# HOTfoot Online

## Autumn 2008 - Issue 10

TRANSCENDENCE & TRANSCULTURAL STORIES

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Editorial by Jeanette Bain

Welcome to the Autumn 2008 issue of Hotfoot Online! It’s been a busy and exciting summer. Read the ADAD News section to catch up with all we’ve been up to, starting with our first Open Stage for dance of the African Diaspora in June.

Following on from summer issue Re:Invention, this issue explores Transcendence and transcultural stories. How can dance artists who are part of the African Diaspora rise above the challenges they face? How do we position ourselves to make our best work, become more visible and establish more viable artistic practices? Throughout this issue, we meet artists and companies who are tackling these questions head on and we discover that the answers are only unearthed as we lay aside our inhibitions and have the courage to be who we are, no matter what.

In his report on the ADAD seminar at the Big Mission festival in May, Dr. Olu Taiwo sheds light on the challenges dance artists from the African Diaspora face in balancing artistic and political agendas. He then shares some reflections on why telling our transcultural stories is more important than ever, as we seek to establish a sense of identity. I share my reflections on the varied approaches of three visiting companies and also manage to squeeze in an interview with American choreographer Cynthia Oliver while she is passing through London doing research for a new piece about “Caribbean people in the transnation”. Dance Student and recent ADAD work experience placement, Lucy Glover, shares her experiences of Contemporary African Dance and her ambitions for the future of the sector. We go West with Huw Jones as he reports on the struggle to keep African and Caribbean dance alive in Bristol, following the closure of the Kuumba centre earlier this year and Zela Gayle also has her say, sharing her tips for survival as an Afro-Caribbean dance artist. Read on...

ADAD News

Events

Throughout the summer months ADAD has hosted and co-hosted a number of events relating to, and celebrating dance of the African Diaspora. We kicked off the summer season with our first Open Stage for dance of the African Diaspora on Thursday 26th June at the De Valois Studio Theatre, London Studio Centre. The event was attended by 60 people from a wide range of backgrounds and gave five artists an opportunity to showcase their work. The performances included contemporary and traditional African, lyrical Hip Hop and contemporary Jazz. The next Open Stage event is scheduled for Tuesday 23rd September and is being hosted in collaboration with Independent Dance at Siobhan Davies studios.

The ADAD endorsed Big Dance 2008 event was an Integrated African dance master class hosted at Irie! Dance Theatre’s studios on Saturday 5th July, 2008. The class was a rare opportunity for people of all physical abilities to explore African dance movement. ADAD provided bursaries for 4 disabled artists to attend the workshop, which was led by Funmi Adewole.
Along with the African and Caribbean Business Network, Kalabash Movement, Outreach Management Services, The Trumpet and Amnesty International, ADAD supported the second annual West Africa Night on Saturday July 19th. The event was organised by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), a charity focused on bringing political change in West Africa. The evening was a celebration of the contribution made by the West African community to the UK. ADAD supported a dance performance provided by ADANTA, a traditional West African dance troupe. The event was attended by over 200 guests.

New ADAD Administrator

ADAD welcomes new administrator Paula Allen who joined us in early July. Paula has hit the ground running supporting our busy summer schedule and keeping the office organised.

ADAD’s photographic exhibition ‘Black Dance in Britain:1930’s to 1990’s Moments’ is back in London at Stratford Circus!

The exhibition has hit the road again. Having done successful runs at the Theatre Museum and the Peepul Centre, the photographs moved to Stratford Circus in early August as ADAD joined East London Dance and Stratford Circus with the support of London Borough of Newham and the Heritage Lottery Fund to take part in Portrait of a Nation.

*Portrait of a Nation* is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the UK’s youth to explore and express what is special to them about where they come from, their local culture, community and identity. This unique campaign is being run during Liverpool’s year-long reign as the European City of Culture 2008 by the Liverpool Culture Company, 17 other partner cities and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The exhibition was used as a starting point for creative exploration during a 3 week multi-disciplinary arts summer school hosted at Stratford Circus. It will remain in East London until the end of November and will be transferred to The Drum arts centre in Birmingham in early 2009.

