



SPRING 2023

# indance

DISCOURSE + DIALOGUE TO UNIFY, STRENGTHEN + AMPLIFY



P.18 They will always hate the Conga



P.08 How home remembers me



P.34 The Soul Train Line

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# WELCOME

by [NKEIRUKA ORUCHE](#), Guest Editor



**HOME IS WHERE THE DANCE IS.** When I was 8, my claim to fame was 'best dancer' champion at family friends' birthday parties. Yet, at that age, I never imagined that the at-home dance sessions and "Nkay, oya come and dance for us" my young adult aunties would demand, would materialize as a career largely based in dance. I knew I was magnetized by dance, and dancers. Yet, I didn't have the 'when I grow up I want to be a dancer' ambition. I never imagined it was something a person could be.

Typically for people of African descent, dance is in the fabric of our being. It's a core part of our social environment. It's how we pass time. How we survive. How we show love. Most of our introduction to dance was 'informal'. You didn't need permission, or second-by-second instruction of what and how you moved.

When I got this opportunity to Guest Edit, I knew that I wanted to start from 'the beginning'. The home. I was excited about exploring how dance shows up for us without the barriers of institutions, without the constraints of capitalism, and without the judgment of society.

This issue explores our intimate and informal connections to dance. Even though the feature articles focus on 'dancer-dancers', I wanted to know more than what we see on stage, or in classes or at events. You get to explore how traditional dance practice in diaspora connects back to the places of origin via three Bay Area multi-generational African Dance families; Dioufs (Diamano Coura), Muisi-kongo & Kiazzi Malonga (Fua Dia Congo), and Kanukai Chigamba (Chinyakare Ensemble).

'Ancestral Re-membrance' employs prayer and a playlist to connect to our roots. 'Uninterrupted Refuge', and 'Wash Spin Repeat' poetically express emotions associated with dance at home. '1st Dance Party' and 'The Do's and Don'ts of the Soul Train Line' are hilarious takes on our connections to dance in social environments. In 'How We Danced At Home', we see regular folk who don't consider themselves dancers share memories. 'The Conga will set you free', and 'Discarding our Dance means Defacing Ourselves' are willful reflections on tradition in the face of societal erasure.

As we continue to emerge from isolation I invite you to dance with 8 year-old me, through this issue.

—Nkeiruka

PHOTO BY KANUKAI CHIGAMBA

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“*Madhuweeee, nyatso kuchema kunge wafirwa.* I need to hear the sadness of the little girl you are singing about in your voice.” Mhamha Henry would shout during *Mhande* rehearsals where I had to lead the song *Mudzimu Wangu*. I would play around with high and low cries while singing it until she said “yeaaaahhh, that’s it, we are almost there.” The memory of how I learned this song has stuck with me until today. It is one of my favorite songs to sing and dance to. Every time people hear me sing this song, they are moved which always takes me back to when I learned it.



# how home remembers me

by KANUKAI CHIGAMBA



Mhamha Henry, my aunt, the oldest child in my mother's family. One of the greatest mbira players and dancers in Zimbabwe. Mhamha Henry always had a way of getting you to reach a part of yourself, you did not know you had, until she shook you a couple of times. Some days, she would show you a dance move or song once, and you better make sure you do something as close to that, if not better, when it's your turn. For the most part, this has been how I learned music and dance. In my family, we learned our traditional dances by watching older family members during *Bira* ceremonies or while hanging out at home.

"*Zvinhu zvese zvatiinazvo...zvinoda kupembererwa baba...*", different high and low pitches of people who were singing and celebrating in one of the new thatched houses at our family home in Hatfield would wake the dead. Whether it was the sharp down and the heart of the beat, *hosho* being played or *maoko arikuomberwa*, or the drum or a long line of mbira

players running their fingers on that instrument like it doesn't hold about 28 keys on it, every intricate sound made in that room created one beautiful mbira song that highlighted how people felt in that moment.

Around 2002-3, Asekuru Chigamba and Gogo Achihoro, my maternal grandparents, hosted an all night *Bira* ceremony to bless our new home in Hatfield. Think of a house warming party, but instead of people bringing gifts such as plants or wall art, people brought all-night prayers and a search for guidance and protection of the new home from the ancestors through music and dance. Family and friends from afar danced, sang, ate, and drank *hwahwa*, *masese* *eseven* days. At eight years old, I struggled to stay awake. Yet, in the early hours of the morning, my uncle, Sekuru Joe, decided it was the best moment to have my cousins and I sit in front of him to sing the Zimbabwe national anthem and create choreography to it. Thanks to Solomon Mutswairo &

**"Zvinhu zvese zvatiinazvo...zvinoda kupembererwa baba..."**, different high and low pitches of people who were singing and celebrating in one of the new thatched houses at our family home in Hatfield would wake the dead.

Fred Changundega, who composed a song with very similar sections, so we mixed up the lyrics and struggled through the whole session.

"Okay, *iwewe Wadza, imba tione*, since you want to act like you already have it all set." Sekuru Joe gave Wadza, a tyrannical look as he put her on the spot to sing. As we fought yawns, and the shutting of our eyelids, Wadza, my older cousin sister, got up, fixed her skirt and stood in front of us giggling like a baby hyena. Buju, my older cousin brother, and childhood partner in crime, who sat next to me, bumped my shoulder to draw my attention to Wadza's nervousness. Of course, this made us all laugh like water faucets that couldn't shut. Through our shenanigans, with her chest up and head help up high, Wadza sang the "*Kubvira, kubva Zambezi kusvika Limpopo...*" part first, instead of the "*Neropa, neropa zhinji ramagamba...*" Before we could utter ours, Wadza led the choir by laughing like a lost wild goat.

Sekuru Joe's chronicles of teaching us dance were always comedic. One day, while practicing *Dinhe*, my cousin, Moses/Mhozi, struggled to coordinate his arms and legs. After he'd had enough, Sekuru Joe's tall frame rose up from his chair asking us if we do not know how to walk normal. "*When you walk normal, your arms and legs naturally go opposite. I have never seen a person that steps with their right leg and their right hand follows.*" Again, uncontrollable laughter ensued. We had created complexity from a part of our everyday life activities.

