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Welcome

Without a doubt, dance is in a period of high popularity and great media exposure in the UK. Programmes on the BBC and ITV plus events like The Big Dance have allowed a new audience to embrace a number of dance styles and in some ways also permit our art form to become more accessible. We can't complain. Getting involved in a dance project, finding something at your level and to suit your taste is more possible than ever and even training to be a professional dancer has a new set of audition criteria increasing the opportunity for a wider and more varied intake of students.

Nevertheless, is all of the current popularity going to lead to with progress in the industry or greater respect and appreciation of the work? Will the result of this interest give birth to new and original artistic strands and creativity? Will the hearts and minds of this extended family of T.V spectators convert - no develop, into hardcore dance theatre watchers? Time will tell.

With all the hype and exposure it's a good moment for us all to acknowledge and reflect on where we are, the enormous changes in dance over the last 50 years and more, and pay tribute to some of the literally ground breaking artists and companies who have put dance of the African Diaspora on the European and world dance map.

In this issue our articles and features mirror the the national tour of the ADAD historical photographic exhibition, **Black Dance in Britain 1930's – 1990's Moments...** currently being displayed at the Peepul Centre, Leicester. With input from Dr Christy Adair on Phoenix Dance and Dick Matchett's work on Katherine Dunham and Buddy Bradley. Regular item, ADAD Asks... interviews well, me! Plus we have a open and heart felt article from Jeannefer Jean Charles and Pearl Jordan.

So read on and then feed back.

Jeannette Brooks

Hotfoot Online Editor

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THE ASSOCIATION OF DANCE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

UK

Think piece...

Perceptions of the Phoenix Dance Company Phenomenon

By Christy Adair

My first memory of Phoenix Dance Company is hearing about a performance in 1983 at the International Dance Festival at Dartington College in Devon. I was intrigued.

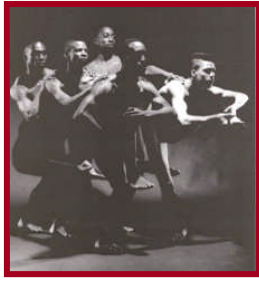
The dancers presented work which drew on street jazz and contemporary dance - a significant contrast to the culture of release techniques and experimental choreography of the festival. The fact that they had engaged such an unlikely audience caught my attention.

My interest in Phoenix Dance Company developed further ten years later when I began teaching at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance and discovered the close connections between some of the people involved with the Company and the School. Phoenix evolved in the context of a society coming to terms with changes through cultural diversity and multiculturalism, rather than expressionist models of identity. In this article want to catch something of the historical moment, the formation and subsequent development of the Company. My research reveals an emergence of a remarkable group of dancers from their testimonies and records through reviews and official documents.

I think the Company was unique in a number of ways both within contemporary dance and the wider artistic and cultural contexts in Britain.

The Company members were in their teens when they formed in 1981 and gained recognition very early in their careers through an established television arts programme, *The South Bank Show*, in 1984.

They were skilful performers but had not received the usual formal three year dance training¹; based in the north of England at a time when the majority of dance activity was located in London.



In addition, they were Black British men, who had known each other from childhood and came from a tight knit community, working in an art form which was associated with femininity (Adair, 1992). All of these features were unusual for a dance company and contributed to a story of success which became legendary.

Phoenix Dance Company was founded by David Hamilton,² Villmore James and Donald Edwards who were joined by Merville Jones and Edward Lynch in 1982. They lived and had been educated in Leeds. They were young people of African-Caribbean heritage who were committed to dance education as well as dance performance. They started the Company 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).

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, notably *Forming of the Phoenix* (1982) (Hamilton, 1997). Paul Gilroy (1993) analyses how reggae music drew together people of the Caribbean who had very different cultural and political histories. The role of reggae music for Hamilton was that it was an important aspect of his creation of dance works which had cultural significance. *'The interaction of the people makes up the group. Behind that is the core of the idea which is, like the mythical (Phoenix) bird, taking from itself to develop, it dies and everything takes place within itself'* (Hamilton in Holgate, 1997).

An early work which Donald Edwards choreographed for the Company was *Ritual for Death* (1982). Merville Jones described the work as, *'a male bonding piece'* (1997). He went on to say: *Once, in Scotland we were doing a tour and we got so much stick for being black and racial abuse was flying around in the auditorium. I remember saying ok let's go and get them [...]. The experience for me was one of the most positive that we'd ever done* (1997).

In the early years Phoenix enjoyed their success and the opportunities which came with it.

The Arts Council funding which they received, however, arguably contributed to a loss of some of the unique aspects of Phoenix. There was a tension between the requirements of an accountable government body, The Arts Council, and the creative self-management of a group of dancers who wanted to explore their own artistic interests and to share their skills in educational and community settings.

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). Hylton's remark illustrates the importance of the Company to the dancers and to those with aspirations to dance with Phoenix.

The Company at that stage was a small scale company. By granting it 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 the dance making practices of the founders ceased at this point. The dancers were angry about the effects of this imposed structure and the Arts Council were not sufficiently reflective of their own practices and structures to support the Company's choreographic beginnings (Edwards, 1998; Barnes, 18 January 2001).

When David Hamilton left the Company in 1987 and Neville Campbell directed it, there was a shift in focus including gender composition.

In 1989 there was a change from an all male company to a male and female company which made Phoenix less unique in the sense that this is the familiar composition of a contemporary dance company; all-male companies are rare. The significance of incorporating women into the Company in such a context was clearly multi-layered and complex.

The founders viewed themselves as contemporary dancers but drew albeit sometimes unconsciously on their black subjectivities to inform their work.



The description of a 'black contemporary dance company', however, came from the press, the funders and the management of the Company at specific times in its history.

Campbell's drive was to establish Phoenix as a successful, middle scale, contemporary dance company without a label such as 'a black dance company' being attached to it.

His ambition was to reach the audiences in the larger venues. His approach to dance was influenced by his training at London Contemporary Dance School and he developed the technicality of the Company. Moreover, differences between Hamilton's and Campbell's choreography were identified in an interview with Campbell, conducted by Ramsay Burt in 1989. The early work tended to be constructed around the dancers' physical qualities and incorporated their dynamism and vigour and Hamilton conveyed the 'emotions of the people performing' (in Holgate, 1997). This style was modified, with Campbell's arrival, to express political and social issues of contemporary relevance. Whilst he developed the institutionalisation of the Company; building the Company so that it became a permanent, ten dancer organisation and bringing in more outside choreographers, it was Margaret Morris who built on their international success.

It seems that it was during Morris' directorship there was overt acknowledgement of what was recorded in Company notes as the 'Black British experience' (2 March 1992: 2).

Undoubtedly, this was partly because of the pressure she was under, from funders, critics and audiences, to justify her position as a white director who was also female, whose professional dance experience was primarily in the US. She was the exact opposite of what the Company was famous for - that is, black and male - which created identity problems which she had to unravel and attempt to solve.

Morris' position was a difficult one not least because some of the dancers in 1991 wanted an all black Company and although the Black Arts Movement of the 1980s no longer had the same impact, there were legacies of those philosophies that leaked into expectations of the Company. She was attempting to lead a contemporary dance company without ignoring the political tensions of their perceived identity as a, 'black dance company'.

In 1992 Morris invited Bebe Miller, an African American, to create a work for the Company. I was invited to review the world premiere of this work, *Spartan Reels*. This was my first introduction to Phoenix behind the scenes. I watched the Company in rehearsal and had an opportunity to speak to Miller about the working process. She was interested in choreographing for people she did not know and who had a different background to her own. She realised that Phoenix had a good deal to offer but were constrained by expectations of 'the old Phoenix'.

