for these forms. Choreographer Kate Prince, whose company ZooNation was launched in 2002, teaches dance in London. When conducting youth projects, she says, 'The only thing I can get the kids interested in is hip hop.' That interest is likely to grow if, as Prince observes, 'More innovative American styles keep coming over to the UK. They're really playing around with rhythm there.'

Whatever the source of individual moves, street dance styles are plainly not something you pick up overnight. As with any artistic vocation, dedication is paramount. Robert Hylton says he got his training '... in my bedroom, at the gym, clubs.' For his part Kwesi Johnson says, 'You just practice anywhere and everywhere.' It's often this same devotion that prompts a street dancer to brave professional dance training. 'I couldn't do anything else,' admits dancer and teacher Banxy, speaking (with Hylton and Johnson) at the South Bank's Facts and Frictions conference in August 2003. 'I was a dancer and that's it. The best thing to do was to go to a dance school and learn some other styles, keeping what I had but just being a bit more open. Dance school makes you more professional. You turn up to rehearsals and video shoots on time, making sure you're warmed up.'

As a budding student, Hylton retrospectively considers himself terribly naive. 'I just didn't have a clue, basically. I just wanted to dance. I liked to learn and so I studied. My body adapted to contemporary dance. However, if I was to be a complete artist, why should I leave the person I was before behind? For me to be the best dancer I can be, I've got all these other things. Even with contemporary dance, when I didn't understand it, I would go back home and start bodypopping. Because that was what I knew. It made sense physically. Then after awhile the ballet came into it. And I'm like, 'Yeah, cool. If I've earned it and I've studied it, I'll use it.' And it just built from there.'

Even in a form as fluid as hip hop, the value of formal dance training can't be underestimated. 'When I was at college I was a street dancer,' says Banxy. 'Then after a couple of years I wasn't any more. But the discipline was there.'

'That discipline you get from college helps a lot,' Johnson avows. 'The professionalism and whole attitude to learning you acquire, leads you to explore new movement.' Passing such hard-won wisdom on to young students isn't easy. 'With the youth culture these days, everything is so immediate. It's like, 'I gave you ten pounds. Why can't I buy a head-spin?' If you're teaching a breaking workshop or street dance, that's usually the first thing they want. They don't understand that to do it right might take you two years. It's an investment, almost like learning a martial art. You can't just walk into a workshop and go out doing head spins. You have to study the philosophy along with the movement. What I try to do when I'm teaching is let them understand that without the foundation a house will fall down.'

'We've all taught a two-hour class of kids,' adds Banxy. 'It's gotta be basic. You kinda show them how hard it is, but then I'll just add something in-between it all. 'Whooooooooaaaaa! Do it again!' I'll say, 'See how I connected it? Now if you connect the same moves together, you'll do it a little bit differently. That's your character coming into it – your body, your individuality.' Then I'll just leave them to come up with their own ideas.'

As for hip hop's effect on British contemporary dance, motives and opinions vary. 'The majority of our dancers were original British B-Boys,' says Corinne Bougaard, Artistic Director of Union Dance. This popular and culturally diverse troupe has worked closely with New York choreographer and erstwhile 'club kid' Doug Elkins for nearly a decade. 'We're not about fads,' Bougaard insists. 'We're also not elitist about the languages we use to comment on pop culture. We treat everything as equal.'

For others, equality is a lesser priority. Hylton has coined the term 'urban classicism' to describe his idiosyncratic brand of street, jazz, ballet and modern styles. He is disarmingly frank when it comes to assessing his own achievements, while remaining true to his calling. 'I'm doing the best I can with the dancers and the budget I've got. I know everything I've done is incomplete. I also know I've got a masterpiece in me.'

As hinted at earlier, Hylton can be severe on the subject of contemporary dance. 'Art is built from its environment, but contemporary dance doesn't acknowledge anything except itself. I'm not feeling forced to frame my work for such a massive but one-dimensional perspective. There are many other creative personalities out there who are realising their ability to produce something of their own.'

'Hip hop is about looking at your environment and creating another dimension through it,' Hylton continues. 'Hip hoppers are very informed people. It's about pushing the best, whether that be in yourself or on the decks. You've got to create your own style, become more aware of yourself as an individual. That's what I pursue, whether on the street or the stage. I like to experiment. There are so many different combinations or links to be found, so many choices. That's what intrigues and excites me. Even though I sound anti-contemporary dance, I've never made the decision yet to strip my work down and just do one form. But you can only do that if you understand the forms. You can't do body popping if you don't know who Boogaloo Sam is. You can't do Graham technique if you don't know who Martha was. People seem to think they can visit and be tourists, be in and out. You can create something that is good, but it's never what it could've been because you didn't understand the whole process. It comes across as a borrowing, which hip hop does. It borrows from all cultures. But you have to understand what you're borrowing, or you're just stealing.'

Johnson is equally articulate about hip hop's rich diversity of styles and the ambiguities of using it as a creative springboard. 'For me it's not necessarily about creating something new, because sometimes you can bring things together and create something else. I'm not a movement fascist. But it's a dichotomy. Obviously in the West it has to be written down and formalised for it to be taken seriously. But if we define it too much it's gonna stop developing, like classical ballet. You can't do a head-spin in classical ballet. It becomes restricted if it has a label. I don't wanna say, 'Right, that's it, that's what I do. I can't do this other movement.' I'm not a movement fascist.'

'The thing that frustrates me with contemporary dance,' Johnson carries on, 'is how do you define it? If we're gonna talk about the label contemporary dance,

that's what hip hop is. Because it's today, of now. I don't hate contemporary dance. I love to move that way. But to have that used as a judgment term. Where's the justification to have hip hop seen down here and contemporary up there?'

Hylton's and Johnson's thoughts echo Jonzi D's experiences. The latter's stint years ago as a student of London Contemporary Dance School was lonely. 'I was embarrassed about what I was doing. I felt I couldn't bring my friends to see me standing onstage extolling the virtues of the status quo. Also, wearing tights is not the most hip hop thing to do. But even as a hip hop head, I missed theatre. So I escaped contemporary dance and began to do hip hop theatre because I wanted to be honest about what moves me as an artist.'

Whether it's ballet or modern, tango, kathak or a hybridisation of styles and movement languages, a good dance performance usually qualifies as good theatre. (Jonzi's groundbreaking production Aeroplane Man, which has also been adapted into a short film, is a sterling example of something-in-between.) While some hard-core hip hoppers may deplore what they perceive as the theatrical co-opting of their form of expression, Jonzi believes there are encouraging signs for artists interested in more than just making a profit. 'We haven't even begun to see what hip hop can offer contemporary dance theatre,' he avers. To facilitate the possibilities, he thinks there should be hip hop programmes in schools. And, he adds, 'Graphic artists, DJs and MCs, B-Boys and B-Girls and pop rockers should all have more experience in theatre.'

'I think it makes an interesting story,' Jonzi continues, 'marginalised artists representing a majority of the artistic voice of the world. But why is hip hop theatre still seen as marginal and minority? Hip hop theatre could well save hip hop. The philosophy and politics have been hijacked by the media and entertainment industry to sell products and promote a negative image of Black people. At its essence, hip hop theatre is free of all these constraints.'

Allan Irvine, head of the Scottish group Freshmess, credits hip hop and street styles with helping to foster 'a whole new dance vocabulary that can be enjoyed by everybody – regular theatre-goers and people who would never think of going to the theatre.' Irvine has taught at Edinburgh's Dance Base since 1996, when he formed the hip hop/contemporary company Freshmess. How did a White boy from Stirling tap into a form of expression founded by East Coast Black Americans?

'I'm from a council scheme where it was unheard of for young men to be dancing,' Irvine says. 'Back in the early 1980s popping and breaking just appeared overnight. It seemed that everyone was doing it – my friends, as well as other guys in

neighbourhoods that we would normally have been fighting with. We not only looked up to Black Americans, but also to Puerto Ricans who pioneered a lot of moves and styles. I don't think we thought of ourselves as any different from them. We were just looking for some direction. Hip hop was there for us and we embraced it.'

Dance Base artistic director Morag Deyes supports Irvine's judgment. 'He has never gone just for tricks and 'hey, look at me' bravado. What comes through in his works is humour and a sense of community.' For his part Irvine says, 'Perhaps we offend traditionalists or hip hop heads, but we have great fun. And people leave our performances wanting to dance.'

If there's any lingering doubt that hip hop can spark innovation, consider Bill 'Crutchmaster' Shannon from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Diagnosed as a child with a rare form of arthritis that affects his hips, Shannon gravitated towards hip-hop in his teens. He has developed a distinctive, stereotype-smashing movement language incorporating self-designed U-bottomed crutches and a skateboard. These simple devices allow him to scoot, slink, stalk, split, spin, slalom and fly like nothing you've ever seen.

But hip-hop is only part of what makes Shannon tick artistically. He has a recent Cirque du Soleil commission – a crutch-using solo for a Russian tumbler – under his belt. He's also a multi-media artist and claims a kinship with such silent movie masters as Chaplin and Keaton. Disability, Shannon feels, has heightened his physical awareness. 'People with disablities don't fit into any mould. The particular condition which limits you can also create possibilities for movement. Because other people were staring at me I became more poised, more present in my body – like a performer in public.' Provocative and enagaging, Shannon is living proof that hip hop need know few boundaries.

'Hip hop is an empowering culture for a voiceless community,' says Jonzi D. Yet in media terms, as he has already intimated, 'It's always had the short end of the stick regarding violence, sexism and homophobia. In my experience it's not like that.' Benji Reid, erstwhile bodypopping champ turned brilliant soloist in such shows as 13 Mics and B Like Water, likewise wants to use live performance to counter the cliches of drug-driven gangsta violence associated with hip hop: 'You can go beyond the machismo of niggaz and bitches and draw a young audience which understands the hip hop aesthetic.'

Rennie Harris, of the Philadelphia-based company Puremovement, can lay claim to the title of that nation's premier hip hop dance specialist. Rome and Jewels,

his blistering all-male take on Romeo and Juliet, is a prime example of theatricalised hip hop being used to probe the motives of gang machismo. Facing Mekka, Puremovement's most recent full-length work, takes up where that breakthrough production left off. Harris likens it to 'a prayer that recognises the spiritual in the street.' Through 90 plotless minutes, he and a 17-strong crew of dancers (both men and women), three vocalists and a DJ expressionistically trace hip hop's global origins against a backdrop of chaotic, dream-like film footage. The show's dark, soulful roots crystallise in a long, slow climactic solo in which Harris himself is the mournful, heroic embodiment of both personal struggle and African-American memory.

Mekka was to have been a part of the Sadler's Wells hip hop festival, but scheduling conflicts stateside postponed its British premiere. UK audiences were still able to sample Harris and company's earlier, equally potent work via a touring repertory programme entitled Students of the Asphalt Jungle. Although that programme contained its share of the flashy, head-spinning stunts and juicy, rubber-jointed virtuosity typical of the hip hop genre, it also demonstrated Puremovement's versatility and depth.

One of the dances, March of the Antmen, questioned Black male militancy. Cast as a platoon of urban warriors, a half-dozen dancers initially crawled towards enemy lines. They graduated into upright, Egyptian frieze poses before climaxing with a scary, brilliant mime drive-by shooting. This last image was a sharp comment on cars and guns, loaded symbols of contemporary male power and potential aggression. 'Some of the hip hop factions call themselves soldiers,' Harris says, explaining what drives the piece, 'but why are we fighting and killing each other? Are we stuck in a cycle?'

Harris's work has always been distinguished by its redemptive philosophical underpinnings, which spring directly from his own experience. Pushing forty, he's a big man (six feet two, one hundred and ninety pounds) whose surface gentility covers a coiled tension released in his dancing. Growing up in a tough part of north Philadelphia, nicknamed the Badlands, one of seven children from a fatherless household, he got his training – in dance and in life – on the streets.

After cutting his professional teeth touring with the likes of Run-DMC, Fat Boys and Kurtis Blow, Harris formed his own dance troupe in 1991. One of his prime achievements is to bring the complex energies of street culture onto the concert stage. He began choreographing and directing 'without knowing what I was doing. But I'm kinda quick to take charge. It was rough, but a lotta fun. It was common for us to get chased out of a neighbourhood, or for an event to end in violence.'

Dubbing hip hop 'a living art that happens every day,' Harris scorns its widespread appropriation by the mainstream. 'You may know the movement, but not the culture. I would never approach modern dance without trying to understand it. Yet Black culture always gets kicked into this thing of being entertainment. It's approached as a commodity, without understanding the history. People forget that the true foundations of hip hop are an extension of traditional culture in the United States. It comes out of socialising within the community, like everything else. It's about being raw, never slick.'