"*Ndave kuenda ini...*" Ambuya would calmly sing and pause from her favorite sofa in the living room, the one with the best view of the TV. Once we heard her sing this line, we knew



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHIGAMBA ARCHIVES



Pictured: Clockwise L- R: Ambuya with her son, Henry Chigamba and 13 of her grandchildren; Ambuya; Asekuru; Irene Chigamba; painted thatched houses at the Chigamba Family compound; Chigamba Family home in Hatfield.



we were in for a long night. Ambuya Chihoro was our matriarch, and whenever she had us dance and sing one of her favorite songs ‘*Ndave Kuenda (I am leaving)*’, she took her time. How dare you start clapping before we arrive at the right groove for the call and response? Ambuya would silently give us another chance to get the song right. She would give us the lead line again, just a little louder than the last time.

Singing this song now, hits differently. [Chinyakare Ensemble](#), our family performance group in Oakland, founded by my mother, Julia Chigamba recently performed at Ashkenaz Music and Dance Community Center. I am convinced that our family has a deep connection to Dinhe rhythm. During our soundcheck, *Ndave Kuenda* was the song that came out of me unknowingly when I was asked to check the mic. I

respected Ambuya wanting to be in the space and went with the flow, but I could not finish as tears flooded my eyes and cheeks. My grandmother died in 2005, and her passing left a huge hole in my family. She was the keystone to the family. Everyone knew you could always come and dance *kumba kwa Achihoro*. Growing up, our time was filled with each other. When there was no electricity we would sit around the fire with Ambuya and other adults. We would sing, play games and dance until people started retiring to their bedrooms one by one. Our personal lives were not separate from our artistry, it was all blended in one like a hot pot of *gango*.

“*Nyarara mwana, Nyarara mwana...*” I started slowly pronouncing the high and low parts to

*Mudzimu Wangu’s* response at Dance Mission Theater during a closing circle after the viewing of the [Mixtape of the Dead & Gone #1](#) performance I was a part of in 2022. It was a room filled with people who had just experienced death at a very intimate level through Nkeiruka’s work. A smile of “yes, that’s it, we are almost there” feeling escaped my mouth the moment I felt people had reached a good place of pronouncing and singing these Shona lyrics beautifully. I reached for the girl Mhamha Henry once helped me search for within me, and we sang until everyone was sounding like one voice.

My grandmother had a way of expressing love through dance and music. Even if you did not know the song she was sharing with you, you could feel the warmth of her heart through her voice. Since moving to the Bay Area in 2010, I have felt a similar feeling from my mother. Whether we are singing “*Kura Uone*” for the 100th time at home or at performances, or as she decorates our house like a museum with endless Zimbabwean and African artifacts, my mother has found a way to keep my siblings and I connected to our roots. She has built a home away from home. This has also given us a way to communicate and learn in ways that I did not know would help me stay grounded in my own journey as an artist.

**KANUKAI CHIGAMBA** is a multifaceted dancer, musician, performer, and burgeoning photographer. She started dancing at a young age in Harare, Zimbabwe, at Biras and as part of Mhembero Dance Troupe. She is the Assistant Director of the renowned Chinyakare Ensemble, and principal in Gbedu Town Radio, a Pan Afro Urban Music and Dance Ensemble. Chigamba has performed all over the United States, including at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, Oregon Zimfest, and Monterey Bay Reggaefest, Stern Grove Festival, Carnegie Hall, and Oakland Museum of California. Her travels to Togo, Nigeria and her work with Yoram Savion/YAK Films, Julia Chigamba, Nkeiruka Oruche, Destiny Arts, and Afro Urban Society find her embarking on her photographic essay series featuring African women navigating complexities of emotional expression.

PHOTO BY STEVE AKA CHEMBAKANDA

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# Ancestral Re-memberance (Egypt)

by EMAN DESOUKY

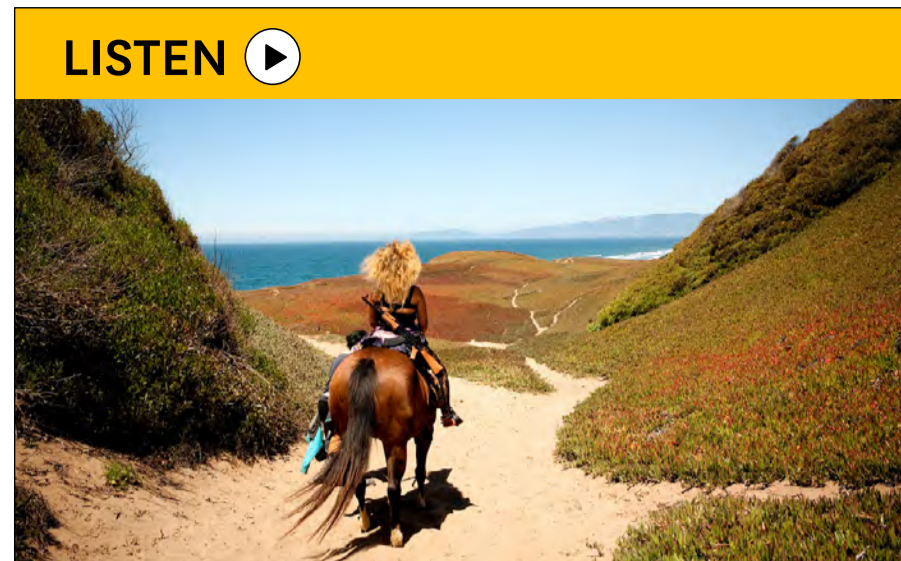
LISTEN TO THE STIRRINGS of your copper brown skin, the greatest gift of the Egyptian sun, the creator of all life. The focus of your deep eyes, molten and luscious. The rhythm of your heartbeat, strong and deep, as it drums your life's beautiful song. Can you hear it? Do you know what language that is? We have been waking up to this melody for centuries.

These are songs of re-membering\*<sup>1</sup>. Of re-awakening. Let us re-member together:



**SPOTIFY PLAYLIST**   
by DJ Emancipation

<sup>1</sup> This act of "re-membering" is inspired by the work of Layla K. Feghali of River Rose Re-membrance, who says that we re-member in order to heal the "culture of severance" that characterizes our contemporary world, a transformation of personal, ancestral, communal, and ecological traumas and violations towards a more life-affirming and dignified reality.



**NUT<sup>2</sup>, oh holy one.** Goddess of the sky. You guided our people across the Mediterranean sea. The currents carried us to the West. Propelled by the winds of thunderstorms and Sahara dust\*<sup>3</sup> across the Atlantic, to places where they spoke different languages, but were mirror images of us. You remind us of the songs we sang when we landed and were greeted with care by the peoples of those lands.