This work was part of the repertoire when Thea Barnes became artistic director. Her desire to develop the Company artistically meant that she wanted to create a repertoire that would be diverse and allow the Company a fluid rather than fixed identity. A step towards this aim led to her decision to create a retrospective programme of excerpts of popular works from the Company repertoire.

This work enabled Barnes to stay within the budget and to satisfy artistic goals³. She came from a background of dancing in US dance companies where she suggested there was more familiarity with the concept that the 'black dancing body' Gottschild (2003) could dance a range of material.

The retrospective provided the ground from which to depart from the past work of Phoenix and to take a new direction in which the repertoire deconstructed what the 'black dancing body' was symbolising in performance (Barnes, 2 September 2004). She was attempting to subvert the tendency for the Company to be discussed only in terms of ethnicity which has been problematic throughout its history.

Barnes considered that the Phoenix of 1981 provided an inspiring model after the images of chaos and looting and of uprisings in the cities in Britain at that time and she had no wish to negate that legacy. She proposed, however, that whilst the past should be acknowledged it was important, '*to be more concerned with developing a future*' (in Holgate, 1997: 36).

As Natasha Bakht pointed out in an article concerned with the difficulties of overcoming stereotyping, 'Essentially, we are asking for the freedom to be unpredictable' (1997: 9). These comments and arguments are concerned with artists' demands for recognition and cultural equity rather than being categorised under the label of cultural diversity.

The latter term condemns the diverse to be diverse rather than to have equal rights to the same resources for cultural development. Despite Barnes insights the Company experienced a number of difficulties which resulted in its closure for a number of months.

Darshan Singh Bhuller was then appointed artistic director in 2002 after the Arts Council decided they did not want to lose a northern repertory company. Bhuller was a contemporary of the founders and studied at both Harehills Middle School and Intake High School, later training at London Contemporary Dance School and becoming a key dancer in London Contemporary Dance Theatre.



Like, Campbell and Barnes before him he wanted a more flexible image for the Company not fixed to ethnicity. He modelled the Company on LCDT and when he left in 2006 Phoenix was acknowledged to be a challenge to the other key British repertory Company Rambert (Craine, 2006).

Javier De Frutos now takes over from Bhuller and offers influences from his Venezuelan background and his experiences as a solo artist and as choreographer for a range of companies. How De Frutos will develop Phoenix is yet to be seen but he will have to negotiate restrictive funding, issues of how artistic excellence is judged and stakeholders' expectations of the Company.

The complex narrative of this repertory company and its development from a small scale regional company to an internationally acclaimed company has many interwoven strands. One of the paradoxes which the Company faced was that of the 'burden of representation' (Mercer, 1994).

The dancers were expected by the funding bodies, critics and audiences to be a community'. Such expectations contained and constrained these artists who were expected to represent an imagined ethnicity. The experience of Phoenix raises questions about the politically driven funding of contemporary dance in Britain and the implications for artistic development of funded companies. The issues raised above highlight the lack of reflection and insight of the funding bodies and the critics and have serious implications for any evolving Company and for the development of contemporary dance in Britain.

Dr. Christy Adair is Subject Leader for Dance at York St John University. She studied at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance and in addition to teaching in a number of higher education institutions has also facilitated dance and performance projects. Christy writes for a range of magazines and journals and is author of *Women and Dance: sylphs and sirens* (Macmillan, 1992). Her current research interests focus on gender and ethnicity in relation to dance studies and performance.

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Donald Edwards, 1997, 1998	Company Documents (from uncateloguéd archive PA),
David Hamilton, 1997	Company Notes 2 March, 1992
Martin Hylton, 1999	

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.
2. David Hamilton's equity name was Leo Hamilton and he is frequently referred to as Leo.
3. Part of Barnes' vision was for the dancers to continue to benefit by retaining their fifty two week, yearly contracts but this entailed difficult financial decisions. The Arts Council only provided the Company with part of its funding requirements and the Company was responsible for raising the remaining funding. When the next director, Darshan Singh Bhuller was appointed the dancers lost this financial security and were employed on nine month contracts (Barnes, 18 September 2004).



Review...

b.supreme Festival

South Bank Centre

Fri 22 Sep 2006 - Sun 24 Sep 2006

Reviewed by Natasha Bunbury

b.supreme, a 3 day festival for women in Hip Hop was held at London's South Bank Centre in partnership with Independence and Greenwich Dance Agency and is the first of this kind to be held in the UK.

Being that, my first question was, why do we need a festival dedicated to women in Hip Hop?

Do women really have something to contribute or could this be another newly packaged strategy to tap into the booming and lucrative Hip Hop theatre-going market. Apparently not! b.supreme can be summed up in one word...**Empowerment.**



Debate

As part of the debate, discussing the issues of the girl-girl (the original term applied to a b-girl) was an impressive panel of women from different skills in the field. Visiting from the USA were, Ana "Rockafella" Garcia - a prominent breaker, dancer, teacher and co-founder of Full Circle Productions, B-girl veteran Asia One - who trained and danced with the best of the boys such as Zulu Nation and Rock Steady Crew (Asia one is also the curator of the highly successful event 'The boy-boy Summit', a major 3-day international Hip Hop Conference in the USA).

Also there were award winning choreographers Ciceley Bradley and Olisa Thomson, purveyors of their own unique dance style referred to as Nu-Style. Besides winning “Choreography of the year” and earning a nomination at the “7th annual American Choreography awards” for choreographing Rapper *Missy Elliot’s* music videos, they have worked many major music artists including *Mary J Blige, Whitney Houston* and *Mario*.

From the UK, contemporary black music specialist and cultural critic, writer, broadcaster and lecturer are just a mere few of Jacqueline Springer’s (UK) talents. Official Nike spokesperson and a true UK Hip Hop beloved Kymberlee Jay, who featured in Madonna’s music videos and famously rocked n’ popped in the Nike Street Dance ad. Other panellist included Jude Kelly, Director of the Royal Festival Hall and UK b-girl Sunsun from the early days of UK Hip Hop.

The panel brought true meaning to the phrase “when you teach a women, you teach a nation” as the festival set out to change the common view that only the men / b-boys are the breakers or into break dancing. Not only can girls do it, but also they have been doing it for years. The panel shed light on the hidden history of the b-girl and challenges she faced being accepted by society and her peers.

Also discussed was basic opinions on the fundamental principals in Hip Hop that are held by the majority, such as the root of Hip Hop dance started with the b-boy. However at points in the discussion it became slightly preachy (and there actually was the odd “Amen” coming from the panel) about what real Hip Hop dance truly is and should be. This unfortunately left the home-grown Street Dance audience members feeling a little homeless and somewhat unaccepted since dancers from the UK Street Dance culture, may not be extremely proficient in many old skool styles, and original repertoire. This is largely due to access to teachers with those styles.

The debate and discussion could have continued forever, as it was highly intriguing and informative, and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Unanimously it was agreed Hip Hop is a form of expression and ultimately artists will be all judged by their work and art.



Main Stage Performance

Making full use of the new face of the South Bank during main performances were girls from various schools and youth groups performing and really enjoying themselves on the festival riverside walks and Queen Elizabeth Hall foyer. Whilst on the main stage with host Kymberlee Jay, the all female line up started with Cicely and Olisa.

They gave us a sample of Nu-Stylz and why they are world-renowned super hot choreographers. Dynamically these girls are fierce, precise and totally awesome. It was a music video performance without the editing and cover up. Disappointingly it was too short a performance.

Choreographer Tony Adigun's claim to "Innovate and never replicate" made the Avant Garde Alpha (UK) performance a highlight of the main stage acts. Amazing high-energy dancers with impeccable timing showed little street lock and breakin if you were looking for original repertoire, but you could not fault them for it. Their unique Street Dance style made a simply fantastic performance. Besides Rowetta Deletant's mesmerising Raggy Doll (UK), Plan B (Holland) and Mersey Mizbehavin Crew (UK) both had areas of their work that needed more development. This really left the performances line up overall a little short.