Applications for the ADAD Trailblazers Fellowships 2008-9 are now open. The deadline is September 8th.

ADAD Celebrates

ADAD congratulates Irie! Dance Theatre who will be launching a new Dance and Diversity Foundation Degree in September 2008. The course is a unique opportunity for full-time dance training that includes African and Caribbean Dance. It is being delivered through City and Islington College in partnership with London Metropolitan University. For more information, check the Irie! website at [http://www.riedancetheatre.org/](http://www.riedancetheatre.org/).

Along with English National Ballet and Candoco, members of Zoonation represented London at the Olympic Handover ceremony in Beijing. Congratulations to Artistic Director, Kate Prince and the Zoonation family! ADAD was especially excited to see Chrissie Adesina (ADAD Trailblazer 2006/07) performing in the piece.
ADAD at the Big Mission - Report by Dr. Olu Taiwo

On May 8th 2008, I was invited to be part of a panel of dance professionals debating ‘Career Pathways in Dance: Fact or Fiction’. The event hosted and facilitated by Sue Davies of Swindon Dance Artist Development and Jeanette Bain, Director of ADAD (The Association of Dance of the African Diaspora) was part of the Big Mission Festival programme. The panel included Sheron Wray, Pearl Jordan, Colin Poole and yours truly Dr Olu Taiwo. The original intention of the debate, organised by a number of partners including State of Emergency Ltd., Wyvern Theatre, and Swindon Dance, was to address questions surrounding career development and transitions for dancers. However, the agenda was slightly high-jacked by the Big Mission’s central theme, which was to celebrate the ‘here and now of Black Dance’. As was to be expected issues of ‘identity’ ‘representation’ and ‘participation’ reared their unresolved heads.

What was refreshing at this debate was a strong desire to collect contemporary stories and good practices as well as collate, organise and disseminate collected information to the wider British public as well as a targeted group of ‘Black’ artists. Sheron Wray raised the most pertinent political point, which was that when it comes to the funding of the arts and related policies, those of us who are part of the African Diaspora are not yet a cohesive political unit and thus have not really mobilised any significant protest to the recent Arts Council decisions to cut funding to some of the companies associated with the ‘Black’ community, an example being Union Dance Company. This is an important point, since political action taken as a group has more power. On the other hand, Colin Poole argued that he wants to identify himself as an independent artist, as a way to debunk perceptions that pigeon hole him as a ‘Black artist’. Instead he wants to highlight universal concerns such as love, hate, confusion, loss and more recently his trans-cultural independence. This indicates a dilemma for those of us interested in cultural actions, outside of the stereotypical frames provided for us. These issues are not new and contemporary dancer Pearl Jordan, who has retrained as a homeopath, was struck by the lack of progress concerning these issues particularly to do with how we individually and collectively take responsibility for support in areas such as: health, inter-generational dialogue and role models.

The debate also addressed participation, identity and representation among the younger generation; the need to encourage the creation of more dedicated sanctuaries (citing Irie! Dance Theatre’s space at Moonshot as a place to build confidence for aspiring artists); mainstream presence, and acknowledgement of the influences of ‘Black’ cultures in mainstream British culture. There was also a call for ‘passion’ to be turned into ‘action’ with regard to advocacy, and the group suggested that this should be taken to the next level by a lead organisation, such as ADAD, perhaps initiating a process of creating a manifesto.

The event succeeded in generating a feeling of empowerment, as it was clear in the debate that even though the same problematic issues had resurfaced, there was not the familiar futile anger that can often come with these events which often feels like impotent complaining. Instead what was present, felt like a strong desire for action, to collate, construct and disseminate.
Enlightening our transcultural stories - Reflections on London’s Cultural Olympiad 2012 by Olu Taiwo

Now that preparations for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad are in full swing, it is important that we reflect our multi, inter and trans-cultural identities as a nation. These entangled and cross-fertilising differences raise interesting questions about our historical, political and spiritual connections to the land we live in and dance on.