On our journey back home we anchored off the Western edge of our continent before making our way into the Mediterranean. We remember the pain You held bearing witness to the creaking ships that reeked of terror. A strange language not of this land echoed. Black bodies imprisoned, shackled, enslaved. Our fear floated into the heavens and You wept. Your tears falling through the skies, across the land, beating down against our skin. We sang songs of grief, drummed rhythms of courage as we watched our kin being forced onto the ships. We sang and sang. Together we opened our mouths as your name screamed through our throats, tossing our bodies to the sand, undulating, throwing dark tresses side to side through the air with our heads bent until our voices, raspy and pregnant with sadness, faded with the ships into the depths of the wailing Atlantic.

We look into each other's eyes and see the edges of NUT's majesty: Altair, Pleiades, Alawaid, Andromeda, Kaitos. This is the map home. Oh Nut, sacred sky mother, You help us re-member that our ancestors created the universe. Reflections of us, returned whole. Now as we toss our bodies to the sand, throwing our dark tresses side to side through the air, it is in reverence of You. And it is in reverence of us.

<sup>2</sup> Goddess of the heavens, creator of the world, in Egyptian mythology  
<sup>3</sup> The Sahara Dust is a natural phenomenon where sand from the Sahara was blown by a storm across the Atlantic, to the lands of Borinquen, now known as Puerto Rico. I imagine these storms (which continue to this day) carried my ancestors, in partnership with the Phoenicians, across the Atlantic regularly way before Columbus was even an idea in the cosmos.

LISTEN 



**Oh Isis<sup>4</sup>, divine Mother.** *They stole your name like they stole our ancestors from their tombs, stole our belongings, stole our lands. They took us from Your womb, oh holy One. They took us from ourselves when they said we were too ugly, too dark, too Black. They turned our sacred into a joke. Dis-membered. Severed our continent despite centuries of graceful crossings through/above/below the Sahara by our kin. Are our dead lost and wandering because of the theft of our resting places? Will our ancestors know who we are? Will they find us?*

But as we are bent in grief, singing songs to the winds that carry our prayers on the Nile, we are no longer afraid. We dance with warm sand between our toes as we touch our foreheads to the fertile soil of the delta smelling like tears and blood, in reverence to You, divine Mother. Your magic is like a balm, oh Isis, healing the wounds of grief with each prayer of re-remembrance, each moment we invoke the song of our people that tell stories of the majesty of who we are and where we come from. The balm that stitches us back to ourselves, whole. In the practice of being beyond space and time, moving our bodies together, you remind us that our lives are not scarce, they are Infinite.

<sup>4</sup> The mother of us all in Egyptian mythology

LISTEN 



**Oh Sekhmet<sup>5</sup>, holiest of warriors!** *They saw our eyes, red from the tears we shed when they built the dam that flooded our ancestral lands. The Nile floods filled our sacred temples. Our homes were destroyed. Our culture epicenters washed away into the sea. They uprooted us, but didn't know our roots have survived for eons, nourished and healed by those very same waters. They tried to drown us but they didn't know we were descendants of Nubia's Nile warriors. The Undrowned. Healing the earth. Rising eternal from the waters like the sacred blue lotus. Our Nubian songs filling the skies with our undying love for the land.*

They called you bloodthirsty but they do not know you. What they thought was blood in your eyes was really magic. Your rage is misunderstood. Our power frightens them. It roars across the lands in prayer, returning to us tenfold, filling us with your fierce love, as our undulating arms echo the soft hills and valleys of Nubia, and the soft tongue of our Nubian song. We re-member you. We re-member us.

**Eman Desouky** is [DJ Emancipation](#), and a fierce mama of a magical 7 year old human. Her two decades of cultural work in the Bay Area are rooted in transformative justice practices that imagine a world without racism, colonialism, classism, and homophobia. Her current written and music curation work is an exploration of what embodiment of our ancestral remembrance looks, feels, but especially sounds like. Her ancestors ascend from the fertile soils of where the Nile river meets the Mediterranean Sea, the Horn of Africa, and the Turquoise Coast of Turkey. She currently resides on the ancestral lands of the Lisjan Ohlone people, also known as Oakland, CA.

<sup>5</sup> Lion goddess, fierce warrior spirit in Egyptian Mythology

PHOTOS BY JULIO DIAZ/FO

**WRITER'S NOTE:** through dance and the embodiment of song as prayer in homage to my ancestors, I defy the colonizers' definition of who I am and where I come from.

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13 Cuban Street Carnival Scene



# THEY WILL ALWAYS HATE THE CONGA

by MARLEY PULIDO

It was a sunny Havana afternoon when the *Conga* was born. The Orishas came down from the heavens and gifted it to us, mortals, so we could learn to be free. Historians say that the colonizers gave the enslaved a day off to parade throughout the city and that's how the *Conga* came to be. I don't believe them. The *Conga's* too sacred for such origin story.

The *Conga* is widely known as Cuban carnival music. ¡Un, dos, tres, pa'llá!

(ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT) COURTESY OF HISTORIA NEGRA DE CUBA'S ARCHIVE

COURTESY OF MARLEY PULIDO

¡Un, dos, tres, pa'cá! That's how you dance it. One, two, three, to the left! One, two, three, to the right! The swag comes from within. The lead singer guides the crowd improvising call and response verses. The drummers beat at their own rhythm as the neighborhood follows them dancing its worries away.

Because my family lived in the back of the *solar*, our rundown government subsidized dwelling, we couldn't always hear the *Boom-boom-boom Tom-tom-tom*.

There was just almost never a moment of stillness in that place. Always some stray dog barking, some *novela* playing on the radio, some neighbors gossiping. Until everyone's breathing would slow down as if they were looking to synchronize with the next door neighbor. Inhaling excitement, exhaling [as loud their lungs allowed] *Hurry up, the Conga's coming!* Not a single soul would stay inside.

Siento un bombo mamita, me está llamando / I hear a bombo mommy, it's calling me

During colonial times, the enslaved and free Negroes could go out and have a fun day. *But be careful, they will start demanding freedom if you let them.* The police were always there. Watching us.

When Cuba became an independent nation in 1902, politicians rushed to use the *Conga* for their politicking. Some in favor, some against it. *What's more dangerous than joyful Negroes singing out loud our deepest truths?* Always using poignant street jargon, the *Conga* thrived in a spontaneity that's never not political. That's why dictator Gerardo Machado banned the *Conga* in the 1930's. Dictator-to-be Fulgencio Batista lifted the ban in 1937 and the *Conga* flourished as a performing art. From the hood to the world!