The show ended with Envoke (Switzerland) with a special appearance from Asia One. This b-girl group gave us the most old skool styles of the performances, watching Asia One there was a realisation of how far her art has come and a deep respect for her contribution to Hip Hop men and women all over the world. Contrastingly, the female movements Envoke performed during that show, highlighted the fact that feminine sexuality pales next to the raw beauty of them breakin.

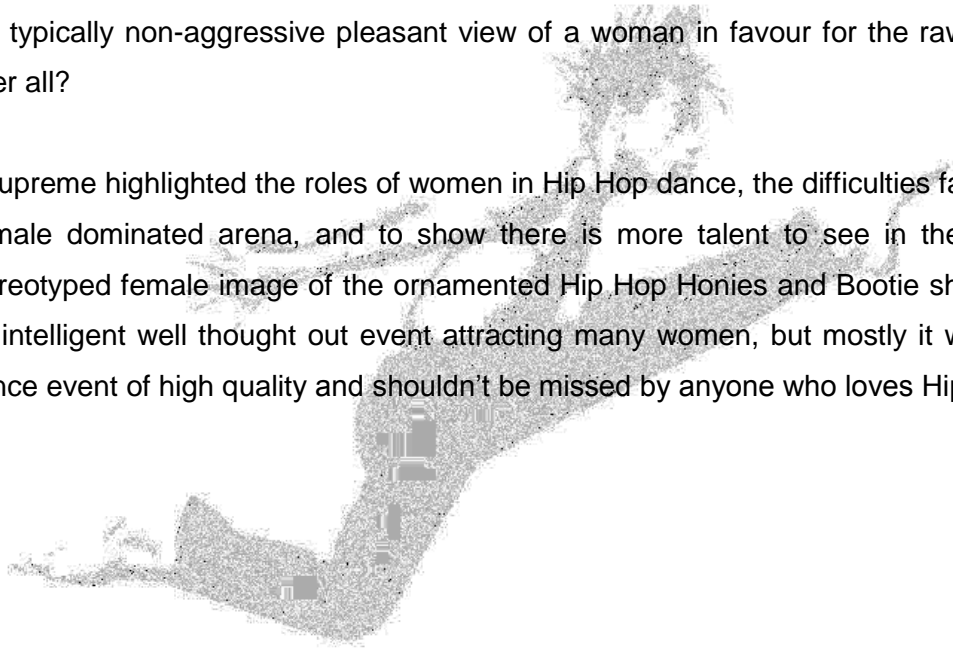
Freestyle Battle

The International Freestyle Battle hosted by Asia One and Kymberlee Jay was perfectly staged and judged Cicely and Olisa plus Rowdy from Flowzaic b-girl crew. Legendary DJ Sarah Love played the music. The competing dancers had to win the vote of the judges in order to face another round and avoid being knocked out.

The now passionate and interactive audience were holding on to their seats as raw energy filled the room. The girl on girl battle heated up with each knock out, absolutely no sissy fighting here.

It became especially dirty with the entrance of one dancer called Suzette. She was ruthless and aggressive but true to how battles really go down. Suzette was extremely good but could not win the affections of the audience. This left me wondering, how ready are females to drop the typically non-aggressive pleasant view of a woman in favour for the rawness of a b-girl after all?

b.supreme highlighted the roles of women in Hip Hop dance, the difficulties faced making it in a male dominated arena, and to show there is more talent to see in the b-girl than the stereotyped female image of the ornamented Hip Hop Honies and Bootie shakers. This was an intelligent well thought out event attracting many women, but mostly it was an excellent dance event of high quality and shouldn't be missed by anyone who loves Hip Hop.



Regular Feature...

ADAD Asks

In each Hotfoot newsletter, ADAD interviews an experienced dance professional with connections to the APD / Black dance sector and ask them 10 direct questions.

This edition, we meet

Jeannette Brooks

1. On a day to day basis what makes up the content of your working life right now?

There is no day to day for me. I have to juggle several elements of a professional career and hope I do justice to each part. It's like I wake up and ask myself 'which Jeannette am I today?'. Freelancer with the variety that brings, venue programmer, education officer, writer.



2. The UK dance scene. In what ways do you interact professionally at your point in your dance career with British based dancers, companies, theatres, or organisations?

I feel fortunate that I can move easily around the major components of the dance infrastructure in the UK. Even though since starting a family I no longer dance or teach, I still come into contact with the creative dance artists – the dancers and choreographers, artistic directors etc. I get to see the guts of the industry too with my various hats on. The theatre managers, funding officers, promoters. Professionally it's really interesting.

3. If you had complete artistic and financial freedom what kind of event or project would you devise to promote dance of the African Diaspora and all its styles to UK audiences and venues?

Humm... nice simple question! I hold to the belief that currently and on the whole, the genres under APD are still misunderstood, misinterpreted, incorrectly programmed and promoted. There are some exceptions and I am being very general about that statement. So I would like to devise some kind of event that honestly breaks down the stereotyping, the pigeonholing and the ghettoisation of this area of dance work.

Allowing the art makers to express and explain their work to bookers, theatre directors and sponsors even. To be frank – I would think there are events already out there that I think, think they are doing some of that I've just said. To me however if that is the case then those events are not working hard enough.

4. Have you ever sensed a kind of *glass ceiling* in your career?

Yes – several times. And not even glass or transparent – obvious and a bit discoloured the glass was.

5. Are you at the point in your professional development you hoped to be right now?

No. Dreams have come true in parts and not in others. Never the less I am very proud of the footprint of my career and the things I have done. I have no regrets and I am happy with the challenges I face in my career every week.

6. Do you feel there are any steps missing in the career path for UK dance artists?

Oh man. The life of a British based dancer changes so frequently. You think you wanna dance but in fact you end up as an artistic social worker, a teacher, reformer of youth offenders, child minder. Before this community involvement focus came along it was all about minorities involvement and audience development. Next we will be using the arts and dance to solve health issues. I don't know how the education and training establishments are supposed to keep abreast of what a professional dancer needs in the tool kit as they graduate. That is the reality.

As for the art, I'm not 100% convinced that the vocation education available is meeting the demands of the industry. Training needs to reflect the eclectic, culturally and stylistically diverse movement requirements of the choreographers at work.

7. What is your present interpretation of African Peoples Dance (APD)/Black Dance?

I think it has the potential to become a truly universal dance vocabulary– however today I think the definitions that are being allowed the oxygen of support, funding, and exposure are not wide or inclusive enough to the genre.



8. Is the APD / Black dance sector relevant to the overall British dance scene and why?

APD is a mirror of the social acceptance of some neat and tidy parts of cultural diversity. The form(s) are absolutely fundamental to the overall changing vocabulary of movement in the UK dance world and match the changing social integration of what it is to be British. The sector and the artists in it are ambassadors for progress and force debate. Yes, the APD sector is relevant.

9. What keeps you focused and motivated?

That's easy. It's that potent cocktail of frustration and realising potential. I have high expectations and low patience levels and I know so much more can be done in the UK for dance.

10. What advice or 'words of wisdom' could you offer to those people working in the APD / Black dance arena?

Stretch everyday – body and mind. Stay happy and cherish your achievements.

Jeanette has 18 years of dance experience as a choreographer, artistic director, performer and teacher, project manager and director. As a versatile performer she has worked with Irie! Dance Theatre, Bullies Ballerinas, and Phoenix Dance. Jeannette has also worked in physical theatre with the Charnock Company and musical theatre with Paul Henry and Stewart Arnold.