Harris's limited knowledge of classical dance hasn't hindered his receiving commissions from smaller-scale American classical companies. 'It's usually liberating for the dancers,' he says. 'I'm excited because they're excited.' On the home turf of hip hop Harris is, naturally, an astute and highly critical judge. 'What gets billed as hip hop dance is not, to me, authentic. In theatre or on television you'll see it mixed into jazz or ballet. People think they'll elevate it by making it whimsical. A lot of that stuff is horrible. Hip hop is not just people jumping around showing off. They can be divinely inspired to move.'

America's hip hop scene, Harris says, is in turmoil. 'Mentally and spiritually in this country we're held back. People don't wanna come out of their box and research something other than what they think they know from the media. And yet everyone's trying to figure out the correct history and take advantage of the hip hop industry so they can get money. Very little is actually being explored in theatre by way of dance.' He deems European hip hop, in its various manifestations, as more adventurous and better supported.

Harris knows that hip hop dance, in order to survive, must be adaptable and creative. By its very nature it can never be overformalised. Were he to try and stop his dancers from improvising, he says, 'I'd take the soul and spirit out of the work. The foundation of hip hop is to constantly flip the script and make something new.'

'Forget MC-ing, graffiti art, DJ-ing,' he continues. 'All that has its own rules. That's a commodity. You can take that home. But you can't take the dance home with you after the show.'

Or, as Benji Reid says, 'You can buy the garments but not the culture. That can't be bought off the shelf. We do have an art form, a total culture. It's how we develop it and where we're gonna take it. We don't need another jump-up-and-down minstrel show. We just have to witness every time we fall off the bike, realise our mistakes and climb back on again. Just so long as we retain control. But do we want to go to the West End with our work and what are the compromises

we'd have to make? It's a question of whether we're gonna be following or leading. Is the mainstream going to relinquish some of its power? Because we will take whatever piece of the pie we need. As long as we're fed.'

A brief history of hip hop development in the UK

by Robert Hylton

Robert Hylton trained at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, but was previously schooled in the early eighties hip hop and underground jazz scene in the UK. He formed Robert Hylton Urban Classicism in 1994 and is currently developing a full-length hip hop version of Swan Lake.

The development of hip hop dance and hip hop music are inseparable, as they stem from a culture and philosophy which also incorporated graffiti, DJ-ing, poetry and a way of life. For a comprehensive timeline of US hip hop development, go to www.mrwiggles.biz.

The history of hip hop music and dance in the UK owes its emergence and development to the longstanding vibrancy of the US hip hop scene.

1979
hip hop emerges musically in the UK through the international – and still fresh – hit Rapper's Delight by The Sugar Hill Gang (using the unmistakable bassline of Chic's Good Times).

1980
Blondie featured Debbie Harry performing a rap on their record Rapture, which further introduced hip hop culture to a wider audience through its merging of hip hop, Pop and Punk. Although Blondie was considered a Punk group, Debbie Harry mentioned hip hop artists Fab 5 Freddie and Grand Master Flash during her rap. This gave Rapture credibility amongst hip hop artists.

1981
The UK's first major taste of hip hop as a dance form can be attributed to Jeffrey Daniel of the pop group Shalimar, who performed the 'backslide' or 'moonwalk' to their smash hit A Night to Remember on Top of the Pops.

1981 / 82
Jeffrey Daniel came to London for a few months with a group called Eclipse which included Poppin Pete, Skeeter Rabbit and Suga Pop. The mecca for hip hop was Covent Garden where, each Saturday, people would gather, dance and interact.

This activity generated one of the first London scenes of B-Boys, DJs, MCs and rappers such as DJ Pogo, Billy Biznizz and The London Posse.

1982
Malcolm McClaren released Buffalo Gals and Double Dutch, further introducing hip hop to a UK audience.

1983
The Rock Steady Crew (a group of B-Boys from the Bronx, New York) featured in the film Flashdance. They also performed at the Royal Variety Performance and released the UK top ten hit Hey You, The Rock Steady Crew. They toured the UK and went on to feature in the hip hop film Beat Street in 1984.

Styles of hip hop that were first practiced in the UK
Locking was created by Don Campbellock and the Campbellockers in the nightclubs of Los Angeles in the early 1970s. This dance and subculture quickly caught on and was soon the rage of a new television dance show called Soul Train. Individual dancers displayed quick locking and pointing movements along with hand slaps and splits.

Some of the early Lockers in London were:
- Feathers
- Hoffmeister
- Pat Cezar

The Body Poppin first practiced in the UK came from New York and was called Electric Boogie, which was a variation of the original style of hip hop coming from the West Coast created by individuals, such as Boogaloo Sam. The original basis of Poppin is a mixture of Locking and Robot. Poppin is actually an umbrella term for many styles of hip hop dance, which include:

- Boogaloo
- Toyman
- Scarecrow
- Animation
- Hitting

In the early 1990s, with access to various sources, hip hop artists were able to research and reconnect with the original West Coast styles of hip hop. Breakin (East Coast) came from The South Bronx and was made famous by The Rock Steady Crew (2nd generation Crazy Legs, Ken Swift, etc)

from which emerged the Street Dance styles that we can see today, such as Krumping. Krumping did not necessarily come from breaking, but is its own emerging new street dance.

UK hip hop epicentres in the early 1980s:
- Rock City – Nottingham
- Covent Garden Piazza – London
- Electric Ballroom – London (which also involved the British jazz dance scene)
- Spatz – London
- All-dayers in all the UK's major cities (eg. London, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Manchester and Leeds)

People gravitated to these places to dance and meet others who shared an interest in the music, the dance and the life-style. There was intense energy from these young people, some who were facing difficult situations under Thatcherism, so these events were a way of channelling emotion via a mode of dynamic creative expression.

American GIs, stationed at US bases in the UK, were partly responsible for bringing the latest hip hop sounds, thus introducing more hip hop music into Britain.

In the late 1980s, hip hop began to suffer from over-exposure and interest waned. Subsequently, Acid Jazz and House became fashionable. This has been termed the Winter Period. hip hop was reintroduced by groups such as Public Enemy, De La Soul, Run DMC and MC Hammer. The difference with this type of hip hop was that the focus was the music rather than the dance.

Sound Systems who catered for hip hop lovers :
- Mastermind Roadshow
- Imperial Mixers
- Beatfreak
- Nutrament

Major hip hop Jams
In 1985 a major hip hop jam was organised by the Covent Garden hip hop community (Imperial Mixers, Cosmic Jam, DJ Pogo, Sargent V, The Chrome Angels, Live 2 Break and Artful Dodger). This jam encompassed all the elements of hip hop and had hip hop collaborators from all over the UK. Other major shows took place at the Shaw Theatre with Afrika Bambaata, Jazzy J and Wanda D, and also the Albany Empire in Deptford. In the late 80s / early 90s other jams were held at Swiss Cottage, Shady Grove and Nutrament's Rock Box.

The mixing of many styles of dance and music also brought about the Warehouse party era including: Family Function, Shake & Finger Pop and Party, Don't Worry About It with the Bash Street Kids.

Benji Reid – UK hip hop pioneer
There were various hip hop crews around the UK which grew out of particular areas or friendships. Most crews in this era would battle in clubs but would also perform hip hop shows in clubs, on television, in theatres and festivals.

These crews included:
- Rock City Crew – Nottingham
- B-Boys – Wolverhampton
- Live to Break, London All Stars – London
- Electro Rock gig at Hippodrome run by Capital FM
- Broken Glass – Manchester

Benji Reid was one of the UK's first and best hip hop dance artists. As a young man, from using dance to entertain at family gatherings, as well as to avoid bullying at school, Reid took inspiration from Jeffrey Daniel's famous 'back slide' and the music of Malcolm McClaren. He went on to join Broken Glass, a hip hop crew from Manchester with whom he toured for two years. Reid became UK Poppin Champion in 1986, as well as winning a host of other accolades. His trademark was his particular sense of character and fun, and his willingness to take hip hop movement vocabulary to a different level where it became theatre. Upon graduating from the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds, Reid gained further performance experience with Dundee Rep, Soul II Soul, Davis Glass Mime Ensemble and Black Mime Theatre. Added to Reid's own inimitable skills and style, this experience began the consolidation of his own particular language of expression, which is inarguably rooted in the culture of hip hop.

To find out more about the life and works of Benji Reid in his own words, go to www.benjireid.com

Where did people hone their skills?
hip hop moves were practiced everywhere by serious lovers of the form; on the street, in youth clubs, at home and, if one had to, even at work. And also they would have their moves ready for the weekend. In order to practice, there was no need for a sprung floor, or temperature-controlled atmospheres. The most one might need was a cardboard mat. hip hop dance was an art form that was truly ready-to-go.

Hip hop and the trained dancer

This crossover happened in the 1980s at the same time as the emergence of Hot Gossip and other similar groups on TV. These groups occasionally used street dance type moves but were more commercially influenced by the movie Fame than by hip hop, the London Boogie and UK jazz scene. Companies such as Torso were an early bridge between the different choreographic styles of ballet, jazz and street. There was also more exposure through the late night music/clubbing programme The Hitman and Her, which featured Jazz and Break dancers (including Benji Reid). Much of the crossover happened in the clubs, where you would find ballet dancers and jazz dancers alongside hip hop dancers. Some dancers went on to create a name for themselves using this fusion of styles. For example, Stuart Arnold and Ozzie were trained dancers who went to the clubs and picked up movement which they integrated into their particular jazz styles, which were popular in both the clubs and the dance studios.

From the The Urdang Academy came Brothers In Jazz with Irven Lewis, which mixed funk, soul, contemporary, ballet and jazz, to create a style Lewis termed Be Bop. In 1988, Brothers in Jazz and fellow jazz dance group Back Street Kidz, (previously 'IDJ' – I Dance Jazz) took part in a dance-off challenge in a boxing ring, which was televised on Channel 4. This was a direct spin-off from them regularly battling each other at the Wag Club in London on Monday nights.

To find out more about the UK jazz dance scene, go to www.brothersinjazz.com and www.hardcore-jazzdance.co.uk

There were also Disco dancing championships, which were places where dancers might incorporate moves like the 'robot' or the 'freeze'.

hip hop reached the theatre stage via companies such as Union Dance, which used break-dancing in their work through collaborations with choreographers such as Doug Elkins. To find out more about Union Dance, go to www.uniondance.co.uk

The term hip hop Theatre was coined by Jonzi D, through works such as Safe and Aeroplane Man. For more information, see www.jonzi-d.com

About Robert Hylton

In the early 1980s, Robert Hylton was already exploring hip hop dance movements such as the Robot. Jeffrey Daniel's appearance on Top of the Pops, the film Beat Street, and the Rock Steady Crew also played a part in his journey, as well as avidly watching music television programmes and reading magazines to find

snippets about hip hop. He first experimented with Poppin rather than Breaking and had much enthusiasm but lacked the necessary hip hop dance skills-base, due to living far away from hip hop epicentres such as London or Birmingham. However, he cut his teeth on the soul and jazz scenes and eventually began to perform in clubs with the group Bamboozle, who he performed with at Dance Umbrella in 1990 at Newcastle Theatre Royal. It was here that he saw London Contemporary Dance Theatre and the original Phoenix, which opened his eyes further to the possibilities of creating his own distinct language of dance. Whilst training at Northern School of Contemporary Dance, he maintained his interest and aptitude for hip hop through going to jazz dance clubs, dancing with Chris Hibbert and Derek Tauk, known as the 3 Cats. So, upon graduating, he had a much larger skills-base upon which to draw, as well as the discipline gained from his training and the continued learning of Poppin. Although he established Urban Classicism in 1999, Hylton continues to hone his craft through studying the work of theatrical heavyweights such as Peter Brook and redefining dance and music on stage with long-time collaborator Billy Biznizz.

To find out more about Robert Hylton, his work and philosophy, go to www.urbanclassicism.com

About Billy Biznizz

A 1st generation B-Boy who has been interested in hip hop culture since seeing Jeffrey Daniels Poppin live on Top of the Pops in the early 80s. Billy Biznizz performed in Covent Garden, alongside crews, such as Micron and Ozzies, he first started b-boying and breaking after seeing Diamond Head Dennis from the Micron crew. He was the lead member of one of the UK's finest break-dance crews, Live 2 Break, performing in Italy, Sweden, Holland and Germany. Through break-dance, he was introduced to the UK jazz dance style, learning steps and frequenting clubs such as Cat's Whiskers, The Electric Ballroom and The 100 Club. He took up DJ-ing in 1985 and soon became well-established, working with The London Posse, Cookie Crew and Caveman. He was also known for his live mixes performed on Capital Radio's Capital Rap Show, hosted by Tim Westwood. In the mid 90s, Biznizz was introduced to Hip Hop Theatre by Jonzi D. He subsequently met Robert Hylton after which they collaborated on several projects.