Growing up in 1990's Cuba, with the anxiety and desperation living in dictatorship during a crisis, the *Conga* somehow managed to feed our souls. It made us defiant. We got sassy and provocative. Even when the times changed, the police stayed. With a baton in their hands and a whip in their minds. The *Conga* and the police. Inseparable.



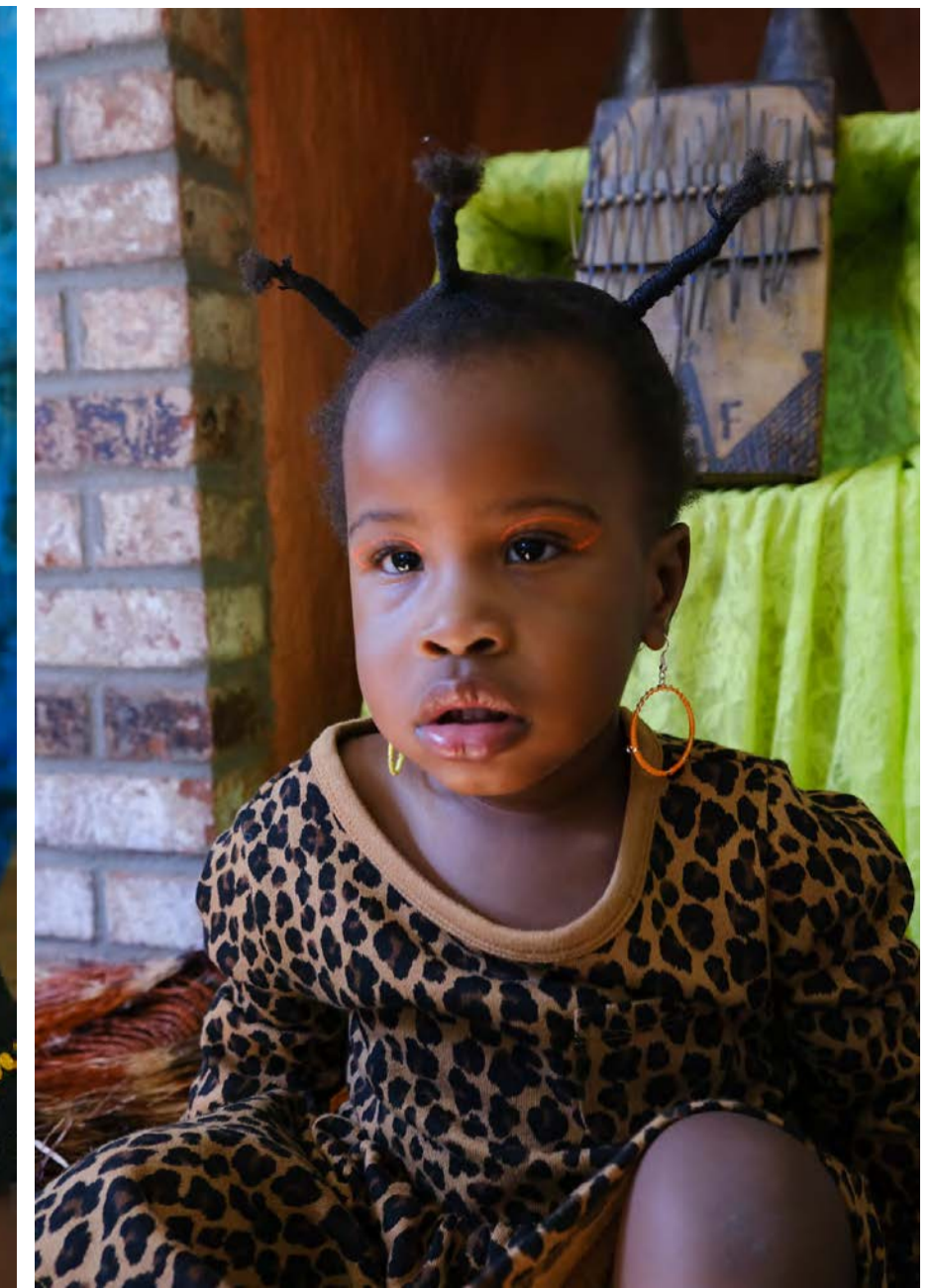
Tumba la caña, anda ligero, mira que viene el mayoral sonando el cuero. / *Cut down the sugar cane, keep it cool, watch out the overseer is coming cracking the whip.*

I dance to the *Conga* from my living room these days. Sometimes hoping to hear some shout *Hurry up, the Conga's coming!* Freedom's coming. So don't just come over here to *shake your body, baby, do the Conga.* Let us treasure this Cuban Negro polyrhythmic communal love language. This might be our last utopian space of ultimate freedom.



**MARLEY PULIDO** is a Cuban born historian, community organizer and archivist. Marley grew up in El Cerro, Havana, a historically Black, poor and work-

ing class neighborhood where his family has lived in for over seven generations. He graduated from the school of History at the University of Havana. After migrating to the U.S., Marley became involved in social movements and community activism, focusing on issues affecting migrants and refugees and Black working people. In 2019, Marley founded Historia Negra de Cuba, a multilingual digital archive and multimedia creative community curating documents, videos, audios and images to preserve and honor the Black Cuban historical memory of the island and the diaspora.



# KEEPERS OF HOME

*Muisi-kongo & Kiazzi Malonga*

BY NKEIRUKA ORUCHE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY [SASHA KELLEY](#) | CREATIVE DIRECTOR: NKEIRUKA ORUCHE

**“IS THIS MS. MALONGA?** Oh my God. I Love her. I will be in her dance class Saturday.” This is the hairdresser E’s response, during our correspondence in my efforts to book a potential stylist for Muisi-kongo’s hair in preparation for our photoshoot for this issue.

When I share this with Muisi-kongo, even over voice notes, I can feel her squeamishness. Through her “you shouldn’t have told me that,” I can tell that she’s struggling with the challenges of being a person in the public eye.

“You just have to accept that people will see you as royalty, even if you don’t think that’s what you’re trying to do,” I offer her.

I’m always tickled when I get to witness these sides of Ms. Malonga, the one not in class teaching, the one not on stage performing. The side of her that shows she’s not quite sure it’s nice to know that goddesses use the toilet, and have insecurities.