Jeannette is the former director of Hampshire Dance and Bracknell Forest Dance was also education manager at Adzido and is currently the education officer of Robert Hylton Urban Classicism and the former artistic director of The Dance Movement. Currently Jeannette edits Hotfoot Online and from September 2006 started work with Hextable Dance as Artistic Programme Manager.

Review...

The Dance Manifesto Summit

Organised by Dance UK, as part of Dance Umbrella 2006 Lillian Baylis Theatre, Sadler's Wells Theatre

Reviewed by **Carolene Hinds**

The Dance Manifesto was presented to David Lammy MP, Minister for Culture in July 2006. This was followed by a launch at City Hall with ADAD and the Jiving Lindy Hoppers as part of the Mayor of London's 'The Big Dance' which also saw a multitude of dance events happening simultaneously all over London.



The most memorable being in Trafalgar Square, venue for the BBC's 'Dancing in the Street' broadcast with world records being broken and a great showcase for some of the many styles of dance with many from the APD sector.

The summit at Sadler's Wells was titled '**A Chance for Dance – Be heard not just seen.**' It was an opportunity for members of the dance sector to take advantage of a free training session with a professional lobbyist and arm themselves with a basic lobbying information kit that could be used as part of a co-ordinated campaign to raise the profile of dance and interact with politicians at local and national level. The overwhelming message of the day was that it is not just enough to be able to dance, as it could all be a short lived career if we don't make steps now, to secure the arts form's future.

We listened to the inspiring stories of the journey of 'Suffolk Dance' as they became 'Dance East' and the growth of 'The Point' in Eastleigh. It was impressive the way that the visions for their organisations and passion for dance pushed them to achieve what some saw as an impossible dream - rather like turning straw into gold. This is a scenario which is all too familiar for all, artists, especially those within the APD sector.

'The Dance Manifesto' and the 'basic Lobbying Kit' provide an excellent foundation for the Dance Community as a whole and the APD sector as part of that community to make a difference and make sure that the contribution of dance is reflected in local and national funding agendas.

The debate about the Dance Manifesto Campaign saw an impressive line up of speakers:

Sir Gerald Kaufman MP (chair of the new all party Dance Group)

Arlene Phillips (choreographer and television presenter)

Mike Lee (CEO Vero Communications and Communications Director of the successful London 2012 bid, author of 'The Race for the 2012 Olympics')

Jane Robinson (Deputy Director, National Campaign For The Arts)

Caroline Miller (Director, Dance UK)

Christina Crisou (Education Manager, Akademi)

Bruce Sansom (Director Central School of Ballet)

Kicking off the proceedings was a film to promote London as the ideal venue for the 2012 Olympic Games. We watched a young runner make a journey across London, passing many famous landmarks, celebrities and a few dancers. Set to the Heather Small soundtrack 'What have you done today to make you feel proud?', it was a very moving piece of film and a very thought provoking question.

Carl Campbell (Dance Company 7) asked, 'What do I say to a child who says "I want to make dance a career?"'. He explained that he struggles to answer them. Should he use his own experience? The image of a face pressed against the window looking in seemed to sum up the issue of exclusion. The diversity of dance and the way that it integrates cultures, needs to be looked at, as does the provision for the mature dancer (such as found in Carl Campbell Dance Company 7's Recycled Teenagers). This aspect specifically brought up the concern that efforts were particularly focussed on the dance in the National Curriculum for the younger generation.

The APD sector needs to join the campaign to ensure that the merits of dance can benefit the whole of society on many levels to allow our professionals to get work with and in schools at various levels of study through the National Curriculum, and therefore educating people as to history and cultural richness of the society we live in. We need to arm ourselves with the facts and figures that prove the benefits of dance in order to promote a healthy society. We need to project a positive image and have a complete understanding of the sector, how APD dance is positioned and how we can effect change.

ADAD@dance

THE ASSOCIATION OF DANCE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

UK

The Mayor, the Minister and the Manifesto

By Caroline Miller

Less than a year since the idea of a dance manifesto was first discussed at a meeting between the dance world and the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) on 8 September 2005, the finished Dance Manifesto was presented to David Lammy MP, Minister for Culture and launched at City Hall during the Big Dance in July 2006.

This is a major achievement in such a short period of time and has only been possible with the wide contributions and commitment from across the dance sector. Though the journey hasn't always been easy, the resulting document sends out a clear message that dance is a flourishing, diverse, professional industry that enriches society, but could achieve so much more with further Government support.

The private dance delegation that delivered the Dance Manifesto to the Minister for Culture made a strong impact with its combination of star names and expert knowledge and we thank Arlene Phillips (choreographer and television presenter), Darcey Bussell (principal ballerina for The Royal Ballet) and Jonzi D (choreographer and Artistic Director of Jonzi D Productions) for making time to support the launch of the Manifesto.

David Lammy welcomed the Dance Manifesto enthusiastically, especially the fact that the dance sector was **speaking to government with a united voice**. This was stressed by Alistair Spalding, Chair of Dance UK in his speech at the Dance Manifesto launch at City Hall in London. Spalding, who was also part of the delegation, said he had never heard any politician welcome an arts initiative so positively.

David Lammy said that his department was open to what dance had to say and that he hoped we would be showing the Manifesto to other politicians and asking for their support.

He also said he could address the points raised in the Dance Manifesto in the regular DCMS Dance Forums.

Over 100 people attended the Dance Manifesto launch on 20 July, representing a wide cross section of the dance world.

All Party Parliamentary Dance Group

The inaugural meeting of the **All Party Parliamentary Dance Group** was held at the Palace of Westminster on 18 July. This is the first time that dance has had a dedicated special interest group in parliament.

The group already has the support of known-dance supporter Sir Gerald Kaufman MP. The dancers Michael Nunn and Billy Trevitt of George Piper Dances found time in their hectic schedule to speak at the first meeting and though only a small number of MPs were able to attend: Frank Doran MP (Labour, Aberdeen North); Harry Cohen MP (Labour, Leyton & Wanstead); John Dawson researcher for Andrew Slaughter MP (Labour, Shepherds Bush and Ealing); Bob Russell MP (Lib Dem, Colchester); and Sandra Osbourne (Labour, Ayr, Carrick, Cumnock), Frank Doran has received nearly 50 responses from parliamentarians about the group.

Dance UK will distribute the confirmed list of MPs and Peers who have signed up to the group when Parliament re-convenes in October.

Moving Forward – how you can get involved in the Dance Manifesto Campaign:

The creation of the Dance Manifesto is the first step in a long term campaign to increase resources and funding for dance. Dance UK and the NCA will be working with their members to use the Manifesto as a tool to influence legislative change. We all need to take individual action, to create co-ordinated pressure on MPs and councillors, persuading them to re-assess the importance of dance in their funding agendas.

- **Write to your local MP, Councillors and Mayor by the end of 2006**

Many MPs and local councillors just don't know how many dance organisations and facilities are in their constituencies or how many of their voters enjoy and benefit from dance. Write to your local MP and councillors, highlighting your organisation, how many local people you reach and the benefits of dance to local people.

Tell them about the new Dance Manifesto and identify the key ambitions it includes that relate to you, and urge them to support the Manifesto and to join the new All Party Parliamentary Dance Group.

- **Invite your MP, Councillor or Mayor to visit you once by June 2007**

End your letter with an invitation to come and visit you, perhaps to see a show, class, rehearsal or your facilities. If you are a teacher you could invite them to present examination certificates and invite the local paper to take a picture. Send the picture to us too, and we'll run it in a subsequent issue of Dance UK! (see page....)

- **Tell Dance UK when you write to MPs and Councillors**

Let us know when you send your letter and who you are writing to. Dance UK will also send a letter supporting your work and stressing you are part of a national network of dance professionals reaching millions of voters.