It was quite an eye opener when I found out that in the Roman army, the 10th legion comprising a large number of Nubian warriors, were posted in Exeter and Carlyle within the 400 hundred years or so of Roman rule in Britain shortly after 54 AD. What! Do you mean a professional Roman Army with Black participants? What! In Britain! My imagination has been ablaze with thoughts and images of their exploits ever since, their interactions with the locals, did they marry and have children? What did they eat? How did they entertain themselves? And if they brought their traditional instruments, what rhythms did they play? How did they dance?

In my view, as a performing artist and academic, dance and the other performing arts are a means of facilitating the trans-cultural art of storytelling. But whose stories are we telling? And whose context are the stories being told through? Where is the ‘here’ in the ‘now’ with regard to why and how we dance our stories? My interest is in encouraging the untold stories of a counter cultural discourse in Britain, which includes the presence of Black Africans. The story of contemporary urban culture is currently, by its nature, trans-cultural - containing multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi, inter and trans-cultural perspectives, so there does not exist a singular culture or social narrative, but a collection of hybrid ones.

I must confess that as an artist and academic, though I have been proactive when it comes to promoting Black British stories at various events, I have not ostensibly been political with regard to ‘actions’ that have a direct effect on policy. Personally this is due in part, to not wanting the typecast of the ‘Black activist’ or the ‘Black artist’. However I am acutely aware that to ‘act’ and ‘represent’ views as part of a marginalised group, is not only to be responsible for bringing an awareness of untold issues to the general public’s attention, it is also about asserting our belonging, even if marginalised, to the land that we exist on; historically, politically and spiritually. This assertion can only occur after we give voice to the dead whose stories have been forgotten, but whose narratives we can reinvent through imaginative deduction, drawing from historical investigation of the fullest spread of cultural narratives. This is crucial at this time as these narratives need to be passed on to the young and disenfranchised. Due to the trans-cultural effects of globalisation, cultural affiliations along ‘ethnic’ and ‘national’ grounds no longer constrict the formation of an individual's identity. Consequently how we investigate, connect to and value the land we live on, can help form new affiliations along refreshed indigenous terrains.

Ultimately if we are to talk about ‘identity’ ‘representation’ and ‘participation’ as a community, we have to talk about spiritual value and self worth. As artists, it is time to move forward to a place in which we are confident enough to be fully present - to ‘claim the land’, sure of our identity and not questioning our right to fully participate in the cultural life of Britain.
Ruptured Calypso: Jeanette Bain interviews Cynthia Oliver

Cynthia Oliver is a dance artist and Associate Professor of Dance at the University of Illinois. A Bessie (New York Dance and Performance Award) winning choreographer, her work mixes dance theatre and the spoken word, and draws on Caribbean, African and American influences. I met Cynthia while she was on a short trip in London, doing research for a new dance piece, which will premiere next autumn.

JB: How did you get into dance, and how were you introduced to African and Afro-Caribbean forms?

CO: I was the last of six children. My sisters went to dance classes and my parents, who were usually unwilling to let me go out of the house at the time, let me go with them and I loved it. I studied, continued to study, all through high school and I was the one who decided to go on and be a professional. My sisters did it as a hobby, for pleasure, but I was the one who took it to a professional level.

Caribbean dance I got into as a very young person because of my teacher, who had a school called Theatre Dance in St. Croix (U.S. Virgin Islands). Her name was Atti Van den Berg, and she used to dance with the Kurt Jooss Ballet (in Germany). She had a school and she would invite artists from all over the Caribbean, all over the world actually, but she was invested in having Caribbean children know other Caribbean artists. So she brought this gentleman, Montgomery Thomson, from Trinidad, who had danced with Beryl McBurnie, to the island. And he taught classes for a while, took workshops and eventually he decided to move to St Croix. And when he moved he continued teaching with her for a while, and I studied with him. And then he broke off and created his own company and I danced with that company.

