

HOTfoot Online



Welcome

Hotfoot Online

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ADAD Interview

Hotfoot Editor Jeannette Brooks meets the new ADAD Programme Development Manager Pamela Zigomo

Pamela Zigomo is a young woman with a mission, a serious and focused mind and a crucial role in the future vision of ADAD. She joined the organisation after the departure of 'Funmi Adewole in September 2004 and has been full - time in the post since March of this year.

So Pamela, can you introduce yourself to the ADAD membership.

Well I'm a born and bred Zimbabwean – and proud of it. I'm a real townie; I lived in Harare where I also went to school.

After my studies I started working as an accountant - trying to do the right thing for all the wrong reasons. I worked for Coopers & Lybrand and then Ernst & Young. But I ended up living for the weekends and evenings. I started a second existence.

Slowly I became more and more involved in the performing arts. I was part of a young people's choir which had a dance group attached to it, and a drama group with kids from my church. At that time in Zimbabwe, community arts were very active. There was a raft of high profile artists such as Stephen Chifunyise to work with, who mentored us and shared their skills and experience. I started writing, plays for the most part.

A major turning point for me was being exposed to Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA). I wasn't a part of the festival – nevertheless I saw so many people, different ages, different cultures and countries – all involved in some way with the arts. We could talk together; there was a connection

even when the spoken language was not the same. Everyone was so motivated. I was so excited and moved by the experience that I decided life was too short to not follow your heart. I knew accounting was not for me and a different path lay ahead. And it felt natural assisting others and I spent less time on the stage and more time getting others to perform or engage in the arts.

All through this discourse you can sense Pamela's passion for what she now does as her career.

What eventually brought you to the UK?

My second degree. I studied at Leeds Metropolitan University for an MSc in Events Management. I had a choice between here and Australia and because I had family here already, England seemed the more logical place to come.

And how are you finding the UK and working at ADAD?

It's more relaxed at home. People are happier and friendlier. Its sink or swim here, so I get on with things.

For me now at ADAD, the transition is complete – the career has changed to arts management and I have a well balanced life. I have stability, emotionally and spiritually. This is what I do – this feels right and I enjoy it.

I will eventually go back home and work with my people in the arts. There is still plenty in Zimbabwe to do.

What three things would you most like to see happen for ADAD while you are the manager?

First of all I want the organisation to have a solid and secure foundation in place. That would be a genuine legacy larger than me.

Practically speaking, I want there to be a stronger web presence for ADAD that serves as a point of reference, and is lively and flexible, just like the dance forms.

I want to strengthen the networks and infrastructure between the different genres and techniques. There must be a firm base for training and education work. ADAD should have a high profile too amongst the other more established dance organisations and amongst all dance artists.

Thank you.

I would just like to add, I am here and I am able and willing to meet and talk with any of the members at any time.

Touring:

Culturally Diverse/Black Dance in the UK

Tim Tubbs

Mission?

A few years ago, a leading choreographer, interviewing me for a post and looking at my CV, asked whether I felt I had a mission to empower culturally diverse/Diaspora (CD) artists in the UK. He wondered whether my calling might be a throwback to my family's British Empire tradition as missionaries, teachers and entrepreneurs. Granddad Tubbs was Archbishop of Rangoon, converting the population of the Nicobar Islands (of recent tsunami notoriety) to Christianity. The maternal side of my family built railways in and imported corn from Argentina. An intriguing proposition from this choreographer, but truly... NO!

A decade earlier, as programmer at Sadler's Wells Theatre (1982-1993), I worked with everything - opera, ballet, musicals, contemporary dance, performance art, rock concerts and world theatre. I presented the Wells' debuts of Phoenix Dance, Adzido, Bill T Jones/Arnie Zane, African Ballet of Guinea and a host of other CD companies, from Cumbre Flamenca to Kodo Drummers. Great times.

Then came Pan Project, Peter Badejo, Mallika Sarabhai, Jacqui Chan, Koffi Koko, Namron, Irven Lewis, Henri Oguike, Jean Abreu, Saju Hari, Union, Bi Ma, Sakoba, Imlata, Shobana Jeyasingh and Mavin Khoo dance companies (among many others). It just happened. I made no conscious choice to work with CD artists or thought of myself as developing a specialism. They were just among the most creative and interesting dancemakers around, so of course I wanted to work with them.

The Approach

I have never approached touring CD dance in any consciously different way from any other work; although I will admit there have been experiences along the way to modify that assertion.