Phoenix Rising

by Dr. Christy Adair

Dr Christy Adair is an academic, writer, lecturer and consultant. Her current research interests focus on gender and ethnicity in relation to dance studies and performance. Her forthcoming book is entitled Dancing the Black Question: The Phoenix Dance Company Phenomenon.

Phoenix Dance Company is nationally and internationally acclaimed. It began as a small scale co-operative venture in 1981 and within three years the creative enterprise was celebrated on national television in the prestigious South Bank Show (Evans: 1984). Shortly after, in 1985, Phoenix was offered funding by the Arts Council of Great Britain, which provided financial security. By 1991 Phoenix had achieved status as a middle-scale company.

Successive Artistic Directors, David Hamilton, Neville Campbell, Margaret Morris, Thea Barnes, Darshan Singh Bhuller and Javier de Frutos, have assisted and nurtured the Company's transformation. Understandably, many people have a sense of ownership of the achievements and development of Phoenix. The history and legacy of Phoenix, however, is a complex one, which encompasses the multifaceted relationships between dance institutions, dance artists, artistic processes and the cultural contexts in which they are located.

An Emerging Company

In 1981 Donald Edwards, David Hamilton and Villmore James formed Phoenix Dance Company in Leeds, joined in 1982 by Merville Jones and Edward Lynch. The Company was exceptional both within contemporary dance and the wider artistic and cultural contexts in Britain for a number of reasons. They were skilful performers but had not received the usual formal three year dance training.[1] The dancers received dance classes based on Laban's principles[2] at Harehills Middle School and frequently danced at local clubs. They identified themselves as Black British at a time when contemporary dance companies comprised of mainly White female and male dancers and in an art form which was associated with femininity (Adair, 1992).

They also identified themselves as working class which affected their views of themselves, their work and their audiences. The location of the Company was unusual as it was based in Leeds in the north of England, where the founders lived and had been educated, rather than London where the majority of dance companies were based. Phoenix became a significant artistic force in British contemporary dance, challenging the dance canon, and its success became legendary.

Influences

Donald Edwards, David Hamilton and Villmore James started the Company whilst in their teens, because they wanted to dance and make dances. *'We were young; we did what we had to do. It was more of a creative process. We wanted to express ourselves, so we did'* (Hamilton, 1997). Their philosophy of dance is revealed through David Hamilton's comments. *'Meaning was important. Phoenix did not just mean a dance company. Making mistakes, that was important, it wasn't just dance, it was part of life' (1997).*

So what were Phoenix's early aspirations and who were their role models?
We looked at London Contemporary Dance Theatre from a very young age. When we were at Harehills, LCDT was 'the' Company. Namron was there. We had videos of him dancing. He was one of the teachers who came to teach class to the Youth Group when I was there. It was like Wow! Look at him, isn't he amazing. That was the role model that everyone carried (Lynch, 1997).

The young dancers sought to achieve Namron's physical skill and dance expertise. Namron (Norman Murray), like the founders of Phoenix, was of African-Caribbean heritage. He was also a founding member of the London Contemporary Dance Group (later to become LCDT). Namron's wide experience and commitment to developing performers was invaluable to Phoenix in the early days (Adewole, 2003). He assisted the Company by sharing his knowledge about how a company was run, teaching classes and occasionally directing rehearsals (Namron, 1997).

Neville Campbell reported that Namron had been one of the first teachers to offer technique classes at Harehills (1997). Villmore James remembers:
Namron coming to Harehills when I was about eleven or twelve and recognising a performer not just a Black performer. For many years the Company wanted to be recognised as a company not as an all-Black company. We wanted to be known as performers (1997).

Repertoire

Phoenix Dance for The South Bank Show was filmed in Leeds from 1-6 July

1984 and included a number of choreographic excerpts from their early repertoire, which illustrated the diversity of the Company's work. This television programme was important for the dancers as it offered insight into the relationship between their background and their dance work. It also provided national publicity and became an important historic record of the Company.

In one of the early works, Forming of the Phoenix (1982), choreographed by David Hamilton, each dancer introduced himself. As the title suggests, this work tells the story of how the Company began and, with evident parody, highlights individual characteristics and styles of each dancer. In this work the performers dance to what was then Britain's top reggae band Aswad's New Chapter of Dub. Reggae music was certainly a significant influence for the founding dancers, as it was in the 1970s and 1980s for many young Black people in Britain (Ramdin, 1987: 461). Hamilton talks about wanting to express himself and of the steep learning curve the young performers were required to navigate. A significant means for Hamilton in his quest for expression was the use of reggae music as an accompaniment to some of the dance works (Hamilton, 1997: 2). Paul Gilroy (1993) analyses how reggae music drew together people of the Caribbean who had very different cultural and political histories. The role of music for Hamilton was an important aspect of his creation of dance works which were expressive and had cultural significance.

There is a continuous process of renewal and rejuvenation for the Company incorporating a diverse range of music and movement vocabulary. Whilst rejuvenation is certainly a theme for the Company, the struggle has been to establish a sense of their own purpose and agency, rather than being driven by the agenda of funders and critics.

The legend of Phoenix was partly created by The South Bank Show TV documentary (Evans, 1984) and The Forming of the Phoenix (1982). This legend is a story of five socially disadvantaged, young men in 80s Britain, making good. Their style was described as 'high-spirited, athletic, fast, funny and fantastically dangerous' (King, 1985: PA).

The work of Phoenix, read against the turbulent cultural context of uprisings in Britain's cities in the early 1980s, is a powerful statement of the founders' ability to fulfil their creative aims and to build a successful enterprise in a very short time[III]. There were a number of people who helped them to realise their potential in the early days. On reflection this may have been connected, although not necessarily consciously, with those who wanted to assist young Black British men to succeed and to prove that there were opportunities in Britain and that circumstances

could be better for those born in Britain than for their migrant families.

The early Phoenix members were both dancers and choreographers drawing on a wide range of sources for inspiration for their creative works. An example of influences from American culture is that of Nightlife at the Flamingo (1983), which is set in an imaginary American nightclub in the 40s. The work, choreographed by Edward Lynch, is exuberant, integrating popular culture with modern dance. The work was noted as one of the most popular pieces in the early repertoire and contains a fast-moving duet, which is reminiscent of the work of the Nicholas Brothers who were acknowledged as one of the greatest dance teams ever known. The dance is a mixture of lindy hop, tap and modern dance, creating rhythmic connections between the dancers in an atmosphere highly charged with having a good time and razzmatazz showmanship.

Between 1982 and 1986 the Company choreographed thirty-two works, of these only seven were created by choreographers outside of the Company. When Neville Campbell became the second Artistic Director, after David Hamilton left, he made eight works for the Company between 1987 and 1991. Villmore James choreographed Leave Him Be (1988) and Donald Edwards choreographed Revelations and The Path in the same year.

This overview of the repertoire provides a context for the significance of the early choreographies. As the Company developed and changed, the focus on creativity and making work, as an important aspect of the Company's philosophy, shifted and the approach to choreography became much more typical of any repertory dance company as more outside choreographers were employed. The impact of these changes on the founders is evident in an interview with Donald Edwards in The Voice (1991), a newspaper which specialises in African-Caribbean perspectives:

We've evolved a rep which is more mainstream…The programme now is more European contemporary dance based. I used to enjoy the fact that I could express my culture through dance – the philosophy and things that we used to dance about stabilised me and created some happy moments. I think we need the Black element again in the company, we need that balance (Anon, 1991: PA).

This comment clearly expresses the sense of disempowerment that the founders experienced, as they found that they no longer had control of the Company once it became a client of the Arts Council.

Glory of the Garden Report

In 1984 The Arts Council of Great Britain published The Glory of the Garden. The ACGB acknowledged that dance was under-funded with low salaries and limited time to create new work. There was recognition that there was a need for stronger companies and stronger links with the regions. New monies were allocated to address the above issues 'to strengthen the support given to Black and Asian dance' (ACGB: 1984: 15). At that time there was only one dance company, the Royal Ballet Company, which had a permanent home for rehearsal and performance, the remaining companies were touring companies.

Within the above context, specific comments were made in relation to Phoenix Dance Company which at that time was a small-scale company:

One company to whose development the Council attaches particular importance, Phoenix Dance Company, provides a good example of the considerations which underlie much of the Council's approach to its strategy. Phoenix is an exciting company of young Black dancers, formed as a result of the outstanding dance-in-education work at Harehills School in Leeds. The Company's artistic achievements over the past few years bear eloquent testimony to the talent which can emerge in the regions; but that talent cannot develop its potential to the full without adequate funding. Phoenix has been an occasional project client of the Arts Council and of the Yorkshire Arts Association. Its work is in a category which is of great potential importance and, in order to provide the basis of stability necessary to its artistic growth, the Council now intends itself to fund it on a more secure basis, perhaps by a three-year franchise. At the end of the franchise period, it may be appropriate to devolve the Company's entire funding to the Yorkshire Arts Association (ACGB: 1984: 15).

It is clear from the above statement that Phoenix fulfilled one of the key objectives of the Arts Council to give support to what they termed, without definition, 'black dance'. It also allowed them to support work which emerged from the regions. The decision to fund the Company because of these priorities had long-term implications.

The Consequences of Funding

The funding allowed the dancers to pay themselves more realistic wages and made their future more secure. Phoenix was able to operate for fifty-two weeks of the year, unlike many other companies, which survived on intermittent project funding with dancers on temporary freelance contracts. It became possible to employ more dancers and to perform and tour to larger venues. They also, however, became accountable to a pre-existing template of professional arts management.

By granting Phoenix funding, the Arts Council gained political credibility and was able to satisfy its own agenda as stated in The Glory of the Garden Report (1984). Unfortunately, the Council did not put any mechanisms in place to enable the artistic practices of the Company to develop and expand.

The Board were the managers and the artists, therefore, no longer directly managed their work and became employees of the Board. The initial vision and dance-making practices of the founders ceased at this point. They were angry about the effects of this imposed structure. The Arts Council, however, were not sufficiently reflective of their own practices and structures to support the Company's choreographic beginnings (Edwards, 1998; Barnes, January 2001).

Some of the statements of Phoenix dancers, who shared the founders' background, offer insight into the Company, which for the Arts Council became merely another 'product'. Martin Hylton said, 'Phoenix is home' (1999). He explained:

I always wanted to dance with Phoenix and wanted my career to be with Phoenix from the age of 19. Phoenix, as its title, gets reborn. Before, the Company was all-male and had a different strength to today. Directors come and go and some [directors] are stronger than others. (1999)

Hylton's remarks illustrate the importance of the Company to the dancers and to those with aspirations to dance with Phoenix.

Whilst on the surface the recommendations made in The Glory of the Garden Report seemed to offer valuable support to the dancers; in fact it can be argued that the Report initiated a process of disenfranchisement. It can, of course, be claimed that the Company has become an international success but this was at some cost to the founders.

The Company changed from one in which making their own work and their commitment to each other was their main concern, to one which was responsible for a significant amount of funding which brought with it the pressure of expectations. As a small company the dancers were frequently over-worked and, therefore, susceptible to injury. The Company were issued with targets to meet, whereas previously they would have set their own.

Phoenix Plus

Another significant change for the Company was the Phoenix Plus project. In April 1989 Chantal (Sharon) Donaldson (now Watson), Dawn Donaldson

(now Holgate), Seline Thomas (now Derrick) and Pamela Johnson, were invited to join Phoenix for a six month project (Holgate, 1997). The four women had also attended Harehills Middle School and therefore knew the founders from their shared school experiences.

Neville Campbell thought that the impact the Company had made in the early years had lost strength and was ready for a new direction and development. This viewpoint is confirmed by Donald Edwards quoted in The Voice:

The all-male Phoenix had its advantages, but after seven years it was time for a change. (Anon, 1991: PA).

Since the tour was so successful, the Arts Council allocated funding to the Company in order for the female dancers to become permanent members. Rehearsal Director Heather Walker thought that, 'the women were very strong, very intelligent and quite formidable; you had to admire their professionalism and their abilities. They were a stunning group' (1998). Phoenix was, at this point a middle-scale company with ten dancers and was reinventing itself.