- **Add your name to the list of Dance Manifesto supporters**

Go to www.danceuk.org and click on **Pledge Your Support** to add your name as an individual or organisation. If you don't have access to a computer call Dance UK on 020 7228 4990 and we'll add your name.



- **Dance Summit**

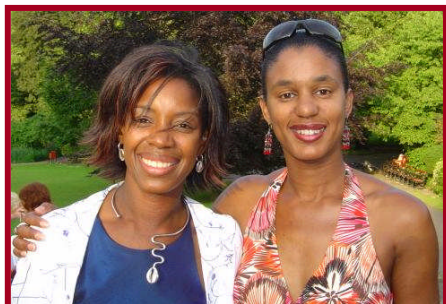
As part of Dance Umbrella, Dance UK organised ***A Chance for Dance - Be heard not just seen***, a two part event focusing on the Dance Manifesto. The event was held at the **Lilian Baylis Theatre on Wednesday 4 October.**

To download the Dance Manifesto visit www.danceuk.org

Article...

A Career In Dance – A Moving Experience

By Jeanefer Jean-Charles and Pearl Jordan



For two Paddington kids from St Lucian families, life as dancer-choreographers has been one long leap, with many twists and turns.

Best friends since primary school, secondary then University, where they graduated in Performing Arts, Jeanefer Jean-Charles and Pearl Jordan have created a unique partnership. They were joint artistic directors of Bullies Ballerinas Jazz Productions from 1990 to 2000.

Here they describe their goals, their dreams, and how they have spent the past six years reinventing themselves.

We formed our own jazz dance company **Bullies Ballerinas** in 1990, after more than a decade performing in other peoples' shows, both as students and professionals. Working collaboratively, we created, choreographed, produced and performed in shows for national and international tours, including memorable trips to Southern Africa, Azerbaijan, Latvia and Italy.

Looking back, it really all started in the late 1980's, when we taught choreographic workshops in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. We developed a method of incorporating movements into our performances that the young participants from the workshops had devised. When these kids, who were not dancers, saw our show, they recognized their own moves.

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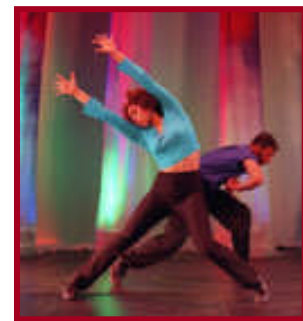
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That they themselves could create something worthy of professional performance gave them a great sense of achievement and excitement. This inspired us to build on a foundation of accessibility. We believed that dance was something everyone could do if it was taught with an open heart. From that, our philosophy 'dance for all', took off. This all pre-dates the current strategies for inclusion and access.

We wanted to reach people who got overlooked and we aimed to have at least 50% of the project's dancers from ethnic minorities. We wanted to break down barriers using Jazz dance and do away with the idea that dance is elitist. We combined performance with education and ensured that our multi racial company comprised of dancers who could teach.

Over the years, we choreographed *Jazz Umbrella*; *Rhythm Circus*; *Barefeet & Crazy Legs* – all successful touring shows. Sometimes we performed in places where there were few or no black people. Did we change peoples' perceptions? Yes, in some small places we may have been seen at the beginning, as a bit of a threat. But we never really felt any overt racism. We simply wouldn't put up with it.

We were beginning to enjoy recognition abroad, working closely with the British Council, and national dance organizations in Britain were clamouring for our work. WAC Performing Arts & Media College, East London Dance and Swindon Dance each understood there was a lack of black dance support and those three organizations in particular supported our work.



But without steady economic backing, it's very hard to balance the books. Budgeting became a nightmare.

Jeanfer-Jean Charles (JJC): It was proving nearly impossible to keep it going. For instance, we dreamt up a project, which was about £100,000 and we raised £30,000 of it. Therefore what we could do was only a third of what we'd aimed for. We made a decision never the less to go ahead, scrimp and scrape, struggle along, ask dancers to do it for less money, not pay ourselves properly; constantly pulling back and pulling back.

Pearl Jordan (PJ): An issue with Jazz dance is that it is generally up-tempo and fun. It's entertainment. For the funding bodies I feel that was difficult. They wanted us to become innovative straight away, push the boundaries. But our argument was that people don't even know what Jazz dance is and there are so many different styles. We needed to educate first. But the pressure was to move on more quickly and that became quite a challenge.

We continued to receive funding but it was never enough and we used a lot of our energy trying to finance projects instead of creating them.

JJC: There has never been a lot of black dance companies in the UK – maybe for that reason: everyone at that time was struggling. Black companies just had to do their own thing. That was and still is a problem. Back then, there wasn't ever a cooperative feeling. The community never really came together under one umbrella. ADAD is trying to change that.

PJ: The black experience has often meant too few of us got a taste of commercial or artistic success. So when one artist or company got somewhere, they felt protective of that achievement. Everyone was too busy struggling to reach out to others.

JJC: So after ten crazy, rewarding years and a lot of soul searching, we closed the company.

PJ: It is an acknowledged fact that when approaching forty year of age, an individual can feel that niggling thing called 'change'. I was exhausted juggling the tour plus my young kids and felt I needed time out. Jean and I decided to take a sabbatical with a view to returning afresh, ready to rock 'n' roll once again three months down the line.

But to my surprise, I so enjoyed the break that *'oh my gosh'*, I think it's time to end the dance thing. That was a really frightening moment. So as Jean has said, after discussions we decided it was time to shut shop.

The following two years were quite an emotional roller coaster. What was strange in my case now changing career path, was certain individuals in the dance world no longer knew what to say to me; they behaved quite strangely, avoiding me as one does when there has been a recent death! It was a huge relief when I decided upon homeopathy. It gave me the opportunity to see who else I could be. Funnily enough, my homeopathy is at its best only when I bring my past Bullies experiences to it!

JJC: For me the closure of bullies was not something I had control over. Pearl needed to move on and I really could not imagine who else would run the company with me in the way Pearl and I did. To find someone else prepared to work the way we did, often unpaid, I believe was pretty much impossible. Plus, I have a lot of respect for Pearl's work; while we worked with equal status in the company, she challenged me every step of the way, and I did her. Also, it was frustrating, but the reality is so many were applying for the same tiny amount of money allocated to 'Black Dance'.

Since the opportunities to continue the professional development of the work were proving impossible, it was this issue along with other reasons that brought our company to a close.

PJ: If I'm to recall a couple of points pre-Bullies: I had some great moments being a commercial dancer. It was being exposed to that commercial energy that made me the performer I am today. However as a dark skinned black dancer in the 80's I was definitely in the minority and this brought its own issues....

Life after our company

PJ: I loved running Bullies Ballerinas with my best mate. There were such fabulous times. Though not looking back through rose tinted glasses, I acknowledge there were some pretty awful times too. But you know what? I wouldn't change it for the world. I grew ten thousand fold as an individual. I got to meet and work with some amazing people all of whom, if it were possible, I would love to mention and thank. A career in dance is not easy but if it doesn't break you it makes you.

JJC: Having folded the company, I continued in the world of dance, running schemes for East London Dance, WAC Performing Arts & Media College and directing various dance festivals. I did a lot of community projects, planning, organizing and teaching, in addition to coaching ice dancers in Beijing, Montreal, Switzerland, and the UK. But last year I stopped to reflect and realized that I missed what I love doing the most: choreographing. And as soon as I decided to put my energies into creative work and found my life coach, June Gamble, the opportunities presented themselves.

I was asked to choreograph a massive event in Trafalgar Square led by the Mayor of London office in partnership with Arts Council England and the BBC. *Big Dance* hinged on an attempt to break a world record by staging the largest number of dance styles being performed at the same time to one piece of music.

As I saw it, *Big Dance* was about making dance accessible to all ages and races – like the original Bullies Ballerinas' concept.