CD work has long since passed into the UK mainstream from its protected special status of the early multi-culti years - *you've been ignored and we're here to put that right* or *we'll fund you and judge you on your ethnicity rather than the quality of your work*, etc. We expect all artistic work now to stand or fall on its own merits: and about time too. 'Teacher's pet' was always a patronisingly uncomfortable role, and you usually suffered for it. So we are growing up.

Speaking as a programmer and producer (and it's a view undoubtedly shared with international promoters who come window-shopping to UK dance showcases like British Dance Edition), I believe contemporary Britain's most stimulating or distinctive dance work could be characterised broadly as 'performance art', 'gender-bending' or 'multi-culti'. And that's mostly what is being booked: DV8, Michael Clark, Henri Oguike, Akram Khan and so on. To some extent, I think UK promoters, venues and audiences agree. Is that so surprising? Although we Brits love to feel guilty or apologetic about ourselves (all that self-deprecation), we are in fact streets ahead of the rest of Europe (and arguably the USA too) on multiculturalism and creative integration.

After six years managing the African Peoples' Dance (APD) touring company Sakoba, I was asked to speak at an Arts Council England conference on 'Promoting Black Dance' and, truth to tell, I was hard pressed to think what I was doing differently with a CD company/artist from tour-booking, producing, promoting or marketing other kinds of work. It was all the same business, really.

The same expertise is applied, the same professional experience, skills and contacts to develop the project with the artists, plan and budget the production, raise the money, book the tour, create the promotional material, nurture critical mass, organise travel and accommodation, rehearsal

schedules, technical staff, artists or collaborators and then deliver and market the tour itself.

Singular Species

So what have I found special or different about touring CD artists and work?

Just as dance has specific touring needs, as opposed to other shows - for instance floor surface, temperature, lighting - so APD has certain specific issues (as do flamenco, tap, bharata natyam, etc.): working on the small-scale with integrated live musicians, for example. That means: finding rehearsal and performance spaces where you can thump djembes or stamp on the floor all day without being lynched by the neighbours (tricky); transporting, maintaining and stage-managing a welter of cumbersome instruments (costly); and coping with musicians, who often have a very different working culture from dancers.

I've had some challenging moments with CD artists over the years. Creative time-keeping, for one. My experiences and joking apart, it's bad for business to leave people waiting or turn up late all the time: not good enough. 'Easy, Tim-man, when I want t'be found, I'll be found,' was one of my favourites from a delightful Caribbean musician with a legendary talent for vanishing without explanation at key moments. Flamenco musicians were expert disappearing acts too, injured egos hissy-ing off to the airport for the silliest reasons - grow up. Substance use: major ganja, of course, but please God, not at Spanish customs on a British Council tour!

And the dramas, the high-strikes! 'If I'm not happy, I'll just lay it on you, or anyone else handy, without regard to the situation, professionalism, fairness, good manners or common-sense.'

I've been shouted at, for no good reason, by an artist, right in front of the presenter, four other UK dance companies and a phalanx of senior British Council representatives. These infantile histrionics have been a defining characteristic for me of an undeveloped professional working culture, of individual insecurity disguised under that infernal "Attichooode" we meet

everywhere. Or may we just call it rampant unprofessionalism? It really won't do, I'm afraid.

The Ethnic Thing

But there are many positives specific to touring CD dance in the UK.

People have criteria to meet and boxes to tick, so in funding and programming terms, 'Ethnic' has an extra edge. Promoters and venues will want to show a diversity of dance work, and there is always room for the non-Western booking.

The snag is, you find yourself lumped in with the most unlikely competition in pursuit of the 'Ethnic' gig. For example:

'Oh, we don't have much of an Asian community in Puddleton-on-Marsh.'

'Er... Shobana Jeyasingh doesn't typically appeal to a predominantly British Asian audience, it's more of a contemporary dance company: we always do better in Brighton, for instance, than Leicester.'

'Well, we have RJC coming next Spring so...'

'So you have ticked the ethnic box for that season with a contemporary dance company, and cannot consider an APD, hip hop or classical Indian company during that three-month period, when your other dance gigs will go to physical theatre or contemporary acts, right?'

On the other hand, the promoter knows as well as you do that you're going to sell more tickets in Wimpleswick than Not-Another-Dreary-Abstract-Contemporary-Dance-Company-Please. A CD dance company can offer: exoticism (play this card with care according to personal taste), something engaging or different, possibly live music, a sense of openness to world influences, the global village, Britain's urban diversity, and – important point – very strong visual images. One of the frequently lamented weaknesses of UK independent and contemporary dance is its incomprehensible and *recherché* publicity language and imagery. You know what I mean; those blurred photos of uninteresting, uncostumed figures with all the impact and charisma of a wet

Monday night in Hull and that incomprehensible babble the artistic director's chum wrote, which is supposed to sell the work to an audience.