Phoenix Plus, as the project was called, was appreciated by the critics, as John Percival writing in The Times commented: 'Phoenix Plus is so much better than the old plain Phoenix that it would be criminal not to keep it going' (in Holgate, 1997: 17). Neville Campbell commissioned Pamela Johnson's first choreography, Subject of the City (1991). 'The performers use each other's bodies like building blocks to create pictures, dissolving and re-forming in an almost gymnastic clarity' (Robertson, 1991: PA). Campbell, as well as commissioning members of the Company to choreograph and choreographing for the Company himself, also brought in guest choreographers. So the potential for the style of the Company to diversify still further was introduced at this juncture. According to David Dougill writing in the Sunday Times, this was timely because there had been a danger of the Company being stereotyped as a 'high-energy' company (22 October 1989: PA) Some of these developments were recorded in a TV documentary, Phoenix Plus (1989) directed by Roger Keech and produced by Mike Murray for BBC North East Leeds.

In 1991 the Company's repertoire was well received. For example, David Henshaw said of the season at Sadler's Wells, London, that the Company invited comparison to LCDT (Henshaw, 1991: 44). It is notable that the company, which Phoenix is compared with, is the one which set the standard to which they aspired. Dancer Melanie Teall (who joined Phoenix in 1995) saw the Company when she was at college in 1991. *'I couldn't believe the audience were reacting*

the way they were. I hadn't been to a dance performance where people stood up and cheered' (1998). She was inspired by their performances and decided she would like to work with Phoenix.

A significant factor, which contributed to the success of Phoenix, was the shared experiences. From 1981 until 1999 a significant number of the dancers with the Company had a dance background from Harehills Middle School with some also having gained experience at Intake High School and/or the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. This provided a common link in terms of understanding and mutual background in Leeds, which despite tensions, provided a sense of community and shared aims.

Ann Nugent's sense of the Company working together in the early 1990s was that they were, 'united in their sensual plasticity, musical awareness and versatility' (Nugent, 1991: PA). As dancer Rick Holgate articulated, *'As individuals we got on really well with each other. The rapport on stage felt so good, you could trust everybody physically, movement wise, and there was enjoyment in the Company. It was superb, absolutely superb'* (1998).

Whilst the development of the Company led to the acknowledgement for some reviewers that, 'Phoenix has made a refreshing contribution to British modern dance' (Anon, 1991: PA). For other reviewers it had '… lost the raw dynamic spirit of its early days and replaced it with a smoothly accomplished sophistication. They are all beautiful dancers but there is some loss of character of identity in this transition' (Thorpe, 1991: PA). This is a view that haunted the Company in reviews over the next ten years.

The Burden of Representation

One of the difficulties that Phoenix encountered, as identified by Judith Williamson, resulted from a tendency to place them, as Black artists, frequently in a position of being 'representative' and speaking 'for the Black community' (in Mercer, 1994). Kobena Mercer termed this situation the 'burden of representation'. The specificity of the artists is eroded under such a burden. But it is this expectation to be representative which emerges in critics' writings about Phoenix and is evident in such labels as 'the Black dance group'. Paradoxically, the founders had embraced that role and appreciated the acknowledgement of their success within their immediate Black community[3]. However, the specificity of Phoenix's art practice is lost when such labels are applied to it, as the work of the Company is only viewed through the lens which this label offers, rather than acknowledging the diversity of Phoenix's dance practice.

Further Developments

The funding for Phoenix was at the outset connected to the contribution the Company made to contemporary dance in relation to the 'Black dancing body'. This confusing notion has been questioned by successive Artistic Directors.

Another issue that Artistic Directors of Phoenix have had to confront, is the structure of the repertory company which has posed difficulties for Phoenix in the past. The assumption, which accompanies such a structure, is that artistic excellence is rewarded and validated by the artistic community, which entails commissioning well-known choreographers. A repertoire of work from internationally renowned choreographers is considered to be an indication of success, as is an international touring circuit. Such criteria, however, are the antithesis of the basis on which Phoenix Dance Company was initially founded and raise issues about how artistic excellence is judged.

The dancers were expected, by the funding bodies, critics and audiences, to be a flagship company of 'Blackness', essentially portraying representations of 'the Black community'. Such expectations contained and constrained artists, who were expected to represent an imagined ethnicity. Their 'dancing body' became an ambiguous, political tool both satisfying and dissatisfying their own and everyone else's vision. These issues are ongoing and the future of Phoenix will inevitably be informed by its history.

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[1] Merville Jones stated in an article in Animated, 'I decided to work with Phoenix for a year whilst I was at school […] I decided that if I wanted to continue with dance, the best way was to stay with Phoenix and not go into vocational training' (in Taylor, 1997: 13). This comment indicates the confidence the young dancers had in their ability to gain the physical skills they needed for performance without undergoing the typical three year training. Such training was offered at London Contemporary Dance School and included daily technique classes in Graham technique and choreography classes. The dancers began the Company soon after leaving school. David Hamilton, however, did complete one year of dance training at London Contemporary Dance School.

[2] The approach to dance in schools in Britain in the 1960s and early 1970s was based on Rudolf von Laban's methods. Laban was motivated to create his movement principles because he was concerned by the limitations and artificiality of ballet at the beginning of the twentieth century. He wrote books, essays, developed a notation system, taught and choreographed for professional dancers and for movement choirs of lay dancers.

[2] There were significant changes in Britain after the urban disturbances in 1981 and it was a time when black British consciousness began to emerge.
[3] Personal communication with choreographer Beth Cassani who was at school with some of the founders (2006).

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Lindy Hop:
Jivin' the UK

by Terry Monaghan

Extracted from an interview with Terry Monaghan, July 2006, London. To read the entire article (including details of the Savoy Ballroom, further descriptions of Authentic Jazz Dance (AJD) styles, key practitioners of Lindy Hop, and more) go to www.adad.org.uk.

Terry Monaghan, co-founded the Jiving Lindy Hoppers, the original UK dimension of the new 1980's resurgence of interest in the Lindy Hop. Their many tours to date include two "old-style" 50-gig coast-to-coast US tours with a band and in a bus. Although representing the JLH in the US, Terry has relinquished European management of the JLH to concentrate on research and writing. He is working on a PhD on the Savoy Ballroom, writes for the London publications The Dancing Times and The Guardian and has just been elected as a board member of the US Society of Dance History Scholars.

Historical Context v. Confusion about names

Competition ballroom jive, often erroneously referred to as 'the jive', is enjoying widespread prominence in the USA right now as one of the categories in the various types of hugely popular Strictly Come Ballroom TV reality dance shows over there. It seems ironic that this British dance innovation, which has never attracted any mass participatory enthusiasm in any ballroom, should now displace in such a spectacular way the original US dance form from which it ultimately derived. Created in Harlem in 1928, and known originally as the Lindy Hop, and subsequently as the Jitterbug, this original version of ballroom jive hung on to no one's coat-tails as it wrought major social and cultural changes. It was thus even more ironic that the 'expert' demonstration of the original Lindy Hop in these TV programmes featured two British dancers, albeit one of them being of Caribbean parentage. It looked as if Americans had come to the UK to teach the Brits how to cook fish and chips or to argue they really wrote the Magna Carta!

Looks however can be deceiving. Amidst these apparently new efforts to obscure the origins of this seemingly indestructible dance form, something more interesting took place. The two British dancers enacting this demonstration were in effect part of the mostly hidden remnants of the counter-cultural interconnections

of Africa, the Caribbean, the USA and Europe, which triumphed over the infamies of the Slave Trade, which Paul Gilroy outlined in his book The Black Atlantic. Their skill in Lindy Hopping derives from the insistent spreading of the Lindy Hop gospel by African-Americans. The latter first brought it to Europe in 1935 and by the early 1980s, when the Lindy had virtually been forgotten in the UK, they brought it back again. Ryan Francois, the male half of this partnership, has no formal dance training, but learned the dance primarily from Warren Heyes, who co-founded the Jiving Lindy Hoppers (JLH), which constituted the main UK dancing outcome of this American intervention. In turn, Ryan taught his current partner Jenny Thomas, an already accomplished professional West End show dancer. Thus, in this instance, the original Lindy Hop took precedence over musical theatre dance which had largely displaced the Lindy on Broadway stages during and after WW2. Furthermore, these British enactors then returned to the US to remind everyone involved what the original dance looked like at the moment of triumph for the British competition ballroom style of dancing, which for so long had tried to replace the original forms of American social dancing. This never happened with any of the other respectively displaced or forgotten American ballroom dance forms.

Yet once again African-American dancers had been pushed out of the way, while distorted and thus confusing claims were made as if the type of jiving featured in these competitions represented the entire European experience of this dance genre, let alone those of other parts of the world. Hidden behind this terminological confusion lies an on-going denial of the type of collective communal creativity that has powered so many major dance innovations. Although this denial has a particularly anti-African dance connotation, as the formerly frequent comparisons to 'jungle dancing' implied, it also expresses hostility to the Lindy's 'democratic' resistance to elitist canonical definitions and attempts at its total commodification. Thus, an examination of how the Lindy Hop came to and took root in the UK, covers a number of issues through the recovery of a pervasive Black dance influencing of the domestic scene.

Lindy Hop & authentic jazz dance

If the Lindy Hop, and its derivative Jiving were not constituent parts of the above mentioned dance groupings, what then can it be linked with? Challenging the confusion layered over early confusion during the past 80 years of the dance's existence is a necessary starting point. The JLH initially evolved out of objections to the claims of some seriously demented souls in the 1970s, who argued that jiving was a White man's dance, as part of a campaign to persuade BBC radio to play Rock 'n' Roll music. Even recent Lindy Hop enthusiasts have proved reluctant to acknowledge African-American agency in ensuring the continuous

existence of this dance form in the UK. Overcoming such muddled thinking thus entailed repeated JLH research visits to the USA after the Harlem-based Mama Lou Parks Dancers brought the Lindy back to the UK in 1983. It was Pepsi Bethel, another old time Harlem Lindy Hopper, who explained that "if you want to get to grips with the Lindy, you need to be familiar with the whole history of the African-American jazz dance tradition" which he called Authentic Jazz Dance (AJD).

Grasping the notion of a continuous cultural dance tradition was not easy though, especially given the almost complete avoidance of the subject area by both US and UK academia. Prevailing conceptions of jazz dance, which are now common to both Broadway and the West End, really describe musical theatre dance, which confusingly they also refer to as jazz. Based mostly on ballet techniques, it has little to do with the kind of dancing integral to the jazz of the first half of the 20th century, and which current jazz dance teaching often describes in clichéd terms as getting "low down and dirty." In their politer moments, they use the term *vernacular*, which has the added convenience of stripping the genre of notions of outstanding excellence and maestro status. In other words, the original tradition is and was simply something 'folk' to be plundered at will.

The source of this confusion can be traced back to the early 1920s when generic notions of jazz dance were abandoned by its original practitioners in the face of ferocious, racialised attacks on the art forms across the US. Thus, the many types of dancing that accompanied the associated varieties of jazz music – rhythm tap dancing, jazz chorus line, eccentric (character) dances, acrobatic, sand dance, social dancing, Russian dance, interpretative, etc – resorted to using their sub-specie names, until AJD enthusiasts after WW2 tried to re-establish a collective recognition. Just the Lindy Hop, one of the social ballroom jazz dances of this period, which also includes an associated 'performance' mode, illustrates the apparently impossible complexity of attempting this task afterwards. Originating amidst the general 1928-9 upsurge of modern American dances that embraced both authentic jazz and what in the UK is called 'contemporary', it first took shape in competitive and performance arenas. Before long, a social dance version came into being and caught on like wildfire. Thus the dance rapidly developed three major dimensions, each of which overlapped as different types of Lindy Hop, whilst at the same time drawing on many other dance interconnections. Moreover it had its own academy – Harlem's Savoy Ballroom – where all three forms came together with the greatest US big-band music of that time.

Being of Black American origin, it nevertheless suffered from identity problems despite its huge success. Constant depictions of it as unbridled expressions

of baser instincts were repeated – as in fact they still are. Although attempts to dent its popularity failed, a wholesale change of its name to jitterbug was effected in the early 1940s. In 1942, a further change of its competition mode name to jitterbug-jive resulted in its shortening to jive, around the time masses of GIs arrived in the UK to prepare for the re-invasion of Europe during WW2. Jive thus became a permanent generic UK name for an assortment of current and later versions, while the core name continued changing back in the USA. A generic recognition thus had been achieved in the UK, but at the price of losing sight of the broader traditions of which it was a part.