So then, I left the island and I went to New York to study professionally, and I left all that behind. I didn't encounter it again until I started dancing with Ron Brown. Ron Brown had built a reputation of mining the black gay underground for movement vocabulary and it was a beautiful way of moving, a luscious and rhythmically filled way of dancing that he made his own. During a certain period, as any artist does, he was shifting and changing and he got interested in African dance, particularly Sabar. And so, he started to infuse the work of the company with Sabar. So what I would do is (I was so fascinated by this movement, it was incredible stuff)...I would go and then take Sabar classes with other teachers. I would take class with Marie Basse...I forget her last name...in New York. Prior to that there were other places, incidents where I might encounter Caribbean or African performance that I would be particularly drawn to. I remember doing a piece with Pauline Oliveros and Ione, they did an evening length production for Brooklyn Academy of Music called Nginga the Queen King and I was Nginga the dancing spirit and so they had a Congolese teacher there. So, my African studies often came through performance. I would start with the performance and that would spark my interest. Like in this case, the Congolese was really interesting to me because it felt so much like Calypso. And I thought that there is that hip initiation stuff, the circling of the hips that was amazingly connected to the rhythm of the feet that was really attractive to me. So from that production I then went and started Congolese classes. So similarly with Ron Brown, from working with him, I started seeking out African classes. And then along side that, a couple of my girlfriends from home, from St Croix, were going to Afro-Caribbean classes and they kept telling me about it, and so I decided to start going with
them. And I started learning Orisha dances and worked with Ricardo Colon for a little while and then with Richard Gonzalez, who I adore, and I continue to follow when I can. And so that’s how I made that journey. And then what was really interesting was that Ron Brown then shifted from African into Afro-Caribbean but I was gone by then. By then I had set up my own company COCo.Dance.

JB: When you studied Orisha dances, what kind of contexts have you used that in? Have you used that in performance?

CO: I have, I have. It’s been really interesting to me how some of the elements of the Orishas relate to some of the very issues that I am interested in exploring performance wise. I mean intellectually as well as performance but they kind of bleed into my performance stuff. I did a piece on madness and women. There was a solo that I made for an evening performance where it was important for me to use elements of Osun because of her preoccupation with herself and her appearance and how that can either spiral downwards or lead to some other kind of revelation of self. And so, I’ll use it in that way and I’m thinking about this Caribbean piece on transnationalism and I’m thinking about Oya for this piece because of the way the winds flow and how circles of people move and when you look at wind systems the way the wind moves bodies through space. So I’m thinking about Oya. Oya is also a warrior, and so those have been some things that kind of influence how I use that material. But I’m also careful about it because I want to study it. I check with my teacher about it. I don’t want to do it in any kind of way that’s disrespectful, that would harm myself or any of the people that I have asked to work with me on it.

JB: Finally, can you tell me a little bit about the piece that you are working on now?

CO: I’m working on a piece called Rigidigidim De Bamba De: Ruptured Calypso and it’s about Caribbean people in the transnation. I’m particularly interested in Calypso music and how Calypso may or may not be a signifier of Caribbean identity. So, who is familiar with it; how are they familiar with it; whether they are familiar with it at all. How Caribbean people make community outside of the Caribbean region. And it might prove me wrong that Calypso is any part of that at all. But it is interesting to me because it has been one of those places where I have gotten tested as a Caribbean person. I felt as though I have always needed to know Calypso. Even though I didn’t dance it, there were places where you should dance and shouldn’t dance it. How you should dance it. But I needed to know it, whether or not I was actually performing. And that’s in a social situation or in perception of self. So that’s why I had that relationship with it and I wanted to kind of work through that.

I’ve collected an amazing group of people. I have a pick up company so whenever I have a project, I ask people to work with me for that project. I have six women who are going to do this: one is from Liverpool; another is from the Bahamas; I have a friend from the Virgin Islands who I grew up with; a woman who is Trinidadian and Gambian; a woman from Toronto but Guyanese and St Lucian (something like that, I think I have St Lucian right!); and then another woman from Toronto via Jamaica. We premiere in the fall of next year.
The Kuumba Centre, African Dance and Bristol by Huw Jones

Last February Arts Council England announced details of its funding budget for organisations in Bristol over the next three years. Among the changes in this budget plan was the discontinuation of funding for the Kuumba Centre at 20-23 Hepburn Road, St Pauls. For over thirty years Kuumba has been the South West’s leading African Caribbean arts centre. Fittingly named after one of the seven principles of kwanzaa (in Swahili the word ‘kuumba’ refers to the kind of creativity that benefits the community) Kuumba has always had a strong community orientation. The centre offers a range of resources, including a nursery and the unique Sankore library, as well as being an arts venue that has been host to a variety of performers over the years spanning music, theatre, comedy and dance.