CD work (contemporary or otherwise) tends to offer strong, attractive and engaging photo imagery and its copy tends to be less pretentious and alienating, thank God.

Another distinct advantage of touring CD dance is that, rightly or wrongly, it is perceived to offer positive role models and major opportunities for outreach or education work. It's not hard to see why a promoter will opt for a martial arts, hiphop or African artist, for example, to engage, motivate and energise a reluctant classroom, a community group or young people.

Pause for self-criticism. Perhaps it is too easy for a manager/producer like myself to overlook the specific contexts of culturally diverse artforms. Still, promoting CD/APD work has really enabled (or obliged) me to engage with unfamiliar and often difficult experiences or concepts. For this I am very deeply grateful and perhaps that is what keeps me connected and active in the sector.

A gap remains, unbridged and only partially acknowledged. I have come to sense a significantly challenging isolation on either side. The culturally diverse or Diaspora artist brings an experience and expertise to the UK dance world which is sometimes barely articulated, understood or shared with the enabling partners, be they the UK-born dancers who will interpret/perform the work, the funders or presenters who will finance or book it, the critics who will damn or praise it, the audiences who will pay to see it... and people like me, who are perhaps the prime enablers, negotiating and furthering the artists' desire to create and show their work by managing, producing and promoting it.

Next Steps

I see (and welcome) a growing self-sufficiency, professional maturity and realism among younger CD/APD artists, an awareness that times have changed and that new challenges and opportunities are there to be embraced, and that this demands new creativity, new approaches and new partners. Do I also perceive a steady burgeoning of regionally-based APD/CD practitioners, whose work is starting to make its mark both locally, regionally and nationally?

More good news can be read in the growing commitment and enthusiasm of leading UK producers and programmers to promote, commission and showcase APD/CD dance. Look at recent CD successes in leading dance establishments: Jonzi D's hip hop festival at Sadler's Wells; Brenda Edwards' Hip or Raj Pardesi's Dance Beats at The Place; The Big Mission/DanceXchange (Birmingham); programmes by Derby Dance Centre or Dance City Newcastle; East London Dance's recent Create at Stratford Circus; or at Covent Garden, ROH2's initiatives like Nitro at the Opera, Ballet Black and the new: currents series at the Clore Studio Upstairs in 2004 and 2005, which I have been honoured to curate.

It's a sobering reality and the times, they are a-changing. Art, as the song goes, is never easy, but it's a fantastic place to be in. While we have to be very realistic to deal with things as they are, artists and their promoters are here to challenge and rise to challenge. BBC star scriptwriter Andrew Davies, writing in this week's Stage about the difficulties of turning Dickens' complex *Bleak House* into an effective TV script, described each problem as an opportunity, which sounds like a recipe for success. Let's talk and, above all, let's do it!

Tim Tubbs, an independent dance manager, producer and consultant, is Director of UK Foundation for Dance which manages a range of artists, produces dance productions for touring, runs Marylebone Dance Studio and is active in the training and support of dance managers.

Introducing Wasssup!

It's your shout.

Your turn, your voice, your article. Do you have something to express? Then express it here. You want to expose some injustice or shout about a success you've had? Do it here.

If you've ignored some burning issue for too long or just need to highlight a subject then don't just think about doing something – write for [Hotfoot](#). Get in touch and let your thoughts be heard. Resources, touring, funding, space – no topic is taboo when it relates to Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD).

Our aim is to represent you and for you to know there is a way of communicating with a large group of artists, organisations, dancers and choreographers.

Keeping this in mind, Wasssup! is looking for contributors. You will not be left to get on with it without support and supervision unless that's the way you want it. Your article will be edited before being printed and you must get in touch with ADAD before starting work on your piece. There is only room for one article per issue!

So, what's happening with you? What's it all about? Wasssup?

Review

The Big Mission

Crescent Theatre, Birmingham 4 February 2005

Reviewed by Terry Grimley for the *Birmingham Post*

Colin Poole's solo performance *The Box Office* was the highlight of the evening.

There was no doubt about the opening night highlight of this four-day festival of new black British dance.

If evidence was needed that dance can explore humanity's darkness as well as its light, Colin Poole's solo performance *The Box Office* provided it to disturbing effect.

First establishing a context of urban stress by juxtaposing animated film of a daunting council estate with Bernstein's 'There's a Place for Us', Poole presented himself as a grotesque hermaphrodite wearing a sinister two-faced golliwog mask and a costume incorporating half a tutu.