I decided to connect the different groups by making them do each other's cultural dances. Salsa dancers had never known, for example, what Turkish dancers did. I myself didn't have a clue as to what Slovakian dancing entailed. Irish dancers learnt African. Flamenco dancers learned Street dance.

I feel it is important that this much-publicized event was choreographed by a black female when so many high profile dance jobs go to white males.

From the feedback I've received, having me in that position inspired young black people to feel that they could aspire to such heights. We need more role models.

Right now I'm creating a 20-minute piece for *State of Emergency*, promoting established black female choreographers. This has come just after I completed *Big Dance*. It's as if my career has just started again.

My next project is *Dads & Lads Move*. It's for men and sons, or uncles, cousins, doesn't matter what male relatives – to come together and move. To learn to communicate through movement and deal with issues that arise. I'm careful not to call it 'dance' though – it could put some guys right off!

PJ: I trained for four years to practice homeopathy and am now practicing at the C.H.A.I.M. Centre in London.

In the beginning, it seemed like a total departure from what I'd always done – from the arts to the sciences. But then I realized that actually I'd come full circle: in many ways practicing homeopathy is comparable to dance.



The choreographer and homeopath have a lot in common. A choreographer searches for different ways to create, using the bodies available. A homeopath when looking at illness focuses on that which is unique about the individual and finds various ways of healing: it's also a creative process.

Bullies Ballerinas' ethos was always about tapping into the individual and choosing how best to take them on a journey. Maybe there's something of the healer in choreographers and something of the creative artist in homeopaths.

I now deliver talks and seminars to performing artists, suggesting basic ways they can look after themselves, prevent injury and keep their minds in a healthier place. Jeanfer and I still come together artistically. We support each other as objective advisors when working on different projects - I still dabble every now and then. Dance is in the blood after all.

Looking back, I liked the later years of Bullies, when it became more about Jean and me, the dynamic duo! The times at the South Bank for example, when we could really just depend on each other and have a laugh.

JJC: Yes, I remember Alistair Spalding inviting us to present *Ballroom Blitz* at the Royal Festival Hall, which was fantastic, and then within a week of that job the British Council offered us the Southern Africa tour. Other highlights include attending the Arts Council *Taped* awards where our *Barefeet & Crazy Legs* film was shown; and having a five-piece band on tour with us. And how can I ever forget the moment in *Big Dance* when 800 dancers performed live in Trafalgar Square. What a buzz.

Final Thoughts

JJC: It sounds naff but.... Dance is such a spiritually uplifting experience. I care how people feel about themselves.

Many think dance is only for those who look a certain way or are from a particular background. But it's within you. I want to encourage young, black dancers to find their place in the community – and not necessarily be labelled as black. We are in such a diverse county, there is so much out there that wants to be allowed to express itself, so many voices that are unheard. To feel inner beauty when you dance – I want everyone to experience it like I have.

PJ: Dance - when you get it, is just the most amazing experience imaginable. When you get the opportunity, when it's all about just dancing and you forget about everything else – it is the most awe-inspiring sensation! And when you're choreographing, there is such a powerful exchange from you to the dancers. You give the spark; you give them your moves, share your ideas and watch a complete transformation. Now that's medicine.

***Jeanfer Jean-Charles** has choreographed for the British Ski Ballet team, tutored the national ice-skating team, and choreographed for Disney film 'Parent Trap', the Young Vic, Theatre Royal Stratford, and Theatre Centre among many others. A qualified schoolteacher, she has led education projects for the Royal Academy of Music, Die Tanzetage International Summer School in Frankfurt, WAC Performing Arts & Media College, Middlesex University and the Royal Ballet School. Last year she worked as a mentor for East London Dance's Cultural Shift, platform for disabled choreographers, and is leader of their Artist Forum. With those credentials, who else but Jeanfer would pull off Britain's largest live dance event, 'Big Dance' in Trafalgar Square, July 2006*

***Pearl Jordan** has performed at the London Palladium (The Royal Variety Show and Stairway to the Stars), The Old Vic (Carmen Jones), Simon Callow's 'My Fair Lady' and made countless TV and pop video appearances. She has received numerous choreographic commissions over the years including for Black Theatre Co-Operative, Musical Morsels C4 TV and most recently the 'Just-A-Minute' event at Wembley Arena. She has taught at establishments as diverse as Central School for Speech and Drama, WAC Performing Arts & Media College, Swindon Dance, The British Council, East London dance, Ballet Rambert and The London Philharmonic Orchestra. After taking a break from dance to raise her children, she trained as a homeopath, specializing in the treatment of performing artists, and set up practice in 2005 at the C.H.A.I.M. Centre in North-West London.*

Pearl Jordan B.A Hons LCPH MARH
www.chaimcentre.com

Jeanfer Jean-Charles
Choreographer, Teacher, Dance Manager
www.jeanferjean-charles.com

(This article is a piece written by Maire Clerkin following an interview with Pearl and Jeanfer)

Regular item...

Wazzup! 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. To contribute, in the first instance talk to Pamela at ADAD.

Peter Badejo OBE interviewed by Zhana

Acknowledging History for a Solid Future

Peter Badejo OBE, founder of Badejo Arts, raises questions about Black history and how it informs identity and the need for African-led arts institutions in the UK.

For a long time, the history of Black people was not taught here in the UK.

But we should know our history and build on it. Then maybe we will have fewer distractions. Distractions are being pushed on us daily, through the television, through the adverts, through everything. But in the United States, Black History is not only is it taught, it is practicalised through the family. A lot of things they do in America – they live almost like people live in Africa, in terms of family values.



I am not one of those romantic Africans, no. In Africa, there are certain things we need to change. But there are certain values we can take and utilise in our new contemporary environment.

That is what I am saying in my productions.

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I did a production called 'The Heart of Dance', which is about the coming back of Black people. It is a kind of juxtaposition of Conrad's Book *Heart of Darkness*, in which the journey began in Greenwich (South London) and went to Africa. He talks about exploration of the 'dark continent'. I started in Greenwich, too, going into Europe. We started on a boat, got all the audience on a boat – Caribbeans, Africans – and the whole of the journey from Greenwich to the South Bank was storytelling about our coming. At the South Bank, we gave birth to New Britain. And that took over the outside of Queen Elizabeth Hall.

I used all the cultures that are present here just to symbolise that Windrush was not the first coming of Black people here. There have been Black people in the UK since the Roman Empire. So, when we came, we met these people – Indians, Asians – it was a celebration of our coming.

Then, in the last part of it, which I did not want to forget, we went to the rooftop of Queen Elizabeth Hall, which is a very harsh reality. It is a concrete space, there is nothing there. That is where we enacted our experience here – 'No Blacks, No Dogs', all this sort of thing. Which was the reality of our lives at one point. But in the end, I finished it in a positive way. Despite all the problems we have had here, we have progressed. We have lawyers, we have doctors, in all facets of life, we have our people.

If we look at African dance in this country. When I first came here, I did not even want to start my company. There were loads of African dance companies and African Diaspora companies that I wanted to work with, to share my ideas with them. I did this for years before I established my own company.

How many are left now? Adzido is gone. Quite a number of us have lost our funding, because the system is now saying, the new thing that represents African people is street and Hip Hop. This is a new venture.

You don't base a whole people's expression on something that is in the passing. It's disposable. It's fine for people to do break-dancing. But you have to remember, where is it coming from? What is the background of the people?

Anything that will not make the audience here think beyond your physical presence on stage is fine for the system, but it is not good for the doer. The system is not challenged. The moment you begin to inflict knowledge – when you say, *wait a minute, when you see me contract and release, there is something behind it, it comes from such-and-such*, you begin to talk about background.