Lindy Hop becomes Jive in the UK'

The first group of Lindy Hoppers to bring the Lindy to the UK arrived in 1935. Led by Leon James and Norma Miller and billed as the Truckin Dance Champions, on the strength of winning the first Harvest Moon Ball championship in Madison Square Garden in New York City, they performed and taught in UK theatres, clubs and ballrooms. Not bringing a band proved a hindrance, as the English dance orchestras did not swing. But they managed. On leaving the UK for France they teamed up with the legendary African-American choreographer and director Louis Douglas and his company of British dancers. (Douglas had founded this first modern Black British dance company with Caribbean-originated members before the First World War, called The Eight Flashes. After the war, Douglas played a key role in propelling Josephine Baker to fame and fortune in Paris.) This joint troupe of Whitey's Lindy Hoppers and Douglas's company successfully toured France in 1936 before the Americans returned home.

In 1937, Frankie Manning led the next Lindy Hop invasion as part of the Cotton Club Revue which featured the Teddy Hill Orchestra (one of the big bands from the Savoy Ballroom). They played the London Palladium and performed in Manchester and Dublin. Reinforcement of the considerable interest caused by these Suzy Q champions came in the following year with the release of the Marx Brother's film A Day at the Races. It featured another section of Whitey's Lindy Hoppers that included the already familiar Norma Miller and Leon James. Audiences in those days could sit all day in the cinema, as Lindy enthusiasts did, to learn the steps by repeatedly watching the dance sequence.

Even the British ballroom dancing establishment did not remain immune. The 1938 UK World Ballroom Champions devised their own routine based on the latest US Big Apple sensation. Meanwhile, the home grown jitterbugs were struggling. Most of the ballrooms tried to stop them from dancing for allegedly disrupting the counter-clockwise social dance flow. Suspicions were aroused that a desire to limit or ban the influence of African-American dancing in British

ballrooms motivated these measures. Other ballrooms allowed them to dance in the middle of the circling, or marked out special areas for them.

The first major jitterbug championship took place in 1939, i.e. significantly before the first American GIs arrived. Two ballrooms in particular welcomed the dance; the Streatham Locarno in South London and the Barrowlands in Glasgow. When massive jitterbug reinforcements arrived in the shape of American GIs getting into position for D-Day, the other major London ballrooms like the Hammersmith Palais, Tottenham Royal, The Empire Leicester Square, and the Lyceum had to give way. Even the Royal Opera House, when transformed into a ballroom each winter to raise funding to pay for opera productions in the summer, reluctantly hosted this forbidden dance.

A series of postponements of the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe meant further jitterbug enrichment for the younger sections of the British population. Expert Savoy dancers, such as Al Minns and Al Leagins stationed here, held regular lessons. Eventually the US troops left, and ballroom managers posted up 'No Jiving' signs to drive jitterbug dancing out of the ballrooms. When the US troops returned during the Cold War, they stayed fenced-off in their military bases from British rationing and possibly to limit their cultural impact, but another type of ex-WW2 jitterbug reinforcement returned to UK shores. A steady stream of former Jamaican servicemen, who had volunteered in large numbers to fight for the Empire, now returned to take advantage of the opportunities for advancement, or so they thought. Still entranced by the jitterbug, but wearing the new uniform of Zoot Suits, they did what they could to reinvigorate the scene. The Paramount Ballroom in Central London became their focus on a Monday night and for a while was a huge success. However, when the press discovered that White British girls also attended, they went on the attack and, given the permissive attitude to racism at that time, were able to close it down.

The UK Scene after WW2

The Jamaicans still jived until Ska came along at the beginning of the 1960s. Professional Lindy Hoppers visited the UK as well, including the Frankie Manning-led Congaroos and Norma Miller and Her Jazz Men. However they played major venues like the London Palladium or expensive night clubs and thus had little impact on social dancing as compared to their pre-war appearances. Bigger changes were in the offing though.

Hollywood moguls unintentionally triggered a new upsurge of enthusiasm through attempts to sell an exploitation movie based on the Bill Haley and the Comets track Rock Around The Clock. Although hugely popular in Hollywood films before

and during WW2, and thus seen round the world as part of the USA's drive after the war to remove Black faces from its popular image (films, musicals, other stage show and even TV), performance Lindy Hop became invisible. Even White jitterbugs were confined to extremely brief roles in major films. During the 1950s though, US White youth increasingly began to tune into black radio stations to hear and dance to the early R&B versions of what became Rock 'n' Roll. Bill Haley's record, which attempted to divert them, thus even got film exposure. Being the cheapest of cheap productions, the plot was dire and thus an aging dance group known as Hollywood Jitterbugs were utilised to inject visual impact. Not realising that the group had been trained by a former Savoy maestro, Dean Collins, the film had an electric impact, especially outside the USA. Even Queen Elizabeth II demanded to see the cause of such extensive disturbances amongst her subjects. Further terminological confusion resulted as Hollywood attempted to re-christen the dance: Rock 'n' Roll. Practical confusion accompanied this mayhem, as it led youth outside the US to believe this was the latest dance from the USA, when in fact the latter's youth were turning their backs on partnering and increasingly dancing in groups or individually.

This predominantly working class UK enthusiasm transgressed many gender and racial conventions, thus constituting a major challenge to the then 'respectable' middle class viewpoint of the media and entertainment industry. Thus, the emergence of the Twist at the beginning of the 1960s was seen as the new salvation, despite its origination from one small part of Lindy Hop technique. Separating partners out came as a big relief for a while, and the Jive, Lindy Hop and its other variations were pushed to the furthest margins. Despite the Savoy Ballroom being demolished in 1959, various African-American groups dedicated themselves to keeping the dance alive. Frankie Manning's Congaroos had folded in 1954, but Norma Miller's dancers kept in business until the mid 1960s, as did Sonny Allen and the Rockets, but the most consistent were the Mama Lou Parks Traditional Jazz Dancers who kept swinging out right through the 1960s and 70s.

Back to the Lindy Hop

The combined efforts of these Lindy Hop elders gave rise to the simultaneous emergence of four new centres of Lindy Hop enthusiasm in Los Angeles, New York, London and Stockholm in 1983/84. In September 1983, Mama Lou Parks brought her dancers to London to follow up the success of the 1982 LWT Southbank Show profile of her company and ran workshops at the Albany Empire, Deptford. The two founders of the JLH – Warren Heyes and Terry Monaghan – took part and in the following year created what became a full-time performing company in 1987. This in turn triggered the emergence of a new

enthusiastic UK Lindy Hop scene. Heyes and Monaghan's prior musical training directly impinged upon the way JLH dancers were and are instructed so they count in the same way as jazz musicians, thus ensuring close performance collaboration. Mama Lou also provided the training and insights that enabled the original Phoenix Dance Company to choreograph their notable piece Night Life at the Flamingo, which helped considerably in establishing their reputation. Typically this collaboration is not acknowledged, in accordance with funding directives that insist on dividing the so-called avant garde from 'popular art'.

In reality, the UK professional dance scene came alive in the early 1980s with exciting dance innovations from all dance forms. Along with the JLH, companies as varied as Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, Union Dance Company, The Cholmondeleys, DV8 and IDJ (I Dance Jazz) burst onto UK stages. The JLH itself spawned further AJD companies such as Bullies Ballerinas (led by Jeanefer Jean-Charles and Pearl Jordan), Zoots and Spangles (led by Ryan Francois) and Temujin Gill and Company. Other Lindy groups emerged such as the Sugar Foot Stompers (led by JLH trained Simon Selmon) and the JLH's teaching work in a South London school saw the founding of the Chestnut Grove Lindy Hoppers. In practical terms, all the leading figures in the current UK swing scene have been taught by Warren Heyes either directly, or indirectly by other people he has trained.

Enthusiasm for the Lindy Hop continues to expand and dancers from the UK take part in the hundreds of Swing Exchanges now staged round the world, where enthusiasts meet up to enjoy dancing together for several days, while keeping alive some old Savoy Ballroom traditions. The subject is also coming under serious scrutiny. A crop of new PhD dissertations on the subject have been completed, as has Frankie Manning's long-awaited memoirs. Remnants of old pejorative attitudes linger on though, and further new thinking is needed. Government policy, which ultimately determines arts funding and programming practices, remains confused. Its increasing obsession with centralism conflicts directly with its need to connect with all sections of the population. Lindy Hopping, which especially flourishes when so-called 'elitist' and 'popular' dancing intersect, embodies this dilemma. Rather than disappearing, it promises to continue manifesting a range of awkward issues that one day, inevitably will have to be addressed.

Resources:

Books

JAZZ DANCE – The Story of American Vernacular Dance: Marshall & Jean Stearns (De Capo Press) 1994

SWINGIN' AT THE SAVOY – The Memoir of a Jazz Dance: Norma Miller (Temple Univ. Press) 1996

STEPPIN' ON THE BLUES – The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance: Jacqui Malone (Univ. of Illinois Press) 1996

SWINGING THE MACHINE – Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars : Joel Dinerstein (Univ. of Mass. Press) 2003

FRANKIE MANNING – Ambassador of Lindy Hop: Frankie Manning & Cynthia Millman (Temple Univ. Press) 2007

Films

'*Day At The Races*' – 1937 film with an early Lindy Hop sequence that features Norma Miller (2nd couple)

'*Hellzapoppin*'– 1941 film with a later style Lindy Hop sequence that includes both Norma Miller (3rd couple) and Frank Manning (4th couple).

'*Don't Knock the Rock*' – 1956 Bill Haley's follow up film to Rock Around The Clock that has the best example of the 1950s rebirth of jitterbug-jive in it, danced to Rip it Up.

'*Chicago Joe and the Showgirl*' – 1990, an otherwise totally forgettable film set in WW2 London, features a dance sequence choreographed by the JLH that includes several of its dancers.

Web sites

www.YouTube.com has a constantly expanding range of Lindy Hop, Jitterbug and Jiving film clips, whose availability was unimaginable when the JLH was founded.

'How To Jive' website that has a list of definitions of the main dance forms associated with Lindy Hop/Jive. www.howtojive.com/intro-jive-guide

The official JLH website, extensively covers the company's history and range of activities. www.jivinglindyhoppers.com

A site dedicated to the memory of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom and providing accurate information about the home of the Lindy Hop. www.savoyballroom.com

Video

'***JAZZ DANCE***' JLH produced video that describes the eventual beginnings of the Lindy Hop in the Cakewalk, which had fused African and European dance forms into something uniquely American. Note: this is not a "how-to-do-it" video.

ADAD thanks Terry Monaghan for generously donating his time and parts of his research to this book.

The Black Body Cultural:

Interview with Thea Barnes

by Colin Prescod

Presented here is the interview and a coda about the conversation written by Thea Barnes. As stated in the Prologue Note for the interview, Colin's questions served to provoke an exploratory conversation in which he and Thea could imagine or suppose alternative analysis and positionalities for the embodiment and performance of dance within and surrounding the African Diaspora. The interview is candid while the coda offers theoretical insights.

Prologue Note – Colin Prescod

The intention is to have the questions, raised here in no particular order, serve as provocations for an exploratory conversation – opening up and out to other interesting questions. The notion here of the 'Black body cultural' is intentionally grandiose and provocative; for this conversation focuses on the 'performing Black body' (on the block, off the plantation, in the street, in the arena, on the dance-floor, on the catwalk, on the stage, in dreams and myth) – and within that the 'dancing Black body'. These are the questions that interest me – just for a start.

Is the Black diasporic African body different from the continental African body?

How does the Black body dance differently in the Diaspora, as contrasted with the continental African body?

What of the different histories?

Does the historic Atlantic slavery experience define a divide between the diasporic and the continental body?

Are there not many 'dancings' coming out of the continent?

What of acknowledging the principally West African cultural origin context of the Black diasporic African body?

What is there to be said about the popular notion of the Black body's ability, beyond the natural scope of the White body, to 'emote publicly' ('soul' expression, both 'medium' and 'message')?

How might we reflect on this cultural phenomenon – how might it be out of Africa and, how might it be related to denial of 'private spaces' in the oppressed enslaved and undignified experiences of the Diaspora and, how might it be connected to 'catharsis' and 'release' in the face of historic 'lock-outs' and 'lock-downs'?

Is it possible that the Black 'performing' body is driven by an added imperative – driven historically and currently to 'dance' out of its oppressed/marginalised/brutalised/humiliated state in the racist West?