Only two years ago it all looked so promising for Kuumba, with exciting plans to develop the listed Old Carriage Works building in Stokes Croft into an arts centre that would reflect the city’s cultural diversity. But the £2.1 million development grant has since been withdrawn and now that the Arts Council have stopped their £110,000 annual grant as of last March, despite still receiving £38,000 a year from Bristol City Council and generating income through hiring hall space, the future of the arts department at Kuumba now seems uncertain and redundancies have already been made.

The reasons for the funding cut seem complicated and to some parties controversial, with talk of targets not being met, confidence being lost in the organisation, and even Kuumba not fitting in with plans to gentrify the Stokes Croft area. I met up with Norman ‘Rubba’ Stephenson, director of dance company Afidance and formerly dance coordinator at Kuumba, to get his thoughts on these recent changes and to find out where African dance in Bristol can go from here.

“Kuumba are happy with what they have done”

Although Rubba feels somewhat frustrated that, compared with ballet and contemporary dance, African dance receives the minimal financial support despite its great potential for having a positive impact in communities like St Pauls, he acknowledges that there may be more to the picture: “I can understand the Arts Council because they look at the bigger picture for an arts centre. It was said that Kuumba didn’t seem to be linking enough with other organisations outside the immediate community.” Rubba wonders whether the funding crisis boils down to an unfortunate conflict of interest between fulfilling funding body requirements and providing the services which the St Pauls community really want. “I think Kuumba has its own vision of what they want to do for the Afro-Caribbean community…but they have a
service agreement with their funders which they must deliver. It’s a catch 22. But Kuumba are happy with what they have done.”

Born in Redhill, Jamaica in 1957 Rubba’s family moved from the Caribbean to Easton in 1964. Now fifty years old, he has been dancing most of his life. Rubba has seen firsthand how African dance can give direction, help develop a sense of responsibility, and put people of African decent back in touch with their cultural roots - not to mention the benefits of the fitness it can bring. It’s then no surprise that Rubba expresses disappointment that despite the Arts Council’s belief in the power of the arts to change lives and communities and to create opportunities, Kuumba in particular should have its funding cut. “I personally believe that African dance serves for more than just performance reasons, it can actually become a very important part of one’s life if one was to properly take up the practice.”

“There’s a history of Africa passing through here”

Having taught African dance since the late seventies, Rubba emphasises what this art form can do for young people in communities such as St Pauls: “We can take youngsters off the street through dance alone….I’ve seen the results. But there’s still a bad situation and we need to address it so we can help the youths even more. That’s one of the most important things about this…what it can do - in particular for people in this area.”
Ruefully Rubba tells me that traditional dance is disappearing. “It’s just not supported enough”. “If it is”, he continues, “it’s supported in a tokenistic manner, and so I think it’s time, really, to address that at least, and Bristol is a very good city for that in terms of it’s relationship to the slave trade. And this area, St Pauls, has had hundreds of years of slave history. There’s a history of Africa passing through here.”

Now that the dance coordinator post at Kuumba has ended, Rubba faces several challenges. He won’t have the funds that allowed him to pay the numerous drummers to drum for the dancers. Without being subsidised by funding, the price of lessons will have to increase which may discourage some. But most importantly, Rubba needs a new venue to continue teaching. So it’s encouraging to hear that Rubba has been motivated by the funding cut to start up a new project in Bristol, to establish a place where African dance can flourish.

Rubba is now very much looking forward, and is already in the process of forming a committee, to be known as the ‘Afidance Collective’, to realise the vision of having a venue in the St Pauls area to encourage awareness, interest, and proud involvement in African dance. An important part of this project will be to establish strong and active connections with other organisations around Bristol; in particular, developing the work that Afidance has already done with local schools.