Yet, I totally understand where E is coming from. I too have had many “Omg, is this The Muisi-kongo Malonga?” Even as I’m texting her. Even as we slowly build a friendship and comradeship that’s been a long time coming.

It’s an early Sunday morning, in an East Oakland home. Furniture has been rearranged for the photoshoot with siblings Muisi-kongo and Kiazi, children of the late renowned Malonga Casquelord, and their children Matsoua and Siama. Muisi-kongo barrels in with piles and piles of items, followed by her eight-year old son Matsoua. “Sorry I’m late, you know I had to get all this stuff you asked for.” I nod in response, and carry on with placing outfits on a clothing rack.

**ALTHOUGH KIAZI, WITH HIS EASY-GOING DISPOSITION, AND MUISI-KONGO WITH HER UNDERCOVER HUMOR, ARE CHARMING, THE REAL STARS OF THE SHOW ARE THE CHILDREN.**

Not long after this initial exchange, as she walks back into the room, she pauses mid stride, “Ohhh, I see what you did. You told me a time two hours earlier than the real arrival time. Ah I see you. You already knew who you were dealing with.” This is the kick off to Muisi-kongo’s hilarity throughout the session, as we dress her, oil her up, do her make up, we witness multiple sides of Ms. Malonga, from the sage introspect to the class clown.

As we go through the suitcases and baskets of fabrics and artifacts that Muisi-kongo brought, I’m struck by how much of a keeper she is. An archive of her family and culture. I feel as though I’m witnessing layers and layers of family story, traditions, that one couldn’t begin to unravel in one sitting. I feel lucky to handle her ancestor bottles. Through these it’s apparent that Muisi-kongo is deeply connected, and guided by those rich in cultural traditions, and that she can be that also for her communities.

Kiazi shows up about half an hour later, his daughter Siama in the crook of one arm, and bags of what I can tell are all the items for a toddler on his other arm. “I brought a couple of items that are in the car, do you need me to bring them out?”

I let him know that I need him to first try on the options I’ve selected for him. I have to admit there’s apprehension in my style direction.

“Want me to try this on?... Oh is this vintage?... Alright alright I see you!!”

Buoyed by his first response, I continue. I hand him flowy orange-orange satin trousers, and pointy cheetah print shoes, and whisper ‘Sapeur’ under my breath, hoping to conjure understanding of where I’m going with this.

“Oh is this, what we doing? Alright come on then!”

I relax. My work is going to be easier than I imagined.

Although Kiazi, with his easy-going disposition, and Muisi-kongo with her undercover humor, are charming, the real stars of the show are the children. Siama, a strikingly verbal and fully engaged two-year old with firm boundaries, and an ability to clearly articulate her needs, and Matsoua, a friendly, curious, easy-going, and theatrical 8-year old.

Siama immediately owns the space, and in response, Kiazi is on full papa duty. Making sure to follow through with the details; snacks, activities, ensuring that the furniture doesn’t crash into her. He’s speaking to her in Lari, and she’s responding with understanding.

I crouch down and face her to talk her through the day. “We’re going to do hair, get dressed, and take some photos.” She stares back at me, as though trying to figure out if I’m someone she should trust. Fair enough. To break the ice, I say “alright let’s take a selfie.” This seems to do the trick. “Here’s your dress, your shoes, and your purse.” The purse is the final piece of the puzzle for her to be convinced, and accept me.

“I took the screen away, there are other kids here, he can connect with them instead.” Kiazi mutters to his older sibling. She responds with an almost imperceptible nod. Matsoua, the subject of the commentary, is delightful in front of the camera, hardly needing any prompts to activate exciting poses, and faces.

“I think she’s pooped.” Muisi-kongo picks up her niece and beelines to the bathroom to change her diaper. And on it goes.



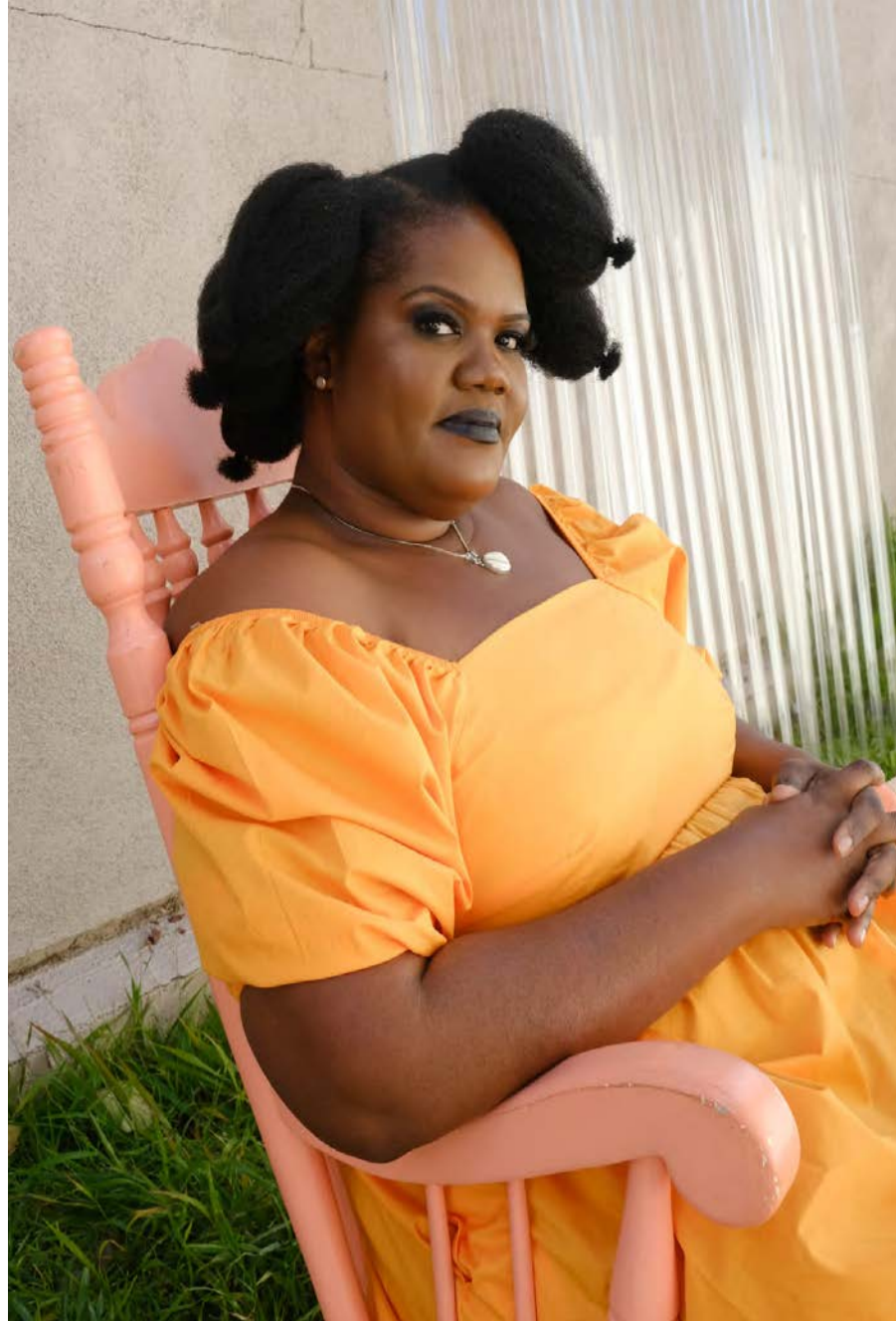
**Pictured: Clockwise: Kiazi Malonga, and Muisi-kongo Malonga; Matsoua and Muisi-kongo; Siama**