Would it be true to say that the African Black body only becomes 'objectified' in the West? (It's an African body in the continent. It's a Black body in the gaze of the White West.)

What is 'the thing' in the theatrical dance world, historically, about the ability and dis-ability of the Black body in the dominant White gaze of the mainstream?

Is the Black body now, today, becoming more White, as the White body becomes more Black – in dance, as already in 'youth' and 'urban' culture?

Is the whole Black and White body thing a mistaken and redundant formulation?

THE CONVERSATION:

Colin (C): How would you like to begin?

Thea (T): I'm going to start with everything in your questions that I have questions about. I think the conversation has to start with what the parameters are, or it becomes very broad-stroked or what I call just extremely binary, Black against White; and it ain't that anymore as far as I'm concerned.

'Black body cultural', and it's this, it's really a bit contentious because it's not just about Africa, the words 'Black', 'body' and 'culture' need to have a parameter before the 3 words together designate something, designate what we want to talk about.

C: Yeah, that's fine. I really do mean provocative, right. I'm not interested in missing the question you ask but actually getting into the question.

T: Ok: *'the intention here is to have the questions, raised here in no particular order, serve as provocations for an exploratory conversation, opening up and out to other interesting questions'*.

Now, performing, performance and performative, sets the context within which you see this body, not just a Black body, you see a body, a dancing body to begin with. Now, *'on the block, off the plantation, in the street, in the arena, on the dance-floor, on the catwalk'*, these are social, political settings; they are not necessarily theatricalised within a Western proscenium stage arena. That's a kind of balancing act in that the dance-floor is a kind of theatre, depending on the street and what is being done. On the catwalk, it's a kind of theatre; one could even push the metaphor of theatre and say that 'on the block' is a particular kind of dance, but now you're playing with words.

Then *'on stage'*, is what one traditionally perceives; and I'd put 'traditionally' in quotes because sometimes that gets confused. But *'on stage'* is what one thinks about the Western proscenium threatricalised and what that body is doing in that space. And then *'in dreams and myth'* those are the psychological and that goes into another place, which is part of what we are doing, but it gets kind of heavy. So, here we go.

When you talk to choreographers, like for instance Colin Poole, he talks a great deal about what he has to do as a choreographer, and it's very much to do with the fact that what he is dealing with psychologically manifests on stage in what he does as a performer. A lot of his work is about combating what people think and see in reaction to his particular kind of dancing, which happens to be a male of African / Asian descent dancing body. There's a great deal of ambivalence he claims, which may be true or not, some people have in reacting to his work. There is a great deal of ambivalence that even he has to combat or deal with in the construction of his work.

So, each one of your sites, such as 'off the plantation,' if you put a performing Black body in front of it, it really has to be teased out.

And then you say – *'and within the dancing Black body*'. These are the questions that interest me, just for a start. Within that, the 'dancing Black body'; when *is* it a 'dancing Black body'? If you look at minstrelsy… what was his name, Thomas D. Rice, who you could say was inspired by watching an older African American doing some improvisational dancing perhaps, social dancing that he witnessed from his hotel window. This was enough information for him to begin this whole idea of black-face parody – usurping Africanist dance

practices and music within an American stage arena. Was that a 'dancing Black body' – this older Black gentleman on the pavement, or was it simply a person moving in a particular way, because of who he was, and which inspired this other gentleman, who happened to be European American to think of this other thing? If you look at the process, it isn't so much contentious; it's actually quite a beautiful exchange in sharing information albeit nobody asked permission to take what was taken. What was conflicting was an older African American at that time, probably Black, at the time, probably 'Negro' person, and this was a privileged White man who decided, "Oh, I can make fun of that…", the whole exchange then has racist overtones. But if this person hadn't done that, a lot of African American artists at that time probably would not have got the opportunity to perform their particular dancing and singing and music making, so that people would pick it up and it would be vital in the development of American musical theatre.

In hindsight, you look in one way and then you try to interrogate the time but with a lens. If you take the lens and look at it, in that time, what did it feel like? But here we are in 2006; what does that look like? Then, what does the information give you as far as not just a 'dancing Black body' but a 'dancing body', and what impact does it have on the whole idea of a 'dancing body'? How do we learn from each other as 'dancing bodies'? How do we make our art and how do we present it? Do you have anything to say?

C: My use of the phrase 'dancing Black body' ranges from the literal to the figurative – from the performing Black body to the dancing Black body that Billie Holiday sings about.

T: Ok, I hear you. Once again I'm saying that's a metaphor. A metaphor that speaks to social political implications in a racist society at that particular time, as a symbol of remembrance for us today of what has gone before and a precaution for what could happen in the future if we allow those kinds of attitudes to continue to fester. What happens with lack of education? What happens when people do not interact? All those things are wrapped up in that. And we haven't even talked about what happens in the first instance when a person makes a dance if that person is making the dance on another person, or, if that person is doing it themselves when they go on stage in a Western proscenium setting and present to other people. That's a different kind of conversation.

See, I am very much on the podium about the dance-maker, coming from the inside out, not as the one who responds to the artefact, to the dance work. In fact, when you start to talk about work that exists, the practices that exist,

within the African Diaspora, a lot of times you are diverted from what is made, to how one reacts to what is made.

C: Yes, and I think that is the full cultural context…the Black body in cultural context – what is done or meant by 'Black-ness', but also, how 'Black-ness' is seen, constructed, by 'non Black-ness'. That is the whole of the cultural context that I am referring to when I try to talk about the 'Black body' in cultural context.

T: Ok, what you just said to me starts us down a road that I call 'redundant binaryism'. I find it fruitless to continue conversations that situate the 'Black body' within a 'White context'. It's a binary; it's limiting, it's redundant. Especially now because, I'm sorry, the African 'Black body' is not the only Black body there is and if you go to America today, we are no longer the hapless and helpless minority; that is now Hispanic – even to the point that they are receiving clout and privileges, because they are the 'wanting' minority. Africa itself is rocked with infighting and racial discrimination. Now figure out where a 'Black body' is situated in that, because it's all Black, albeit a lot of turmoil is stemming from a 'White influence'. But I'm sorry, Black people running around killing Pygmies for sport has nothing to do with White influence.

C: Can I go back to what you said, when you say that the African 'Black body' is not the only Black body?

T: Yeah, well that is what I said. Any 'Black body'; if you start thinking it's only an African origin, African heritage, African descendant, is not the only Black body.

I went to see Bangarra last night. Now, Bangarra is from Australia. Their artistic directors are Stephen Page and Frances Rings. Their work last night was, I found it to be a little simplistic, minimalist. Their indigenous movement vocabulary is minuscule, when one thinks of the profusion of dance expressions found in the African continent. Let me find the line that did me a loop… This is Frances Rings; she is the co-choreographer. The name of the work they created is Bush. In the work, they have travelling with them and interacting in the dance itself, on stage, a culture consultant and guest performer. Her name is Kathy, and I can't even begin to pronounce her middle name, Marika. Now Kathy Marika has worked with them and when you watch the work, when you see the indigenous dance movement, it is simplistic. But you see that they also have yogic influence, yoga-type movement influence; not Capoeira, we're talking yogic, I know the difference; this is yoga – inverted type work and conventional contemporary dance expression movement vocabulary.

This is the language they are speaking with their bodies on stage, revealing a fantastic layer of spirituality that comes from these traditional forms. They pride themselves on trying to maintain that layer of spirituality because that is where they get their significances. This is what makes them different from other contemporary dance companies. One paragraph, 'working with Kathy Marika', now this is Frances talking, she says 'working with Kathy Marika is wonderful. She is a traditional woman who is the caretaker of these ancient stories and is passing on all this historical knowledge. Being a Black woman myself, I can tap into that energy and that gut-knowing. It is what I always try to rely on as my source of inspiration and drive'. She refers to herself as a Black woman. This child looks Hispanic, she is olive colour, has long hair, straight as an arrow. Frances Rings is a Kokatha Tribe descendent and is also of German descent. She first joined Bangarra in 1993 and has studied at New York's Alvin Ailey American Dance Centre. In 2002, Frances made her main stage choreographic debut for Bangarra to outstanding critical acclaim with Rations from the double-bill Walkabout. In 2003 she co-choreographed Bush, with the Artistic Director. All of this is to say, she as a dance maker refers to herself as a Black woman. There is a lot of meaning in there and there is also a lot of thinking that we need to do, when we start talking about 'Black body', because it is no longer just an 'African body'; it looks like somehow or another we keep going back to this 'Black' word and it just...

When we talk and use these words as observers to the work, I think we need to be a little more articulate and not use such a broad brush, because it ain't going to fly in 2006, irrespective of the fact that the hegemony or mainstream continues to throw these things about...I think we need to start saying; this isn't what it is. Do you understand what I'm saying?

C: Of course I do.

T: Ok, to run on with your questions on the paper. *'Is the Black Diasporan African body different from the continental African body? How does the Black body dance differently in the diaspora, as contrasted with the continental African body? What are the different histories?*

Now, I kind of like and don't like this, because there are distinctions within difference but sometimes difference, if you approach it incorrectly, smacks of racism and I go back to my reference of Congolese soldiers running around killing Pygmies for sport. Ok, so I would like not to, well, is there another way we can converse about the differences within African dance making practice, without having to make it a conflict between Continental and Diaspora,

because when we throw in 'Black' and 'African' and, you know what I mean, it kind of makes it – I don't want to split us apart, because in a lot of ways that is what the hegemony does. That's what mainstream does. I point to Moving Africa 2.

Kettly Noël, I interviewed her. She was one of the choreographers of Moving Africa 2, presented at the Barbican in 2005. Now this is a woman who is now working in Mali. She is originally from Haiti. She learned a lot of her ideas about contemporary dance and how dance is made in the Caribbean, but she also studied in Africa. She is now working and running her own school and company in Africa. When you see her dance work she is not so much versed in conventional contemporary dance movement as she is an embodiment of understandings, or what you could say, translations, or transliterations of traditional Diasporic African dance forms. I can't pick out whether it's from this tribe or that tribe; but she is taking what I would call a contemporary approach. She has embodied a wealth of knowledge both on a traditional and contemporary understanding of dance movement, on both sides of the Atlantic and from this understanding and embodiment, a collection of movement experiences. She has come up with works that speak of a voice of 'modernity'. If you want to think 'modernity' is always rediscovering itself as time progresses forward. Her duet at the Barbican was a lady trapped in a relationship with a man that was abusive. And so it was a current topic of interest for her that she was offering to an audience to look at – her impression of what would go on in an abusive relationship between a man and a woman. Her vocabulary was a mixture of traditional and conventional dance forms.

I don't like to say that there is a dividing line, contest or a confrontation between what is an 'American Black body', what is a 'Caribbean Black body', what is an 'African Continental Black body', because I see too many artists who are going between these different worlds and coming up with their own particular, individual, singular expressions. All I can say is that she is a 'dancing body' and her 'dancing body' has these distinctions.

Ok, let's go on. *'Does the historic Atlantic slavery experience define a divide between the diasporan and the continental body? What is the divide between diasporan and continental?'* I don't know, you tell me.

C: Well, the 'ripped out' experience – the 'ripped away from the place from whence they came' experience, and which is then turned into an experience developed on this side of the Atlantic, *only* out of that, of being enslaved. Whereas on the continent, there are Africans who would not have had that struggle, for whom that struggle is not a driving force.

T: Ok, that I can agree. I am definitely not disputing that history. The history of people that find themselves in America because of that circumstance is definitely different from the history of those people who stayed in Africa; there is no dispute.

C: Ok, my question would be, does anything hang from that – relating to the dancing – making the dances differ, hanging off that fact?

T: I think context dictates how a dance is made, a reflection on the artefact, and who does it, is what makes those differences. I myself look at that equation, if you can call it that, and just see dance makers, somehow, no matter what their histories dictate, they come up with particular kinds of works with particular kinds of significances, they draw from what they know or from what they experience or what they remember, reclamations, one can call them blood memories, oral histories and trading, handing down, but that to me also is kind of a fact. I mean I go back to who we are talking about, because for me, I will always slip into the maker's point of view. Do you understand what I'm saying?

As for a divide – to me even the word Diaspora may not be applicable to some African dance practitioners, be they traditional or contemporary, because what is 'Diaspora' about what they're doing; they haven't left the continent.

So when you become a world traveller, a migrant, be it forced or the result that you have chosen to go someplace else, then it becomes diasporic.