The mask implied a rich layering of meanings, sometimes looking like a child's painting while also suggesting a horror movie bogeyman. When the reverse, female, face was presented to the audience Poole's limbs appeared dislocated, suggesting an insect or one of the women in Picasso's painting 'Les demoiseles d'Avignon' - appropriately, since the central orgiastic episode dealt with commercialised sex.

This edgy white-knuckle ride of a show ended up in calmer waters, to the accompaniment of a Schubert string quartet.

Poole's originality was flanked by two pieces which, in widely contrasting ways, both reflected stereotypes of black dance. Ruff/Cut Dance Theatre's *Silent Caves*, with its evocative African setting and costumes, looked gorgeous. But it was almost killed off before it got going by a wearily wordy introduction and despite some elegant dancing it sagged under the weight of its meaningful torpor.

Martin Robinson's *Yin & Yang* went to the other, urban, extreme as Robinson delivered his metallic solo performance to the near-deafening accompaniment of a trio of DJs. Representative, perhaps, but not obviously innovative.

Arts Council England: update on African People's Dance Opportunities for Regular Funding

Background Information

As a result of funding changes in 2004/5, Arts Council England (ACE) had available £1,011,000 to invest in organisations with a focus on developing African People's Dance (APD) in the year 2005/6. Arts Council England defines APD as an inclusive term for all genres of dance which originate from the subcontinent of Africa and across the African Diaspora.

A decision was made at executive level to strategically focus this sizeable investment on APD rather than another area or art-form. Cultural diversity is one of Arts Council England's five aims and their corporate plan (which you can find on the ACE website) sets out to increase the number of Black and Minority Ethnic led organisations as a priority. As it was noted that Black dance has very little infrastructure, the decision was taken to spend the funding in the area of APD.

Following this decision at ACE, applications for regular funding were sought by invitation. A number of factors were taken into account when choosing the organisations invited to submit to this funding opportunity. They included the organisation's strategic role, effective operation methods, track record and contribution to Arts Council England's Ambitions for the Arts. The regular funding offered comprises of a three-year financial commitment by ACE to invest in the artistic activity of the organisation.

Purpose of Awards

The funding awards objectives are to enable the creation and distribution of high quality African People's Dance and ACE has now chosen the organisations it will fund. They each operate effectively under one of the three categories below:

- Making and touring high quality dance productions to tour on small and middle scale regional/national touring circuits.
- Independent producers who are able to develop high quality touring dance productions, festivals and/or platforms.
- Provision of high quality artist/company support services (e.g. provision of professional development programmes, management services, information and networking, advocacy, etc.).

Funding Awardees

From the 18 applicants invited to submit, the following APD organisations were successful in the recent process to secure regular funding:

Touring Companies

African Cultural Exchange

Robert Hylton, Urban Classicism

Kompany Malakhi

Tavaziva Dance Company

Region

West Midlands

London

South West

London

Producers

Stillbrock Productions

Benji Reid

State of Emergency

Region

London

North West

South West

Support Organisations

The Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD)

Region

London

Sakoba Dance Company and Kajans were both added to the portfolio through their regional offices.

For more information on Arts Council England and its funding opportunities please call 0845 300 6200 or visit its web site at www.artscouncil.org.uk

Regular Feature

ADAD Asks...

In each Hotfoot newsletter, ADAD will interview an experienced dance professional with connections to the sector that works with Dance forms of the African Diaspora (DAD) and ask them 10 direct questions.

In this edition, we meet Marie McCluskey MBE MA, Director of Swindon Dance, National Dance Agency.

1. How do you strategically engage with the DAD sector?

Firstly, I must say that dance forms of the African Diaspora have been part of what I've been involved with and what I've naturally leant towards for a long time now. It is a very accepted and normal part of what we 'do' at Swindon Dance.

Strategically, our work includes developing new audiences and new Swindon audiences at that. The geography of our town and its varied communities necessitates a focus on culturally diverse dance.

Consequently it's been appropriate to commission dance, right from the early days of our 'Inner Rhythms' seasons. We supported companies such as Bullies Ballerinas and Sankalpalm amongst others during the 1990's. We've sought to actively engage the artists in other areas of our activity – such as being part of steering groups and by making our professional programmes and training courses relevant to DAD.

Finally, from the outset, we made sure that companies touring to Swindon (such as Phoenix Dance and RJC) always matched their visit to an educational residency.