Moreover, Rubba is confident that he has the right people for the job. Rubba and drummer
Stephen ‘Blaggy’ Blagrove have been working together for over 28 years and are two of the very few people in the UK with their skills. “We can use these skills to help the community. Part of our vision is to develop more teams.” Rubba is keen to stress that it is the bigger picture that the Afidance Collective will have in mind; the long term goal of imparting the knowledge to others who in turn will be able to teach the art form. Earnestly he tells me that “this skill takes so long to learn, and there are so few people who know it. That's part of my remit. How are we going to keep it going? You can’t get a drummer that knows what Blaggy knows. Simple as that. It takes years of training. After Blaggy and after me and one or two others scattered around in London, in twenty years time if there isn’t a master drummer then you wont have African dance being done properly in this country. It'll fade out. We need to get people proud of their roots, wanting to learn it, and wanting to pass it on. It's urgent.”

Reflections on three visiting companies by Jeanette Bain

Three visiting companies, from three different locations, demonstrate the depth and scope that dance with African influence has to offer.

We must eat our lollipops with the wrappers on  Robyn Orlin’s City Theatre and Dance Group; Saturday May 17, 2008; Birmingham Hippodrome

Performed as part of the Birmingham International Dance Festival, this interactive piece, focused on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa. The piece used live singing, theatre and dance to evoke the causes and impact of the epidemic. The cast, a highly skilled, multi-talented group of dancers, singers and actors, delivered a gripping performance.

The audience was taken on an emotional journey, which saw the performers building a relationship with us in various ways. As the audience entered the auditorium, we were met by performers standing and sitting in the aisles and on the stairs. During the piece, we were handed red lollipops a symbol for sexual relationships, frighteningly ironic in the context of the piece; our shoes were stolen and placed on stage, and we even had live video of our faces projected unto the backdrop and props. All this drew us into the piece, reminding us that we are not so far from the experiences depicted by the performers.

The performers transitioned seamlessly between gut-wrenching a capella renditions, vibrant African dance sequences, monologues and physical theatre; rife with irony, not one moment of the piece was ‘just for show’. Each scene and sequence revealed something more of the reality of the AIDS crisis. Lollipops is issue-based dance theatre at its very best.

The Rite of Spring Georges Momboye Dance Company; Saturday May 10, 2008; Wyvern Theatre, Swindon

This year's Big Mission festival, hosted by State of Emergency, Swindon Dance and the Wyvern Theatre culminated with Goerges Momboye Dance Company’s take on The Rite
of Spring. Based in Paris, Momboye cites a wide range of influences on his work, not least of which is African dance. This piece draws on African dance postures and nuances grounded feet, percussive movement, and rhythmic jumps, building these elements around a predominantly contemporary structure. The very idea of re-interpreting Stravinsky’s iconic score is a bold one. However Momboye’s approach is subtle and fresh. The cast of 16 dancers weave in and out of geometric patterns, never losing their sense of individuality. The melodrama of Stravinsky’s score is difficult to match in movement, but the dancers hardly miss a beat. There are a few moments when the music just about overwhelms them, but these are few and far between.

The disappointment in this piece lies in the glimpses of new, interesting movement which never come into full view. It is difficult to grasp motifs and themes within the piece because there is so much going on. However overall, Momboye’s movement is engaging and his dancers perform with commitment and drive.

**Havana Rakatan** Ballet Rakatan and live Cuban Son band Torquino; Saturday May 31, 2008; Peacock Theatre

Havana Rakatan is an evening of beautiful, skillful dancing; a whistle-stop tour of Cuban music and dance; and a great night out. Complete with live music on stage, provided by Cuban son band Torquino, the show sometimes feel a bit pre-packaged but it never quite becomes airport art. Putting the dancers through their paces, as they perform a range of traditional dances displaying Cuba’s unique mix of African, Caribbean and Spanish heritage, there is no shortage of diversity in style. The performance features jazz, mambo, bolero, son, cha-cha-cha, rumba and salsa.