If you start saying African Diaspora, from whose perspective are you saying it? Once again, I go onto practitioners who have lived for generations in Africa from day one, it's not diasporic. What makes it diasporic; when Vincent Mantsoe brings his experience of South African sacred forms into contemporary dance practice. What makes it diasporic is when we find me sitting in America doing Fanga. How did I learn Fanga? From Pearl Primus. How did she learn it? She went to Africa to learn it from the Ashanti people because that was part of her research work. So my experience of Fanga is a diasporic experience because it was removed from the original context. Now I can say that I know for a fact Fanga is a traditional welcome dance for the Ashanti people.

A lot of dance done in the Americas, North and South including the Caribbean, has been documented as having roots in Africa. You can trace…like the ring shout; that is a diasporic sacred dance developed by slaves that found its beginnings in America and then spawned a whole other host of different kinds of dance expressions, both sacred and secular within the American context that is diasporic. But not all African expressions are diasporic. We use African

diasporic, once again similar to the use of 'Black dance' as a catchall phrase; everyone seems to know what it is but have we all really thought about what it means, and to use it properly.

'*Are there many 'dancings' coming out of the continent?'* Well for damn sure. And what do you mean by 'dancings'? I think I know what you mean but what do you mean?

C: I put it into brackets; I mean 'ways of dancing.'

T: Ok – *'What of acknowledging the principally West African cultural origin context of the Black diasporan African body'.* This needs a distinction. What do you mean?

C: I mean people of African descent, who are Black – coming out of Ghana, Nigeria, that area of the continent – as distinct from North Africa, or East or South Africa.

T: I mean, if you look at the history – there exist rosters, listings of the majority of peoples who were taken and displaced to America and they were particular peoples who had particular kinds of skills. People who knew how to grow corn, rice, labourers, farmers; they were skilled people who would fit the needs of the Americas at that time. They weren't just anybody. So there were particular factions of people who had particular skills.

Now, these different tribes obviously had particular kinds of dance practice, music making, particular that belonged only to them. But there were several. This melting pot became the foundation of a lot of the music practices, dance practices that came out of America. They weren't just any old kinds. I would wager to say, if the needs had been for tribes who had been in Northern Africa or Eastern Africa, then the music we would be listening to today would be that. The situation was that they came from West Africa.

America being the capitalist country that it is, popularised that kind of music and dance making. That kind of music and dance making contributed to the foundation of what became later on through the years, African American modern dance, or what some like…Thomas De Frantz, call 'Black dance'. I like to call it African American modern dance. It has particular distinctions in practice and performance that set it apart from other modern dance forms, but it is modern dance. We had modern dance in America, postmodern dance, post-postmodern dance, but you could call it all contemporary dance, if you like. Contemporary dance, meaning, it is at the moment, in the moment, be it 1952, 1962, 2002, 2006, it is still contemporary dance. The practice, the process, how one goes

about making dance hasn't changed. What is being danced, and how it is being danced, has. You know what I mean.

Ok, next. *'What is there to be said about the popular notion of the Black body's ability beyond the natural scope of the White body to 'emote publicly' (soul expression, both 'medium' and 'message')'.*

There are several ideas connected here.

For me, growing up in America, we as a people needed these differences in order to facilitate self-confidence, empowerment and a sense of agency. I also know that these same bits of differences were coveted by other peoples, White peoples, all kinds of peoples, not just White people, but at that particular time it was White European American people. They were envious of these characteristics. And these characteristics became an opportunity for a people who were admired and hated at the same. There's a great deal of what Colin Poole calls 'ambivalence and cultural tourism' revealed in that.

From there, think of Josephine Baker; her embodiment allowed those who saw her, particularly French Europeans, to connect to a sense of inhibition and abandonment. Because they were within a circumstance of war and economic disintegration, Josephine Baker kind of allowed them a sense of escapism; her performance, her exoticness was a way out from their, I guess you could say, tawdry existence. If you want to call it that, that might be a little harsh and inconsiderate and disrespectful – but at least I admitted it.

Popular notions sometimes have more to do with what is desired and sold currently. And right now, what is being sold in a lot of instances, I won't say all, but in a lot of instances, has more to do with what is seen as sellable at the moment.

C: What is encouraged.

T: And sometimes that dictates what actually comes to be the dominant dance practice. Some artists are out here in the field, on the ground, still going about their way without Arts Council support. But what happens to be spotlighted, privileged, is what determines the popular.

OK. *'How might we reflect on this cultural phenomenon? How might it be out of Africa and how might it be related to denial of 'private spaces' in the oppressed enslaved and undignified experiences of the Diaspora and, how might it be connected to 'catharsis' and 'release' in the face of historic 'lock-outs'*

and 'lock-downs'?'

I did an interview with a traditional African dance practitioner, Nii Tagoe of Frititi; and he had been soliciting the Arts Council year in, year out for funding for his traditional forms. But at the end of the day they weren't interested in Traditional African Dance. They weren't interested in him. OK. I believe he's not soliciting them any more. And if you look at the Arts Council's portfolio, they can say whatever they want, they're not interested in traditional African dance. They have moved from that.

C: I think that, in fact, they will have no understanding of African traditions.

T: Maybe. But see then, you have people like ADAD, you have Irie!, fighting this never ending battle to try to get recognition for these forms so that they can get support from the Arts Council who couldn't care two buns because their understanding is that the population doesn't want traditional African dance forms. They'll pull out statistics that reveal audience numbers have dropped, or, only these numbers are interested, or else, the audience numbers don't exist because practitioners didn't keep records. Practitioners didn't do their side; they didn't take care of business to defend their plot so they lost the plot. Yeah, the cultural phenomenon can end up being very one-sided if people like yourself don't keep saying; 'Oh wait a minute, there's some other people down here doing something else; wait a minute, its not all about hip hop; sorry it just isn't; that's just one part. Don't start acting like hip hop is the 'Black body', because its not.'

Just like me going to see Bangarra; the practitioners themselves have very strong feelings about who they are and what they're doing. And, until the establishment recognises the value of how the dancing body feels about its own embodiment, they will always be out of the loop. Because of their position of power, they will still be able to dictate what is acknowledged. So in a lot of ways, people just got to keep writing, you got to get out there. But it's also about how we say what it is that's happening on the ground, and that's why I'm reticent about the word Black, 'Black dance', 'dancing Black body' – because it makes people see only one thing or two things.

C: My final question, then. *"Is it possible that the Black 'performing' body is driven by an added imperative – driven, historically and currently, to 'dance' out of its oppressed/marginalise/brutalised/humiliated state in the racist West?"*

T: A metaphor, it's a metaphor.

C: Of course.

T: The Black 'performing' body now as a metaphor that encompasses 'difference', not just African, then we can talk about right now, about the 'oppressed/marginalised/brutalised/humiliated state in the racist West'. But those are huge mega metaphors.

They're huge, and I just need for it to be understood that when 'Black' is used in quotation marks that it is a metaphor that encapsulates every single difference there is – every difference that is pushed to the side because it is different.

Let's go to movies; what's coming out of China right now, film-wise if you look at Hero or Memoirs of a Geisha; those kinds of different 'dancing bodies' because if you look at the films, there is a lot of dancing in there. House of Flying Daggers; that's a better example than Hero. House of Flying Daggers is a better example because in there, Ziyi Zhang, she does this one dance and it's (Martha) Grahamic, it's her martial art experience; it's phenomenal. There's ballet in there. She's a ballet dancer. But it's situated in a different place. Because the film is from China, it has a Chinese director, it is different. It is not part of Western mainstream. It is a different kind of 'body'. If you can imagine 'Black' encompassing that kind of difference then you can understand the overarching idea of how people somehow or another alienate the Other because it's different. What is it different from? And then you get to this whole idea of 'Black' shadowed by 'White'.

You can kind of skirt around and go at it another way. Look at this body; this particular dancer's body. It does martial arts, it does ballet, it does Graham. Her skin is yellow, her hair is long and black and straight. But it is another Other. OK. What has made it an 'Other'? I think that's the question we should be asking. And don't name it 'White', because it isn't just necessarily 'White'. Because I'm going to tell you some people will say that that body is not 'Black', because to them she doesn't have nappy hair and dark skin. But it is different; she is different and she's not readily put in a place within the Western mainstream. So, it's a metaphor.

Then I go to me personally; my perspective. John Ashford once called me a citizen of the world. My existence has enabled me to have a broader perspective of dance; an opportunity to allow differences to come up even-keeled. In a lot of ways, to me it's about how people develop responses to any kind of dancing body; that enables them to understand first and foremost it's a dancing body: what is it dancing, not necessarily who and what's their background.

Just look at the dance: what kind of dance is it, what are they saying with the dance; if you don't understand then back off of it. Don't try to say I can't understand it so it's over here in a corner, because it's not part of what I understand. Unfortunately, that's what dictates what is accepted and what is marginalised.

C: Can we leap to the last one – for completeness sake? *'Would it be true to say that the African Black body only becomes 'objectified' in the West? It's an African body in the continent. It's a Black body in the gaze of the White West'.*

T: OK, where else would it be objectified?

C: It could be objectified in the context of another dominant cultural narrative.

T: I don't know, because see, watch this. I don't have the dates in my head but what I remember is reading in the New York Times, African American soldiers went over to defend these people. Maybe it was Rwanda, maybe it was some place else.

C: Probably Somalia.

T: Maybe, but they went over there to defend these people and they were saying how these Somalians, the people they had come to save, to lay down their lives and die for, were looking at them, laughing at them making racist remarks about their 'big lips', 'flat noses', 'big eyes', 'brown skin'. The American soldiers couldn't understand why they were regarded as 'less than'. Now how can something like that happen?

C: Now, Thea, you're talking about something that, out here, we don't talk about very much. When you go back into the continent and talk to people about the great schisms that exist within the continent, one of them is in fact the schism that comes from that other historic invasion and dominance. Sometimes you sense it in the use of the terms 'Africa South of the Sahara' or, 'Black Africa'. I'm referring to the Arab presence in the continent, which still throws up antagonistic contradictions. And I suspect that those 'big lipped' 'black skin' taunts about which African American GIs got upset in Somalia, are tied up in that historic relationship of dominance and subjugation.

T: But, see that's what I'm saying. I can be; maybe it's a flaw, but I can be naive enough to believe that objectification is always within the one who is gazing and that person gazing can be 'anybody'. Then that 'anybody' is who is dominant in any given circumstance. After a while, objectification becomes examples of

objectification scattered all over the world and it's not just Africa. What was Bosnia about? At the end of the day, I can be as a child and wonder what it is about human nature that if we see something different we have to, like children, point and laugh. That is a very childish reaction that in adults turns into genocide. And it is related to looking at a dance, and not understanding, and therefore marginalising it.

C: So to my next probing provocation – a big one: *'What is 'the thing', in the theatrical dance world, historically, about the ability and dis-ability of the Black body in the dominant White gaze of the mainstream'?*

T: From my experience, I believe it is a bit here in Britain, it is ignorance. In 1993 when I went up to Phoenix they were having all kinds of sports science specialists trying to figure out why the Phoenix dancers were having so many problems with injuries, or why were they different from other dancers; what kind of mess is that? And I'm coming from an American context where…

Alvin Ailey didn't particularly care for my batty butt and I was objectified and teased because of it. I remember standing on stage getting ready to do Revelations for the opening section Buked in a brown double-knit sack dress; a metaphor for slavery and the triumph of the African American spirit, and Dudley Williams is teasing me, putting his elbow on my bottom talking about how I had such a shelf. Now, one would have thought my batty bottom would have respect in that context but Alvin would ask, 'can't you get rid of it?' My response to him was I'm not getting rid of this, this is my heritage, I got this from my mother, she probably got it from hers. What am I supposed to do with this, it's going to be right there when I die. Consequently though, I changed my ballet teacher and took Pilates and slimmed the batty down. So in the end I did change.

Now, Alvin is an African American. British context, British people, English people; what it boils down to, sure if you go the sport science route, people are genetically set in what their capabilities are, their skills are, what they are capable of achieving given the sport or the dance they are trying to achieve. There are too many examples that blow the ship out of the water so to speak of what a person is capable of doing despite what genetics has laid out for them. I am a perfect example of the made body; one that I took upon myself, with the correct guidance, and paid for lessons, Pilates and yoga and ballet, up the wazoo training. It's about training. And when it comes to dance, it's about opportunities for the kinds of training that will facilitate development of a body that can do almost, if not everything, the person conceives of trying to do.