L to R: Kiazi Malonga; Muisi-kongo Malonga

Between fitting clothes, acclimating to the bodies in the space, and caring for the children, it takes us a few hours to get rolling. But after a few warm up shots, they begin to loosen up. Things go up a notch when the sounds of Koffi Olomide’s ‘*Effrakata*’ coming out of the speakers, hits its climax. The Malongas dip, drop, and sway with the ease and nuance of true children of the soil.

Muisi-kongo Malonga and Kiazi Malonga are the children of [Malonga Casquelourd](#), a world-renowned Congolese dancer, drummer and choreographer who built an exceptional legacy in the traditional arts in the US, and spent half his life activating Congolese culture at the Alice Arts Center ([now named after him](#)), in Oakland, California. Malonga developed a following at an early age as a dancer for Community Fetes, a network of indigenous cultural centers near Brazzaville, in the Congo Republic, where he grew up. He was a principal dancer with the National Congolese Dance Company, toured Africa, Europe and the United States. In 1972 he went to New York, and was a co-founder of Tanawa, the first central African dance company in the US. Malonga moved to Oakland in the mid-1970s, and joined CitiCenter Dance Theater to teach Congolese dance and drum classes. From there, he created his own dance troupe, Fua Dia Congo. In this interview we hear from his first two children.



Muisi-kongo Malonga is a dancer and culture bearer dedicated to preserving culture and cultivating the healing power of African arts traditions. As Artistic Director of [Fua Dia Congo](#), Muisi-kongo continues the pioneering cultural preservation work begun in 1977 by her parents. She founded [BottleTree Culture](#), a grassroots arts organization to reanimate the presence of African cultural arts in her native East Palo Alto. Her current projects include Congo Danced A Nairobi Blues, a site-specific dance-theater production and Lufuki!, an international dance collaboration.

Kiazi, a child protégé of his late father, who performed with his father’s Fua Dia Congo Performing Arts Company from age of 6, became a lead performer, then Musical Director. He currently teaches drumming, and released his debut album, [Tembo Kia Ngoma](#) in March of 2021.

The interview session with Kiazi and Muisi-kongo is mostly a listening session. I’m a co-passenger on a train overhearing close friends talk. I don’t even need to ask leading questions. For the most part, I insert myself to ask qualifying questions, or to expand on something I heard. Like a friend who’s come to visit, sitting with siblings trading jabs at each other, except, this time it’s anecdotes and lessons. Their father Malonga Casquelord is the enduring focal point. He is responsible for world building. He is the keeper

of home. As a friend, I can’t share everything that I’ve heard, but I’m certainly happy to have been invited in.

### Who makes up the Malonga family?

**MUISI-KONGO:** Our Parents, Malonga Casquelourd; Dr. Faye McNair-Knox; Norma Jean Ishman-Brown; Cynthia Phillips. Their Children, Muisi-kongo Malonga; Kiazi Malonga; Lungusu Malonga; Boueta-Mbongo Malonga, and their Grandchildren: Malonga Matsoua Hemil Koub; Ma’Syiah Malonga-May; Siama Mpandu Malonga; Ynez Nzolani Malonga.

### On Origin

**KIAZI:** We are Kongo people who originated from [the area that is] modern-day Angola, northern Angola. Kongo dia Ntotela or “The Kongo Kingdom” included Angola, parts of Congo-Brazzaville, and Congo-Kinshasa.

**MUISI-KONGO:** Boko district. Southern part of what is now the Republic of Congo. Before that our origins are in Mbanza Kongo in modern-day Angola. Our names are like a road map. Our dad always said that, you know, he gave us our names so that we wouldn’t get lost. I’m the first. Muisi-kongo, which means ‘one from the Kongo’, then Kiazi is number two, the village that we come from. Lungusu is named after our great-grandfather. And lastly, Boueta-Mbongo is named after a prominent revolutionary figure in Congolese history who fought fiercely against colonialism.

### On Parents

**KIAZI:** [Our Father] had a whole military background prior to coming to this country. When the Congo got its independence in 1960, he was in his early teens and already very active politically. We have pictures of him with Mao Tse Tung, as part of a delegation of young leaders sent by the Congolese government to China for special training. A lot of those people in the pictures were either killed or are in exile.

**MUISI-KONGO:** He did not get his American citizenship until 2002 (after September 11). I don’t know how interested he was in being an American citizen. I wonder if he was holding on to a dream of returning, but finally accepted that his family, community and life were here.

**KIAZI:** Yeah, he had his green card. But in terms of giving up the Congolese passport, he wasn’t. He was real ‘African Bushman’ \*chuckle\*.



L-R: Matsoua, Muisi-kongo, Kiazi Malonga, and Siama



**MUISI-KONGO:** My mom is Dr. Faye McNair-Knox. Her mother, Sarah Lee Williams McNair was from Augusta, GA and her father, Rev. Elisha Bonaparte McNair was from Bassfield, Mississippi. I think both of our moms' families have roots in Mississippi before migrating West. My mom was a preacher's kid. She was a brilliant scholar who studied and taught at Stanford, a super revolutionary, Pan-Africanist. We attended African-centered schools and grew up in the same CME church she grew up in,

to our family and had a common language to communicate with. My mom was a military brat similar to our dad. Okay. Our dad's father was part of an African infantry unit known as 'Les tirailleurs Sénégalais' in World War II. I lived in a few different places. My mom was a scholar...a college professor and linguist, but she kept up the pattern of frequent movement from her upbringing in a military family throughout her academic career. A couple of years in Virginia, in Miami, in New Jersey. I was with her for some

where she served as musical director. We attended family reunions every two years and she was the director for the big family choir. My mom passed on September 12, 2018.