By far, the highlight for me was the live music and singing, which added depth and texture to the evening. From recognizable tunes like Guantana Mera and Bésame Mucho to less familiar ones, the songs were delivered with passion and commitment and the singers were pretty good dancers themselves. By the end of the performance, the audience was on their feet clapping, dancing and singing.

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**Speak Your Mind: Zela Gayle**

*Caribbean Dance Artist, Zela Gayle, shares her survival techniques as a teacher, choreographer and performer.*

The inconsistency of finding dance work in the UK and working as an independent dance artist in London can be extremely frustrating, especially because I know my skills and knowledge are important to passing down the history of African-Caribbean dance forms in educational settings. I have a lot of passion for dance of the African Diaspora - for adults and children to experience the traditional forms coming from a rich heritage of ‘Black’ dance before experiencing the popular dance forms from these cultures.
Having taught African-Caribbean dance in the UK for five years, I realise that schools and the community at large recognise and appreciate the significance of African-Caribbean dance during the month of October for ‘Black History Month’. The frustrating thing is having too many contracts during this time and nothing offered to you for the rest of the year. I am grateful that the majority of primary schools in London acknowledge dance of the African Diaspora and can take on a specialist teacher to advocate celebrating the history of African dance forms, so that children have a better understanding of how African dance has influenced the development of Street dance, in which children have a great passion. However, why is it so difficult to maintain a relationship with the school throughout the year?

As an independent dance artist I am constantly forced to look at new ways of generating work to sustain myself. I have to think practically about my lifestyle and career. So, if there is no dance work coming in, I will opt for work in retail or an administrative post to make sure I have some cash coming in. Trying to find a balance between being a dancer, choreographer and a teacher is forever challenging because it is not always paid work, and no one wants to end up being a starving artist. So I look for opportunities to broaden my network and collaborate with like-minded artists; regionally and internationally. Alternatively, I create work outside of African dance (primarily in Contemporary dance) to attract a different audience. This opens up a new scope to my repertoire of dances from the Inner zeal productions.

I like to travel with my dances - teaching and performing internationally. Dealing with an overseas contract is a challenge because you take the risk of doing something in a new way and this sometimes means not knowing the outcome of the contract until you arrive in the country ready to work. How far are you willing to go for people to take you seriously? I always travel with my own PR pack and draft contract. For people to take you seriously you also need a lawyer in case something happens that is out of your hands. I simply reject overseas contracts if they present certain flaws. Everything should be securely in place before you travel, to safeguard yourself. For example, I was offered a contract with a prominent cultural organisation in Jamaica. It seemed like a chance of a lifetime; to dance my solo act on a stage in Jamaica alongside well-known Jamaican singers, musicians and dance groups. It was a great compliment to receive such an invitation. But when I found out that the organisation would not pay my flight and other necessary expenses, I knew it would not suffice and worst of all, that I was not regarded as a professional artist for the event.

One of the highlights of my career to date has been being an ADAD Trailblazer (2005/06). Receiving the fellowship was an uplifting experience. It gave me the opportunity to push my dance talents further by travelling to Cuba to work with Danza Libre Company based in Guantanamo. The language of traditional Cuban dance was new to me. I participated in Afro-Cuban folklore and Contemporary dance training daily for two months. It was elevating, spiritually enhancing, exhausting and complex at times. The Cuban dance methodology was rigorous, but I enjoyed the intensity with which we trained. There is no equivalent of Danza Libre Company in the UK! I was very fortunate to have access to this training in African-Cuban dances in preparation for weekly performances. The Director, Alfredo Velasquez, made me feel welcome and the dancers of the company treated me with the same respect as long standing members of the company. Being Jamaican born, we had the Caribbean commonality, until I opened my mouth to speak. I learnt the Spanish language very quickly. My dance teachers spoke to
me in Spanish and I practised at home with my neighbours to process my learning &
understanding. We would also visit performances by other Cuban dance companies, and
I was even invited to lead a session in Jamaican reggae dances which they were highly
fond of. I thoroughly fulfilled my time dancing and learning about Cuban culture in
Guantanamo and hope to venture out to other regions next time. The trip was so
inspiring that I still feel vibrant about it three years later. Returning to the UK, as an
ADAD Trailblazer I was able to build a repertoire of choreography based on my
experiences of the traditional techniques. My aim was to take this into Primary schools
and build a relationship with schools in order to set up a Youth Dance Company. I now
find that children in Primary schools have lost interest in African dance, and so my
immediate aim is to focus on young adults. I have created a resource pack for The Inner
Zeal Productions to use for courses in dance at diploma level and for University students
studying African-Cuban dance.