When I used to teach in schools, some white parents used to say, 'I don't want my child learning this. My child came home and started singing some mumbo jumbo'. The moment you go beyond just the artificial razzle-dazzle, it becomes a problem. You are beginning to give messages that go back, that challenge even the perception that has been given to the children.

I think it is because the foundation of some parents is not solid. We make a lot of assumptions. 'He comes from Africa so he is knowledgeable'. No. He could come from the heart of Africa and yet not even know how to spell Africa. The Diaspora needs to learn from the Continent, the Continent needs to learn from the Diaspora. And until we can merge these two experiences, I think we have a long way to go.

Each culture needs to be understood and respected...

...especially when you are in a culture that is being bleached gradually, daily. For example, there is nothing wrong with people becoming British. But Britain is a multicultural society, for heaven's sake. I think each culture needs to be identified, understood, respected. Otherwise, when you call it 'multicultural', there is no equal attention given to what is multicultural. Then it becomes a follow-up cultural. It becomes one culture tagging the others along, which is the same thing which has happened in the education system.

Occasionally, the system wakes up and says, 'Hey, wait a minute, are we going the right route?'. Then you begin to find little programmes being sprung into the education system. That is a little bit of waking up to it before problems happen. So that is there. We need to look at our roles and redefine them and see how they help in building the family.



In 'The Pain of Aspirations' I looked at the young people here, and I said, something is wrong. The young people seem to be losing it. They want to buy this, they want to buy that, they want to go here and there. Are those the aspirations of our fathers who came here? I don't think so. We need to properly revisit our family values. We need to revisit our culture. Culture is not something we should be ashamed of.

Culture is supposed to help us move from our past to our present and from the present into our future.

I think the Saturday schools are wonderful. But it looks like there is a bottleneck. You start from a very wide base, and it narrows down until you cannot breathe anymore. It needs to develop into foundation courses, diplomas and employment so that the people who leave the Saturday schools will never forget those experiences.

I hate using the word 'Black' in this country.

To me, the word 'Black' has meant a lot of deprivation, and it should not be that way. The system finds it comfortable to have a common name for our people. But when it comes to giving resources, 'Black' becomes expandable. So I am reverting, recoiling into my Africanness. First and foremost, I am an African from Nigeria, I live in Britain and I am British.

We are trying to develop a more comprehensive idea. England has a way of squashing you into some kind of compartmentalisation. 'I'm a dancer, I'm a singer, I'm a musician'. Whereas, as a cultural ambassador, I believe that one should go back and revisit the non-compartmentalisation of our own expression.

Now, I am developing the first African dance technique, based on a particular dance from Nigeria called *bata*. And *bata* is a dance that has gone beyond Africa. You find it in Cuba, America, Brazil and all those places.



So it has made its inroads. But in terms of it becoming a technique, which can be studied, that is what I am developing here. I am doing that at the University of Surrey, where I am a research fellow.

I am working with young dancers - because I am not intending to close the company, and I am not intending to stay here forever. So when I move on, the company will be run by young people who appreciate the importance of understanding Africa. Knowing where the performing experiences originate from, and moving them on into the new world.

Three years ago, I was given an OBE by the Queen for my contribution to the development of African dance. It is an honour that, to me, is not limited just to myself.

I think it is more for the sector. I have met people here who were doing African dance 10-20 years before I came. But fortunately, my work was highlighted. I did not just work in dance, I worked in drama, music, etc. And it paid off.

[Accepting the OBE] was a difficult decision, it is very controversial. I received a letter from the Prime Minister's office saying, "Will you accept this honour?" I thought, 'this is a tricky one' because of the name of it – the Empire.

It was an honour tied to my contribution. My wife and I talked about it and prayed over it. Refusing it – what would that contribute? Accepting it – what would that contribute? We weighed the two. I remember discussing Benjamin Zephaniah's rejection of it. I decided that there is a meaning to this award over and above the damage of the Empire.

This is an honour for dance and for my contribution to dance. Nobody has ever been given an OBE in dance. So I decided not to reject it. Suppose they used that to dishonour other people?

We cannot reject some of these things, even though we don't like the titles. Because a lot of people have been honoured – people from the Caribbean who have come here and really worked at things. Are we then going to say they should reject their honour simply because it is badly titled? So it is debatable and it is a decision that individuals have to make.

If I were not in African dance, I would have been given respect beyond what I have.

An artist of my calibre and experience, if I were not in African dance, I would have been given the kind of respect beyond what I have. That to me is a form of enslavement. We are enslaved because of our colour. At the same time, there are certain expressions we want to make. We don't even have an institution that deals with our own experience, our own expression. Not Caribbean, not African, nothing. Nigeria is a country three times the size of Great Britain, and has more than 50 languages. Each culture and language carries its own dance expression and musical expression. And I am not even including the derivatives from the Diaspora.

If that is not recognised, and given a place of intellectual study, I think this is a mistake. The only way we can change things is to shape our own contribution. A colleague and I just wrote to 100 universities around the world offering what our experience is in the development of dance in Britain. By approaching it intellectually, bringing our ideas to the forefront, I am hoping that we will be able to find ways of developing an institution for this expression.

We don't even have Black theatres in this country. In New York, there are lots of Black theatres, lots of centres where you can pick and choose what African dance expression you want to look at and study. But we do not have that here yet. We are beginning to enlighten the audience about what we do. I see that as an emancipation.

I would expect an African or a Diasporic choreographer coming up to think from language, from verbal understanding to a physical language, which is dance. So they would have to understand self, where they are coming from. The individual self as well as their culture.

Your culture can only be seen from you.

Then you have to bring in the technical expertise. Choreography in the West could be movement, but from an African point of view, you have to look at the relationship between music and movement. How the two merge together. So you look at self, culture, and then technical interpretation. That would be my advice.

Within the African dance tradition, there is still individuality. That will be there even when it is institutionalised. We are doing the same dance but we are individuals. It's not like Swan Lake, where all the hands have to be at a particular angle.

My plan for the future is that we will establish a community for the company, where we will be able to build a sense of belonging through the work we are doing with young people in the community. Give them a sense of pride. Give the non-Africans who are participating a sense of understanding of where our own cultural expression is coming from, and maybe the community can grow into some kind of institution.

Peter Badejo since 1990 has made a dramatic impact on British arts in general. Artistic Director of Badejo Arts, he was awarded an OBE in 2001 in recognition of his work with and commitment to African people's dance. Companies throughout Africa, Europe and America have commissioned Peter Badejo's work. In this country, Peter's list of collaborators and commissioners includes Adzido, Kokuma, Irie, Sakoba Productions, H Patten, The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, Cambridge Arts Theatre and Pan Project. Choreographer, performer, teacher and academic, his commitment to the field of African performance arts has also involved research conducted through the Universities of London, California, Ghana and Ahmadu Bello University.



Article...

Attitudes and Vocabulary: Moments in Black Dance in Britain

Insights prompted by research related to the ADAD promoted photographic exhibition, Peepul Centre, Leicester, from 15th January 2007 to the 31st May 2007.

By Dick Matchett

I thought readers of Hotfoot might be challenged by considering a few of the statements and reviews I discovered while researching Buddy Bradley and Katherine Dunham.

I invite you to make your own judgements, but I will comment briefly here in the introduction, that context is all. I ask you to remember that what was accepted without question 70 or 80 years ago may seem totally unacceptable in today's changed environment. The words mean the same – however the situation in which they may or may not be used changes radically.

I have to start by making clear that most of the reviews that I read were positive and the language in which they were expressed would be no different today. Nevertheless for the purpose of this article I have chosen to concentrate on the few occasions where the difference of attitude or the tone of expression was most noticeable and therefore possibly most revealing. Please bear in mind, that to reviewers of that period (the 1930s and 1940s) the elements of the work which they reacted to most powerfully were where it was most different to the norms of the day. For some of them, the powerfulness of their reaction affected the tone and vocabulary of their response.