So it gets down to education and opportunities. First off, some people are ignorant about what is needed to train a dancer. And when I got over here in 1992, I may be hurting some feelings here, but I'm sorry, some of the training was behind the times. Even what the London Contemporary Dance School was offering in the way of Graham technique, was behind the times. The Graham School itself had progressed beyond what was being taught here in Britain. So Britain was behind the times, not only in what they were offering for this technique, but also in what they understood was required.

Let's go back in history. What was understood as African dance practice on the continent was not viewed as the beautiful, gracing thing that we now understand it to be. A lot of those first observers came from their limited experience and point of view and named the dance practices of African peoples, lascivious; all kinds of ugly words and not credible. They didn't understand its polyrhythms, its polycentric movement, its values, its significances, its spirituality. Had no concept, had no frame of reference and so they denigrated it. I don't have to discuss how that dancing body was viewed. You come up to this time and some people are still locked in that understanding of a dancing body that is Black; they don't get it.

Anybody can reshape their body. Let's take an extreme, Cher (the singer/actress). She's spent a lot of money to look like that. There's all kinds of ways you can change a body. Training is about changing a body; it is also about changing mind set. In my early experiences with Phoenix, some of the dancers could have danced the world. They were slowed down by their state of mind and their understanding of what they were capable of doing. That wasn't just on them. Other people's expectations of them either built or lowered their expectations of themselves and that's what it's about.

C: *'Is the Black body now, today, becoming more White – as the White body becomes more Black – in dance, as already in youth and urban culture?'*

T: I have to go again to possibilities. And possibilities as in dance making. What were the only options for a people within a cultural circumstance who felt overwhelmed by anothers, oppressive, overwhelming, homogenizing principles and possibilities, convoluting and destroying their original ideas of themselves? These young people come up in schools where everything is shared; children can't help but share. They do it all the time; they exchange things. Then you have a commercial ideal that privileges particular kinds of expressions because, once again, it allows a society an avenue of escape, something to model, be it good or bad.

Hip Hop is fraught with positive and negative role models, and all youth are picking up both of them, the positive and the negative. Gangster and what you can call Revisionist. I already pointed out Bangarra. Frances Rings refers to herself as a Black woman; she has German and Australian indigenous coursing in her blood.

As a child I used to dream a world where everyone was brown. But that was a long time ago. I was sitting on the train and we got on the B train and there was the A train. There were only two trains in those days. And it got to a point when it got out to the South side that the A train went one way, went West, and the B train went East. The A train had lots of White folks and the B train had lots of Black folk. Nowadays you go to Chicago there are trains all over the place. And there are people all over the place, it's not just Black or White. Because of the Chicago fire and the inundation of African Americans from the South, my mother bringing us along with countless thousands of others moving to the North for economic opportunities for jobs in the urban centres, there was a time when Chicago was laid out, Black and White. The south was Black, the north was White; it doesn't exist quite like that, not any more.

So, in 2006, the question, *'Is the Black not a White body, the White body not a Black body?'* – if you want to use it as a metaphor, then I would dare say, 'yeah!' Because I look at even my earlier discussions of White, can't be discussions of White because, for a fact, in my early heyays I had a boyfriend; that child could pass for German, but he had a grandmother the same skin colour as me. So his ability to pass already confuses the idea of a Black body, if we're only dealing with skin colour.

I would say, the current context... if you look at a globalness, a global thing, because for me right now there are no national contemporary dance companies; contemporary dance as a practice, even classical ballet as a practice is global. The process of making dance is not national. What makes differences is the movement language, how it's put together and then how it's performed. If you look at it that way, yeah, there is exchange and sharing, all kinds all over the place – cross-cultural, multilingual, multiplistic, you know, all over the map.

C: You will know that the very notion(s) of the national, and the nation state, and nationality are under critical attack in our time.

T: Undermined.

C: So – the whole Black body, White body formulation becomes redundant.

T: Yeah, of course.

CODA – Thea Barnes

Our conversation spun off in many directions with both of us offering several delineations of the reality and validity of a "Black Body Cultural". We also deconstructed varied dimensions of the dancing body that supposedly inhabit it. What came out were our positionalities, our cultural politics about what the dancing body, that is thought to be Black, embodies and presents whether in performance, walking down the street or dancing at home. The tension is in that the dancing body that is Black is not necessarily African and that it represents what is thought to be Black. I, like Isaac Julien for his films, wanted to explore qualities of Black-ness. It's not enough to say it's African or Black, especially in Britain, especially in this day and time.

We all dance, but within this simplistic universalism we have to acknowledge difference in Black-ness in all its manifestations. Difference can be found in the historical, social, political, climatic and cultural situation of each dance practice as it is embodied and witnessed. The distribution of dance practice based on skin colour has long barred an articulated reclamation and excavation of British dances that fall between the Black/White dichotomies. These invisiblised dancings thriving in marginal spaces have not been acknowledged by Britain's dance canon. Gross universalising terms and binaries have only succeeded in homogenizing or alienating these alternative expressions.

I have been inspired by cultural politics of difference as discussed by Cornell West, which aim to subvert simplistic universalism by using indicators of specificity "to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing."[1] These considerations can be applied to cross-cultural dance practice as it exists in Britain, in the past and present. These considerations can be applied to demystify notions of a "Black Body Cultural", its inhabitant the "Black" dancing body and its varied realities in Britain.

At crisis points during the 20th century; end of World War I, World War II, race riots of the 1980s, a proliferation of cross-cultural dance making occurred which ushered in alternative movement vocabularies. Some within the 1980s and 1990s were considered "British Black dance". These dance makers re-imagined the imperial gaze by designing alternative movement vocabularies for diasporic representations vivifying as well as contradicting British hegemonic perspectives. Kokuma and MAAS Movers are two examples of practitioners whose embodied

knowledge and individual performative acts allegorise traditional forms by remembering and reclaiming historical memories. Cultural and social crisis sparked cross-cultural expressions throughout Britain's dance history. These moments of cultural upheaval allowed marginalised practices to reclaim, excavate and reinvent inherited sources. These sources in their various manifestations defined difference in gender, class and race in mainstream narratives.

Conjunctural trends in British dance practice illustrate a hegemonic centre and its contentious, dissenting and overlapping hierarchies. These hierarchies include the proliferation and decline of dance practices of difference that have shifted aesthetic preference in Britain in numerous directions throughout the 20th century. Classical ballet was not born in Britain, it was imported. German modern dance pioneers, Kurt Joos, and Rudolf Laban, American modern dance pioneer Martha Graham and postmodern choreographer Merce Cunningham are examples of revised modern and postmodern concepts and innovations that shared a temporal and spatial proximity with traditional and displaced diasporic practices. Diasporic practices have migrated from Africa through George Dzikunu's Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble and from the Caribbean through Les Ballet Negres and Irie! Dance Theatre. From Asia dance practices are represented by practitioners of Kathak from Northern India, Bharata Natyam from Southern India, Odissi from Eastern India and many, many more known and unknown lineages. These Indian practices have influenced ballet through Ernest Berk to current contemporary dance maker Akram Khan. Not all cross-cultural dance making was made by English, British-born or immigrated African, Caribbean or Asian practitioners. African American jazz dance practitioner Buddy Bradley working with Frederick Ashton in his 1932 production High Yellow with lead prima ballerina Alicia Markova is illustrative of those who shifted the marginalised to the centre by appropriating desired practices from the idolised 'Other'. The British landscape is a complex and shared space for exchange and alternative perspectives in dance making, pooled expertise and encouraged appropriation of all forms and all matter of cultural mimesis.

In Britain, ambivalence has glorified exoticness and mystified performative practices while denigrating indigenous origins. These strategies have participated in a process to erase cultural specificity by renunciating origins and invisiblising the participation of difference in the transformation of all British 'dancings'. Stuart Hall's comment that "postmodernism's deep and ambivalent fascination with difference – sexual difference, cultural difference, racial difference and, above all, ethnic difference"[2] characterises a distinctive element in the situational relationship between cross-cultural dance practices and this British circumstance.

Though not articulated critically in a credible manner to date, the politics surrounding cross-cultural dance practices in Britain suggest numerous striations of accelerated innovation and ruptures that chart dance practice in relation to circumstance. Displacements and migrations before and after World War II, racial disparity and racial tensions in early 1980s, decolonization and the decline of imperial power, displacement of European models, particularly the dancing body of high culture, have all affected the tolerance and acceptance of cross-cultural practices. The fluidity of current contemporary dance making has further degenerated nationalistic ideologies, while globalisation and commodification associated with the emergence of hip hop cultures and their dance practices have changed accessibility and the value of imported and exported dance theatre. These moments of historical specificity propose distinct temporalities characterising and illustrating the ebb and flow, rise and decline of cross-cultural dance practices.

Taking a lead from Cornel West to reveal the intricacies of dance practice in Britain – cultural politics of difference eliminate the monolithic and homogeneous encased in efforts that appear on the surface to be understandings, ideologies and implementations of diversity, but which are in practice characterised by diffuse multiplicity and heterogeneity. Referential binaries like Black/White, African/Caribbean, sacred/secular, gender pluralities male/female, class distinctions of high/low are splintered to discover a situational diagnosis[3] of dance practice.

Cultural politics of difference demystify ideologies that underpin "Black Body Cultural", "British Black Dance", "African People's Dance" and the "Black" dancing body to examine and describe how representational strategies within performative acts were creative responses to specific circumstances. Investigations of difference can illustrate the dynamics of power structures, particularly between dance practitioners and organisations like Arts Council England, which participate in bureaucracies that sabotage nascent expressions to meet institutional expectations. Investigations of difference can fragment and deconstruct the printed word that legitimises racialised ideologies of all kinds. Embodiment and performance develop into very different investigations when articulating how the efficacy of agency – the assertive power of self-representation – enables dance artists to arrive at individual, authenticated renderings of her and his dance making.

Inspired by the cultural politics of difference, autobiographical revelations and rethinking of British dance history; my particular examination of cross-cultural dance practice maps the dynamics of relations and interactions of varied dancing bodies. Their various struggles and successes indicate shifts in dance making and creation of individual identities. Dance making practices, encouraged by

shifts in ideologies transfigured by innovative manifestations of difference, designed singular subjectivities. Their individual realities continuously disempower mythic constructions of the dancing body. Examinations of their reality dispel monolithic constructions of Black-ness. What is revealed provides a transformative praxis for alternative readings in a context where the works of cross-cultural dance makers has yet to be canonically articulated and acknowledged in British history.

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[1] West, C. (1990). "The New Cultural Politics of Difference". In Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures. Russell Ferguson (Ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, p. 19.

[2] Hall, S. (1992). "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" Gina Dent (Ed.) In Black Popular Culture, p. 23

[3] Shohat, E. (2006). "Post-Fanon and the Colonial: Situational Diagnosis. In Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices. London: Duke University Press, p. 250-289.

VOICING BLACK DANCE:
The British Experience 1930s – 1990s
A Reader produced for the ADAD Heritage Project 2007

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When I studied dance at university I struggled to find published works about the history of African or Caribbean dancers in the UK yet I was taught (and could read) in detail about ballet and contemporary dance from Louis XIV to Anna Pavlova to the Judson Church Group. This is not how it should be. That is why I am thankful to have been a part of the process of creating this first reader. This publication is incredibly significant because it is a first step in acknowledging the immense value of the contribution made by dance artists who are a part of the African Diaspora in the UK. ADAD hopes that every reader of this publication will have an opportunity to hear the voices of these artists – to gain a deeper appreciation for their foundational work and an appetite to see today's dance artists from the African Diasporic community growing from strength to strength.
Jeanette Bain, ADAD Director

A timely collection of writings and interviews about the rich history and current state of Black dance in Britain is long overdue. While by no means the last word on the subject, Voicing Black Dance might be just what is needed to kick-start a larger and ongoing dialogue.
Donald Hutera, Dance Writer

There are always great revelations when one delves into history and archival material. Black people have contributed sizably to every performing art form in this country and now it is this generation's responsibility to effectively make this known, our history should no longer be a mystery.
Sheron Wray, Independent Dance Artist

ADAD are to be applauded for rescuing these memories of the rich and wide ranging contributions that Black artists have made to British dance over the last half century. These essays and interviews offer much needed information and insights into an important but unjustly neglected field.
Ramsay Burt, Professor of Dance History, De Montfort University

Dance artists in the UK with a strong interest in dance forms of the African Diaspora lack a sense of legacy. If the Africanist Presence in Britain is not reclaimed, restored in name, protected and respected, we who do know will have but ourselves to blame.
Thea Barnes, Dance Researcher and Resident Dance Supervisor, The Lion King (London)

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