2. What events or initiatives do you programme at your venue under these strategies?

We regularly programme 'Inner Rhythms'. This annual season started after being awarded the runners up prize in the 1993 Digital Dance Awards. Its focus is on cultural identity and how that is defined through art and dance.

A far more recent initiative is 'Reflexions' – devised in partnership with Maria Ryan and Swindon Dance. It is a Black dance and dance artist support scheme. Everything delivered, planned and co-ordinated through this project comes directly from the artists present on the Black dance scene and part of the initiative.

3. How did you devise or create these plans?

It is all linked to the artist/company relationships we build. The original 'Inner Rhythms' course is a great example where we saw a need and a potential. The steering group we formed was committed to the partnership and was present and responsible at all stages of the season's evolution.

4. What audience development ideas do you use to raise the profile of dance forms of the African Diaspora?

Audience development in this area usually involves entire communities and its extended support networks. We tend to work with the parents, the young people and the parents of the young people's parents! That has been particularly positive in the Swindon West Indian community. I remember watching the wonderful educational sessions led by Jackie Guy and Kokuma, seeing the Caribbean elders performing the Quadrille with great enthusiasm.

5. What is your present interpretation of DAD?

I believe there is a definite and distinct genre developing. There are connections across the sector that relate to the whole Diaspora of dance forms. I'll give you a few of my interpretations of the style. Firstly, the musical connections: there is a choice made that is often very rhythmical and driven. The work is often emotional and engages with its audiences. There is some kind of implied narrative. Not a story per se but a journey with sometimes even very light direction. It's physical. Bones, sweat, muscles. The dance flows from deep inside, out. There is a suggestion of race memory or cultural identity.

6. What steps can still be made with the sector to build resources including artists' development and audience development?

Mentoring at every level and time of the artist's/company's/work's development is crucial.

Also matching the artists and companies with highly skilled managers – of which there is a national shortage. We need more entrepreneurs and people ready to roll up their sleeves. Take the example of Akram Khan and his manager Farooq Chaudhry – when they work, these relationships make things happen. We must never forget to have the ability to *not* approach problems in the same way across the board for every dance artist and company.

7. Is the DAD sector relevant to the overall British dance scene?

Vital. It is currently one of the most important areas of dance.

8. Why might this area of dance be important?

DAD transcends so many things. It cuts across social groups, age groups and emotional dispositions whilst remaining relevant to them all. It relates to its time and also to its traditions. It clicks with popular culture and is the 'voice of the people'. It provides us with spectacular role models and touches so many.

9. What insights/predictions can you share with the ADAD readership of your future plans?

We intend to programme more artist and art form driven work – like the practice of ‘Reflexions’ – and to include commissions. I want to extend partnership investments to where there is a real and genuine need and call for our support.

10. What advice or ‘words of wisdom’ could you offer the DAD arena?

Don’t expect or accept doing everything for yourself and on your own. Sometimes the class or community we come from puts us into a habitual and pragmatic ‘to do’ approach to everything.

And finally – don’t compromise on the quality of your work.

Marie McCluskey MBE MA, trained as a dancer at Arts Educational School (London) and London School of Contemporary Dance. She performed commercially before establishing a private dance school in Swindon. In 1979, Marie was became dance fellow for Swindon Borough Council and founded Swindon Dance (formerly known as Thamesdown Dance Studio) and in the same year was appointed its Dance Director. Swindon Dance gained National Dance Agency status in 1991; it is one of the first local authority established dance centres in the UK.

Marie’s awards include the Winston Churchill Scholarship (1984) to study the training and development of Black dancers in New York at Alvin Ailey and Dance Theatre Harlem; the Digital Dance Award (1993 runner up) and an MBE in 1993 for services to dance.

Marie is a current board member of Siobhan Davies Dance Company and former board member of the Foundation for Community Dance (Founder Chair) and ADAD (Founder Chair).

Review

Sakoba Dance Theatre - *Aseju*

The Place, London 6 & 7 March 2005

Reviewed by Lisa Haight for londondance.com

Bode Lawal is Sakoba Dance theatre's artistic director and choreographer. Judging from *Aseju's* (*Excess*) detailed programme notes, he is also a bit of a philosopher.

Aseju was performed in two parts: Part One consisted of two sections *Group Intro* and *Ijogbon (Trouble)* and Part Two consisted of seven sections, *Commute, City, Image, Choices, Social Scene, Consequences* and *Ritual Dance*.