The 'N' Word

In 1932 Buddy Bradley was invited by the Camargo Society to choreograph a ballet to the music of Spike Jones. Frederick Ashton worked with Buddy to present "High Yellow" at the Savoy Theatre with Alicia Markova in the lead.





All the dancers had to 'black up' and the reviews and recollections of the artists involved make for interesting reading.

The Dancing Times didn't hold back. "The first new ballet of the season was a nigger fantasia - syncopation a la mode – the voodoo monotony of the rhythm make it seem too long".

To me, the attitude which comes through most strongly is the negative response to the music – which is strange since it was the composer who Ashton and Markova were initially inspired by.

Markova indeed collected his music recordings and in her Knightsbridge flat there is still a large collection of them which were much loved by her all her life.

Anton Dolin who was not involved with the project, writes in his autobiography "I personally hated seeing Markova dancing in High Yellow". He added that Olga Spessivtseva, Diaghlev, Prima Ballerina, withdrew from the programme seemingly because she found it impossible to dance Swan Lake Act 2 on the same stage as Buddy's jazz ballet. Markova's attitude was more balanced. In her book 'Markova Remembers' she admitted "Frederick Ashton collaborated with the American Jazz choreographer Buddy Bradley in High Yellow for which I was coached for 6 weeks in Jazz dancing and the snake hips by Buddy Bradley who told me I reminded him of his adored Florence Mills".

In the book 'Markova the Legend' we read "she danced a black girl there being no black ballerina". Alicia received excellent notices for her authenticity in Buddy's ballet – not so the corps. And what about Dolin? Well if you read on in his autobiography you discover the following seven or so years later - "Buddy Bradley produced and arranged a new kind of dance for me, the dance of The Tiger God" which was one of the triumphs of a most successful revue at Blackpool Opera House.

It is also interesting to consider that the money for “High Yellow” was put up by Lady Cunard. Dolin reports in his book that “I know it shocked Lady Cunard”. This is very ironic when you consider that Lady Cunard was the mother of Nancy Cunard who published ‘Negro’ in 1934, one of the first significant works of black aesthetics. This is the same Lady Cunard who when she discovered what her daughter was publishing and the company she kept in order to make it possible, allegedly delivered herself of the immortal line



“Do you mean to say my daughter actually knows a negro?”. Now that is attitude.

Drugs

“Light Up” was a revue at the Savoy Theatre in 1940. It had choreography by both Buddy Bradley and the well known English choreographer Antony Tudor. It was the former, however, who stole the reviews with a piece that I suspect would be titled differently today.

“The sensation of the evening was a dope fiend dance called ‘Marihuana’ which brought the house down” commented the Evening Standard. Contrast this with Mr Tudor’s contribution, which was called ‘An Old Dance Hall’ using the music of the polka and the gallop. Buddy was also responsible for a piece called ‘Hashish Hop’ which a contemporary reviewer described as “A frighteningly macabre dance which ought to sweep the town.”. Buddy’s American Jazz style was obviously able to cover powerful issues and contemporary social arguments which the British dance of the period didn’t seem able to. What Buddy’s career makes clear is that drug taking (and its effect on society) as an issue for dance makers did not arrive in the dance scene until the Hip Hop artists of more recent times.

The Jungle

Buddy Bradley co produced a show in the early 1940s called 'Orchids and Onions'. One of the reviewers commented favourably on the "Tapfoot rhythms caught in the jungle and tamed by Mr Buddy Bradley has here a profound slickness".

Likewise a local paper review covering Katherine Dunham's visit to Bournemouth highlighted "A warm world where passions flame and emotions are as uninhibited as the great trees of the jungle".

The review continues "Hypnotic and writhing bodies told stories as primitive as time". And that one sentence contains 3 elements of vocabulary which "black" work evokes in British writing of that period.

- 1) Rhythm
- 2) Primitive
- 3) Some variation on...

...the word writhing to indicate I suppose the opposite of classical ballets *line*.

The Bournemouth critic went on to praise Dunham's scholarship and still commenting on how "The audience went silent, overwhelmed by the realism of a performance staggering in its integrity".



The critic also felt it necessary to draw the audiences' attention to the fact that some of the repertoire may "shock" them and indicated that "They may not like everything they see, but see it they must".

That was the critic's conclusion despite the show being "somewhat sensual" for a town like Bournemouth's reputation for culture and all that is good and nice in entertainment. Isn't it fascinating (and very English) the contrast that is drawn between culture and the sensual.

This debate is carried on in a very interesting article in Ballet Today, September 1948 which evaluated the energy of Dunham's company against the fact that British ballet had "become the preserve of suburbia". These suburban values contrasted with the values in Dunham's work "which got right under our civilised façade and touched something sacred and primitive in us".

Spoiled Children

CB Cochran, the greatest impresario of his time wrote an autobiography "I had almost forgotten" in 1932. He was a man who admired many black artists and presented more shows with a black aesthetic than anyone of his era. Nevertheless some of his ideas and expressions might be questioned today.

Discussing the 'Dover Street to Dixie' show he makes it clear that most of the audience had turned up to demonstrate against "this plantation cabaret". He goes on "But within a few moments of the curtain rising on these extraordinary artists, London had taken the darkies to that big heart which always beats to real art". Writing about Florence Mills he describes her as one of the greatest artists that ever walked on a stage. However, realistically, he goes on "but for her colour she would have been internationally accepted as one of the half dozen leading theatrical personalities of their age and worth all the money in the world". But it is a comparison which he makes between artist like Florence Mills and Paul Robeson "who can compete on equal terms with the stars of the white theatre" and "many of their darkey colleagues who remain children – and sometimes spoiled children at that" which is most difficult to come to terms with in our times.

His book makes it clear that employing black artists in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s was fraught with difficulties. He draws attention to "the antagonism which some people had towards coloured people". He emphasises that "the presentation of a big company of coloured performers is something of a responsibility". All of this first hand evidence makes me appreciate nowadays how difficult it has always been even for producers who are committed to "black work" to bring it to the attention of British audiences. The exhibition at the Theatre Museum is called "Moments" – but producing and presenting these moments has never been easy or for the faint hearted.

To conclude, I want to draw your attention to one review of Buddy Bradley's contribution to "Follow the Sun" a 1936 dance extravaganza at the Adelphi Theatre. This review offers a unique insight into the attitudes of the day – and it is perhaps appropriate that it comes not from a dance specialist but from the well known drama critic of the Sunday Times, James Agate.

It displays a point of view which no dance critic that I have read ever produced; and its inversion of the common reaction to work coming from a black perspective repays consideration today.

Agate writes "Are we watching the natural exuberance of a primitive people or are they (the dancers) the sophisticated entertainers and we the gaping singletons. Against their enormous physical energy all else fades. I imagine they must be calm and collected inside what looks like epilepsy and paranoia is the merest simulacrum and that it is the onlooker who is apoplexed". This questioning of the obvious superiority of the view of the onlooker is rare in the writing of that time and the placing of the "primitive peoples art form with all its physical energy in the "sophisticated camp" is unique.

Go and see the exhibition and decide for yourself.

Black Dance in Britain: 1930's – 1990's Moments... Photographic exhibition finished at the Theatre Museum on 31st December 2007.

The exhibition will be open to the public at the Peepul Centre from 15th January 2007 to the 31st May 2007.

Peepul Centre
Orchardson Avenue
Leicester
LE4 6DP

Tel: 0116 261 6000
Email: info@peepulcentre.com

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Notes:

For the full interview with Peter Badejo please visit

<http://www.kuumba-survivors.com/peterbadejoobe.htm>

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