Another significant development opportunity has been my role as volunteer administrator
for Feedback 33, a dancers’ mentoring forum which was set up by Sheron Wray. It has
helped me greatly in networking with dance artists globally and opportunities to
collaborate with members have arisen. This forum has also provided a chance to raise
my profile as an artist through conducting several “my space” sessions A “my space”
session is held once a month and allows artists to use the studio space and time (up to
two hours) to present some work in whatever medium of artistic dance expression they
choose. Feedback 33 also invites teachers from around the globe to lead sessions.
Although the forum is based in London, people from other cities in the UK have attended
classes to gain insight into the passions, challenges and experiences of various artists.
We have a MySpace website for our members to communicate and continue to support
each other in a friendly environment. For more information on how to register, email me:
inspiredbyluv@yahoo.co.uk or check our site: www.myspace.com/feedback33

Do you have something to share with Hotfoot readers? Email info@adad.org.uk to
speak your mind.

Looking to the Future by Lucy Glover

I’m a 3rd year student at Laban currently figuring out what kind of mark I want to make
on dance in Britain when I’m unleashed into the professional world next June. With the
vast choices to make and not having one particular passion, the one thing I do know for
sure is that I never felt more alive than when I danced with Bawren Tavaziva two
summers ago. My love for the great continent Africa has been a part of me since I was
young. It began with a love for the Wildlife and has merged with my love for dance in
recent years. I was given the opportunity, which I reluctantly agreed to, to take part in a
youth project at the Wycombe Swan in August 2007 to create a piece with Bawren
Tavaziva and twenty other young dancers aged 13-19. Being 19 at the time I had
reservations about the work being challenging enough. The experience turned out to be
a major turning point for me. I was introduced to a technique that I was passionate about
and discovered that I had not yet reached my boundaries as a performer -not even
close. I also realised that my knowledge for the technique and the history of Africa is
lacking. I became passionate about rectifying this and my interest was ignited by the experience. Since then, I have done my best to find out more about African Contemporary dance in Britain. This is how I came across ADAD.

For two weeks in July I did a placement with ADAD, working for Jeanette Bain. This experience was fundamental to inspiring me further to work in this sector. I am currently researching to write my dissertation about the implementation of African contemporary dance in Britain. My time with ADAD opened my eyes to the struggles this sector still encounters. Even in a city which claims to be culturally diverse, and proud of it. I found how easy it could be to feel hopeless in the vastness of the situation. However, I also found how much support there is within it; many people have their heads and hearts in the right place for the future of African Dance. So, I am excited about the future of African dance in Britain; it can only be onwards and upwards from here. From my experience at ADAD I feel that there is increasing support especially from voices which can be heard. I feel hopeful and not hopeless for the future.

I feel strongly about African culture and with an equal passion for dance I wish to be a part of the future of African Dance in Britain as a performer and being active in making a change to its significance in the arts. I will endeavour to increase my knowledge and understanding through attending performances, going to classes, and being involved wherever I can be in African Dance. My main priority is the research for my dissertation and I hope this will help me take steps towards improving the status of this technique in the UK, as I feel it is still under-appreciated and misunderstood by many. This is only through lack of knowledge and preconceptions of attitudes on all sides. An open mind towards African dance, putting all preconceptions in the past, is all that is required. I hope through the research and writing of my dissertation this information can reach more people to help increase support and knowledge for this sector of the arts.

I look forward to the challenges and the successes, with only optimism for the future.