Group Intro combined African dance movements, contemporary dance movements and a combination of the two. It was well executed and choreographed and a pleasure to watch. It started with what appeared to be five dancers walking backwards and then, quite surprisingly, one man broke out of the formation and started playing a drum and then another man broke out and started playing his drum. These two disappeared behind a semi-transparent screen and were joined by a third musician. They continued playing African styled music which was rhythmic, attention grabbing and invigorating whilst the three dancers left were dancing African styled movements in a circle. Two other women entered the stage and began dancing in their own group. These two dancers' movements included whispering whilst holding up a hand to their respective ears (talking on a mobile?). The choreography was simplistic and effective.

Ijogbon was the section where the theatre part of Sakoba's 'dance theatre' started. This part combined speech with movement and centred around a man, Lawal, dressed as a woman, playing the part of an infertile wife. The storyline was this 'wife' had been married to her husband for 10 years and hadn't been able to conceive and because of this, the husband went out, got a

mistress and got her pregnant (she was showing). The wife ended up attacking the mistress, hitting and kicking her.

Although Lawal's performance in the role was strong, I didn't understand why one of the other female dancers couldn't play the part of the wife. The wife as she appeared was obviously a man in drag and this prevented me from 'believing' the story line. (Maybe the husband only just worked out the truth?) There was little real dance in this section.

Part Two's sections contained dance and were short, choppy and loosely held together. For me, the majority of the costumes, aside from those in *Commute*, *City* and *Social Scene*, came across as not suiting the work. Take for example, the black lycra mini-dress worn in *Image*. The woman in this scene was portraying what appeared to be a celebrity being photographed by the paparazzi. Her character came across as being glamorous, famous and fashion conscious but what she was wearing didn't match, it came across as looking cheap, and I wasn't able to 'believe' this character either.

Asjeu was like a good series of ideas that worked on paper in the form of the programme notes, but not on the stage. I wish I could've seen more of the dance style and movements Lawal created for the *Group Intro* as it showed real talent and there, maybe, lies the key to the artistic status and respect Lawal is seeking.

Contemplating Diversity in Audiences

Thea Nerissa Barnes

The Set Up

Thea was asked to respond to the following question:

Is there something inherent to dance audiences from a particular culture, country or continent?

In My Opinion

I believe no two audiences are the same. My experience of touring globally as a dancer and director for many years has shown me that audiences are unpredictable. As far as cultural or ethnic distinctions between audiences, there may be some basic shared characteristics but beyond that every audience as a group and each individual therein respond differently whether to different kinds of performance or different performances of the same show.

Audiences watching *The Lion King* are a wonderful indicator of this belief. Given the show's 24 scenes, any one in a particular performance will receive a diverse response. For example the opening scene, 'The Circle of Life' will always receive an uproarious applause at its end. Similarly, the appearance of the elephant and the rhinoceros puppet dancers in the stall aisles and their march up the stairs on to the stage most times will also get a reaction. The 'Eulogy' scene that occurs after the death of the Mufasa character may or may not get a response - anything from total silence to strong applause for the same set of performers.

A World of Reactions

On a very personal level, reminiscing further on audience reactions, I reflect upon a performance given by a group of friends and I at an Elders Home in Chicago, Illinois. Pushing back tables and chairs to the walls of the common room, we performed a small repertory of African American *gang gang*. This is

a slang term for dances that are a synthesis of traditional West African dance movement. We were greeted with appreciative applause, smiles and verbal comments throughout our dances. That warm and complimentary appreciation is no less cherished than my experiences with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and the Martha Graham Dance Company.

It was a normal expectation to perform two or three encores for Eastern European opera house audiences after Ailey's *Revelations* when we toured these countries before the Iron Curtain came down. A characteristic of mainland European audiences was to hear the sound of two thousand or more people stamping their feet and clapping their hands in unison for several curtain calls.

I also remember the outdoor dance festival audiences as a performer with the Martha Graham Dance Company in Italy. One audience watching the company's presentation of *Diversion of Angels* was so appreciative they cheered and clapped throughout the performance responding to my jetés as the Yellow Girl and the six o'clock tilts of Takako Asakawa. Our display caused such a visceral empathy the audience *had* to react. I also remember a performance of *Song*, choreographed by Martha Graham, when I danced the principal role in Paris. On this occasion the audience response was so boisterous Ms Graham met me backstage and gave me that 'look' that always seemed to know me more than I knew myself. 'Very good!' was the implication to which I responded to my mentor with a very proud 'Thank you!'