**KIAZI:** My mother is Norma Jean Ishman-Brown. She was one of three, all girls. She was a middle child, and the only one that had children. She was an engineer who graduated from Stanford with a degree in Human Biology. The only connection I had to her side were her two sisters and her parents. My grandfather is from Mississippi, and my grandmother, Texas, Arkansas. They moved to Southern California, then Vegas, then back to Southern California. I was pretty close to that side of the family until my mom passed on November 21, 1998.

#### On Growing Up

**KIAZI:** [I grew up in] East Palo Alto. We have different moms, and spent weekends and vacations [together]. We have a very intricate family web. We took trips together. We have a lot of the same memories and experiences even though it wasn't a 24/7 situation.

**MUISI-KONGO:** I grew up between East Palo Alto and Oakland. I have two older sisters, Halili and RaShida from my mom's first marriage. I spent a couple of years, from [age] 7 to 9 in France living with our dad's younger sister. A strategy to make sure we were linked

of that. Other times, I would come back to Oakland to live with our dad. Even though we were splitting our time between our moms' households and his, it's not disjointed in my mind.

**KIAZI:** We used to call on the phone, and after the first six months, she had a French accent. It was hella funny.

**MUISI-KONGO:** People!! Immersion! I grew up doing a lot of musical stuff. My mom, my two older sisters, and I would perform during Kwanzaa, songs by Sweet Honey in the Rock and other revolutionary Black things. I spent a lot of that time lip syncing because it was terrifying to be up there singing. People still come up to me, making fun of me about lip syncing.

**KIAZI:** I lived with my mom, and my two younger sisters. I have another younger sister from my mother's marriage. We lived in East Menlo Park. I played a lot of basketball.

### THE MOVEMENT AND THE ENERGY AROUND WHAT WE WERE DOING, WHAT WE GREW UP IN, WAS SO STRONG THAT OUR FRIENDS ENDED UP BECOMING A PART OF WHAT WE WERE DOING.

I performed with Pops. But, he would always make sure that the arts weren't impacting school. My mother passed at 16, then I moved up to Oakland full time and was commuting (to school), until I graduated.

#### On life with Malonga

**MUISI-KONGO:** A message we always heard from my father is, there's no such thing as a half sibling. There's no confusion around the fact that we're siblings. We grew up in different households partially as an extension of each other. But in the mind, he's not my half brother because that's not a thing. That's not how we grew up. That's not like the mindset that we were given.

**KIAZI:** Pops used to have us at the [Diata Diata] rehearsals on Sundays. I'm like, dude, can I just go home? When I was younger, I used to hate to be the token African boy that would drum at Black History Month in school. I'm trying to play ball, you know? As I got older, reflecting on the fact that I come from parents who saw the importance of being rooted in art. Pops would always tell us to always master and learn your art because it will take you places and put you in rooms with people who otherwise you wouldn't be connected with, and if you need them, you have a plethora of a community that you can lean into.

**MUISI-KONGO:** Our dad cooked a lot. People are always coming over. People were always living with us. We'd

get home from rehearsal and people would come over and we had dinner at like midnight. You'd go to bed, get woken up at 1:00 in the morning to get up and come eat because rehearsal ended at 11.

**KIAZI:** Let me jump in right here. So they get woken up to eat but I got woken up to make the fufu before y'all got there.

**MUISI-KONGO:** The dance was the central activity, really. But community was also an activity. We do this thing together, and it creates this energy beyond the dance and drumming. It wasn't always people that were involved in the dance. He was a magnet for people in general.

**KIAZI:** He was super good at building people. I didn't get this from him because sometimes I get tired of being around people, but he never did. Our house was open. Just community always. He was super instrumental in building a community based in that culture and bringing a lot of artists to grow the culture here, even people who were not Congolese, who were not artists, he [got] them involved, to learn something in the arts, to be able to increase how the art was being presented. We have several aunts and

uncles who were teachers, dancers, drummers, singers, artists, musicians. A number of people outside of him and our greater family circle who were involved in arts and influence and guide our artistic journey.

**MUISI-KONGO:** The movement and the energy around what we were doing, what we grew up in, was so strong that our friends ended up becoming a part of what we were doing. The friends that we grew up with, became family and were also involved in the art form. That avenue served multiple purposes. I probably started actually liking dance for myself around 12, where it no longer felt like a chore. You couldn't just not participate. When I didn't want to dance, I drummed a little bit with Diata Diata. But it was clear, I had to do something. [My father] would push but with limits. You weren't just gonna sit with your arms folded and not be a part of what was happening. When he started the youth company, Ballet Kizingu, and got our peers involved, that's when I felt myself blossom. I had spent most of my apprenticeship learning alongside adults. When we got together with our peers, that unlocked the joy.

#### On Going to the Congo

**MUISI-KONGO:** 1988. [We were] very excited.

**KIAZI:** We definitely were. Lungusu cried for a good period of time. Boueta wasn't born yet. Muisi and I just

hung out on the plane and acted like we were getting drunk off of soda. Fall asleep, wake up, order all-you-can-drink soda. Up until that point, and even after, people would communicate via letter but Pops would buy the boom boxes and sit down and talk and have us tell messages to our grandparents and all of the family there. They would do the same. He would send those tapes. Kind of like long voice notes. So coming into that trip, even though I was six, she was seven, we had a really good sense of who our family was. We had a lot of stories about our grandparents and uncles. When we saw people, it was like, “remember this story?” That’s him. Remember this one? Boom, that’s him. The one who got the whoopin’ when he was 40. That’s him.

**KIAZI:** [The next time I went was] 2006. I would have gone earlier. I was pushing him to go. When our grandfather passed in 2001, I was pushing to go and he was like, no, stay in school. Then I got into an overseas program in Tanzania. All right, I got my money. I’m going to Congo after. I’m buying my ticket. If you want to come

**MY HEART IS IN CONGO. IT’S WHERE I IDENTIFY, WHERE I FEEL AS A PERSON, MY HEALING, MY GROWTH THE WAY I LOOK AT SPIRITUALITY IS THROUGH THAT LENS.**

with me, you can come. Fast forward, the accident happened. We all didn’t actually make it back as a collective until 2006.