Anyone who has ever been to New York and attended an Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre performance may witness a range of audience reactions. Some audiences are relatively quiet with their response, but give an enthusiastic applause at the end. Some performances, though, draw audience members who call out a dancer's name, scream emphatic comments or clap and finger snap all whilst the dance is going on. For a newcomer to these dance events this kind of intrusion may be an annoyance but is an acceptable reaction in this context. With hundreds of devoted patrons who know the repertory and attend performances every season, plus a school attached to the company, these kinds of public outbursts by audience members during a

performance is an affirmation and active preservation of Africanist cultural values and allegiances, as much as an affiliation with and appreciation of what is happening on stage.

The Here and Now

At The Big Mission Festival in Birmingham (2-5 February 2005) I attended a forum to discuss recommended strategies for developing audiences for dance works made by choreographers estranged by the British dance canon, either because of who they are or because of the dance being made. This debate discussed many of the issues encountered by marketing personnel in theatres and dance companies in an effort to develop audiences for Black choreographic work. This discussion was chaired by Wanjiku Nyachae with Antia Dinham of Audiences Central, Natasha Graham of PUSH, Paula Moreau-Smith an Independent Consultant, and Marie McCluskey of Swindon Dance, with other participants present providing their perspectives on this topic.

The discussion advised the following. Firstly, no two audiences are the same. Secondly, and most importantly, know the work being presented. It was recommended that any development of audiences for Black choreographic work take an inclusive approach that considers the varied demographics within the British population. Notions or strategies that categorise and ghettoise audiences are actually counterproductive. All present were given the following words to consider: *The more narrow the demographics, the more meaningless the experience*. Yes, audiences can be grouped into neat population categories, but an audience of one grouping with the same predictable response does not always make for great cultural experiences. There is no opportunity for diverse ethnic, disability or age groups to acknowledge or hopefully apprehend varied appreciations or understandings from each other, much less gain new and different understandings from what is happening on stage.

Maxine Green, (a pre-eminent aesthetic educator and philosopher-in-residence at the Lincoln Centre Institute of the Arts in Education) would give lectures for teachers and artists who worked in the schools of New York, New

Jersey and Connecticut areas. Green's most profound instructions, given in her accessible and informal manner, encouraged instructors to not only respect another's response to artwork but to also enable an open space for wider and alternative appreciations and understandings. A dance performance in this instance becomes an opportunity for diverse populations to congregate exchange and share knowledge about the event and maybe even learn something about each other.

Each audience member's response to a performance is a combination of several things, including the person's ethnic experience and extent of exposure to alternative cultures. Every culture is different and every person in that culture has an identity that complements and differs from that culture. London is cosmopolitan and uniquely poly-cultural with its influences from Europe, Asia and Africa. There are also locations in Britain that are not so endowed being effectively mono-cultural. I believe, however, that a diversity of responses to dance occurs in poly and mono-cultural locations, not because of the audience as a group but because of each person in the audience. As I stated above, there may be one or two common characteristics but beyond that every audience as a group and each individual therein respond differently.

Thea Nerissa Barnes is Resident Dance Supervisor for *The Lion King* in London's West End. She has had a distinguished performing career with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and Martha Graham Dance Company.

Thea was Artistic Director of Phoenix Dance Company from 1997–2000 and has taught and choreographed in community settings, schools, and universities in USA, Britain and Europe. Thea has also published articles in numerous dance magazines and journals.

Thea holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Dance from the Juilliard School, New York; a Master's Degree in Dance Education from Columbia Teachers College, New York; and a Master of Philosophy degree from City University, London.

ADAD News

Regular Funding

We are pleased to announce that ADAD has recently been awarded Regularly Funded Organisation status by Arts Council England for the next three years. This means we can look forward to pursuing a range of projects that will make a considerable move towards meeting the needs of the sector. Some of our areas of focus in the next three years will include the following:

- **Advocacy** – We will work to develop a voice for Dance forms of the African Diaspora (DAD) , taking advantage of all opportunities to increase the recognition and understanding of the sector.
- **Website** – We will set up a dedicated ADAD service on Dance UK’s website which will provide a vital meeting point and information resource for the sector and beyond, containing information on forthcoming events and activities, searchable directories of DAD artists and links to other organisations and sources of information.
- **Regional events** - We will organise events which will take place annually in different regions in England to promote ADAD’s work, bringing together local communities of artists and working towards the development of a national network of DAD practitioners.
- **Training and education** – We will start with a focus on the development of frameworks for a generic qualification that both acknowledges prior performance experience and provides the opportunity to gain further skills in the teaching of dance.
- **Dance manager support** – We will be collaborating with partner organisations using existing programmes and opportunities to develop skilled dance managers and entrepreneurs for the DAD sector.

ADAD Anniversary

The Steering Committee of ADAD and Pamela Zigomo would like to thank all of the members who helped us celebrate our 10th birthday at The Albany on 4 December 2004. Everyone who attended had a good time and members sampled the delicious Afro-Caribbean menu and danced the night away. We also used this occasion to launch the first ADAD Forum, and our guest speaker, Tim Tubbs from the UK Foundation for Dance, took us on a witty and extremely useful tour of the 'Dance Ecology'.

Trailblazers Update

Jeanette Brooks has continued her research into the three leading dance forms that influence her technique dance classes: Jazz, African and Urban dance styles. This summer she will be preparing for the Swindon Dance Summer Intensive classes in August, and she will be participating in the Farnham Maltings Research Week and South Hill Park Master classes in September.

Maria Ghoumrassi has begun her journey as a choreographer and director with confidence. She presented her powerful piece *Pestle and Mortar* at Resolution! 2005 and The Big Mission. The piece is about a woman's desire to explore beyond the boundaries of her experience and has received many positive reviews.

Leo Kay is at present working in Scotland with a new company called Aye Productions creating a piece of visual theatre which has elements of aerial dance within it. At the same time, he is preparing for his Trailblazer research trip to Santos (Sao Paulo, Brazil) where he will spend six weeks studying movement forms at a house of Candomble (an Afro-Brazilian religion) where he will observe the night-long rituals that take place within this form of worship.

Flavia Chevez Le Messurier has just returned from Peru where she spent three weeks researching the music and movement of the Zapateo in Lima. She was then invited to Browne University, USA to present her findings. Flavia is currently preparing to hold a workshop at Roehampton University.

Trailblazers 2005–6

Invitations for applications for the 2005-6 fellowships will be announced at the end of June 2005. Artists who are interested should contact ADAD at the end of June to make sure we can mail the details to you.

Forum

This year has started on a good note with the second ADAD Forum on 5 March 2005. This was another exhilarating event, with life coach, Jackee Holder, taking us through an empowering practical session on 'Respect'. Forum attendees were led in interesting practical exercises focusing on the characteristics of true professionalism that would earn artists the respect they deserved from their peers and the public.

The ADAD Forums provide a voice for the sector and a meeting, consultation and advocacy point. The Forums offer the opportunity to share skills and experience and develop a cross-form community based on mutual aspirations and needs.

Each Forum consists of a presentation or practical session supported by a group of voluntary advocates who each represent a different genre within DAD practice. The advocates lead small-group debates within the Forums to allow discussion of artistic and other genre-specific matters. The combination of the broader Forum and the advocate-led groups provide both cross-sector and aesthetically focused networks to support DAD artists.

The next forum will be held on Saturday, 11 of June 2005, and the topic is 'Trust'. Discussions will focus around dispelling myths surrounding funding and sponsorship, and giving practical advice on the best ways to tackle future applications.

Regional, National and International News

ADAD started the spring-summer season by making links with companies and artists in Manchester. Collaborating on a regional event with Dance Initiative Greater Manchester, a Street Dance Workshop was organised with Jonzi D and Stillbrock Productions on 9 April 2005. ADAD is now actively pursuing further regional, national and international links so keep an eye and ear out for us when we come to your area!

We are also currently planning autumn activities to celebrate the rich heritage of dance forms of the African diaspora in the United Kingdom. Look out for more details about these activities in the next issue of *Hotfoot*.

Brochures

New ADAD brochures have been distributed to all ADAD members and arts organisations. We would like to thank all the members who contributed their dance images to its publication.

ADAD Directory

Look out for the launch of the long awaited ADAD Directory this summer. The directory will list dancers and choreographers whose working and teaching methods draw from dance forms and techniques developed within African or Caribbean cultures and other communities within the Diaspora. Practitioners trained in ballet and other Western forms of dance will be included as well as they often work with fusion or stylisation. Other search criteria will include drummers, musicians, dance schools, and arts organisations.

ADAD in Bloom

And lastly but by no means least, ADAD would like to congratulate Steering Committee Members, Kwesi Johnson and Carolene Hinds who welcomed new additions to their families in February and March 2005. as well as ADAD Street dance Advocate Natasha Bunbury who had a baby girl in April.

Hotfoot Issue 1: credits and notes

Hotfoot Logo

Photo Credit: Anthony Crickmay

Image: Dancer John Akoto Annan of Adzido

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Reviews

Our thanks to:

Carmel Smith of londondance.com and Lisa Haight for permission to reproduce the review of Sakoba

Terry Grimley of the *Birmingham Post* for permission to reproduce the review on The Big Mission

END...