**MUISI-KONGO:** He went in ‘83, in ‘88. He went to bury our grandfather in 2001. He wasn’t able to go when our grandmother passed in ‘98.

**KIAZI:** There was a civil war.

**On Cultural Identity & Connection**

**KIAZI:** I got a lot of questions around being of African descent here in America. You might come to school in something that’s a little different, an African print shirt. So I got teased a lot at first. In third grade I went to public school and [kids] made a story up about me being a young African boy prodigy who would go around the world giving speeches.

**MUISI-KONGO:** There were a lot of different ways that he tried to connect us to our actual family in addition to how the arts connected us to the fact that we were from Congo and that was ingrained.

**KIAZI:** My heart is in Congo. It’s where I identify, where I feel as a person, my healing, my growth, the way I look at spirituality is through that lens. I’m pretty solid on

who I am in my Congolese identity. Knowing the arts and the culture helps me understand myself and my people better. This is who I am. This is where my family is from. This is why things are this way. You can look at yourself and understand your journey a little bit better.

**MUISI-KONGO:** Traditional music and dance. Yeah, it’s a ritual, it’s an activity, it’s a skill. Most of all, it’s a portal. We can get into the politics of do you have to be born somewhere, to be ‘of’ somewhere? I wasn’t born in the Congo, but what’s very real is blood memory. What’s very real is that these are spiritual practices. So you absolutely tap into an ancient knowing that connects you to God and spirit and to all those who came before. I absolutely believe that being a practitioner of these traditions gives you that gateway that you can plug into at any given point. I’m very much a Congolese African American. Yet, all roads lead back to the same place. I was born and raised in the U.S. I’m deeply rooted. I’m connected. And I have different ways that I can tap into that connection. The dance is a very potent way where

I can have this direct conversation, not contingent upon birthplace but rather birthright.

**KIAZI:** Not everybody from back home is super duper into traditional

beliefs, or the traditional art forms. A lot of folks will even be so much more into Western ways, whether it’s worship music to the point where they know shit about stuff that’s going on here that you don’t even know because you’re just like, I’m not following it like that. I think being outside of the country is definitely a way to stay connected. It’s easy to lose your identity in a place where it’s like putting a drop of sugar in a huge thing of coffee. You won’t taste the sweetness. If you don’t hold on to the little you got you can get lost in the sauce.

**On life ‘after’ Malonga. Hopes, Dreams, Regrets**

**KIAZI:** Pops was the glue that connected everybody. With his transition shit shifts. We are evolving and finding new ways to connect as we grow. With me being a new dad, and Muisi with Matsoua, we’re connecting on parenting. We are seeing each other as adults, siblings, artists and parents. The artistic connection is always there. But as we walk into this new phase of our lives, there are new branches growing on this tree and we have to be mindful of how to tend them together.

**MUISI-KONGO:** The hope is always to be able to pass these traditions on. Trying to balance the roles of parent and cultural caretaker, amongst other things, makes me reflect on how effective our dad was in everything that he was holding.

**KIAZI:** For Siama, I follow Pop’s perspective. I want her to find something that she’s super passionate about from an academic standpoint and then dedicate her life to that. She already likes to dance, so hopefully I’m jumpstarting and continue to pour into that. I wanted to be able to look at my daughter and be like, yeah, she’s doing her thing. I want to give them the gift of knowledge of self and culture.

**MUISI-KONGO:** My desire at this stage is to center our efforts in passing the torch to our replacements. For my own son, nieces, nephews, and our community children. I want to see with my own eyes these traditions in the hands of those trusted and trained to carry them forward. I want to see the impact they will have on the world.

**KIAZI:** I try not to regret. I like to think before I move. But, people passing, you can’t really control that. So there’s a sense of dang, I wish they could be here because, this little one, she’s pretty groovy.

**MUISI-KONGO:** I really wish my parents were here to see their extension. I would’ve loved to witness their relationships with their grandchildren as they grow. My mom passed away when Matsoua was about 4. I keep his memory of her fresh by talking about her often. I also tell him stories about his Nka nka (grandpa). There will always be a longing for their physical presence, but they are present in other ways.

**On Home**

**KIAZI:** Congo for me is home because Pops raised us always saying, this is not your home. You have a huge family. We have land. Referencing this far off place that he eventually took us. Our mamas were African American and they found home in the culture. That’s why I can identify with Congo being home.

**MUISI-KONGO:** Home for me is in my body first. Wherever I go, I am already there. Home is also where my Ancestors have put down roots... East Palo Alto, Oakland, Bassfield, Augusta and the Congo.

**NKEIRUKA ORUCHE** is a cultural organizer, multimedia creative of Igbo descent, who specializes in Afro-Urban culture and its intersections with social issues. She is a co-founder of BoomShake, a social justice and music education organization, and founder and executive artistic director of Afro Urban Society, an incubator and presenter of Pan Afro-Urban arts, culture, and social discourse. In 2022, she created and directed ‘Mixtape of the Dead & Gone #1’ – Ahamefula’, a shit-just-got-real dance-theater piece about life, death, and what the fuck comes next.

She is a 2022 Dance/USA Artist Fellow, a Kikwetu Honors Awardee, a 2018 NYFA Immigrant Artist Fellow, YBCA 100 Honoree, and recipient of awards from Creative Work Fund, MAP Fund, New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, California Arts Council, among others.





"the author's mother"

## UNINTERRUPTED REFUGE

dear Mum,

the tv is on, endlessly buzzing about the furious snowstorm barreling onto roofs

in this overheated Atlanta apartment you remain mostly on the sofa, swaddled by that hulking heather gray blanket

bones still frail subtly masked by your emerald sweater that hangs a little too loosely across your neck

your frame so small, past near death but the whisper of death still lingering.

it's the third day of this christmastime visit

three families gather

California, Georgia, Tennessee, but Nigeria binds us.

the togetherness seems to power your limbs or maybe it's that damn P-Square song that stays on repeat

and then there you are in the midst of a rowdy circle of mostly twenty-somethings

that sweet sly smile as you laugh dropping low to the ground

Momz to the ground tho?

there's a little bit of victory i see.

PHOTOS: L. TO R. COURTESY OF KEMI ROLE, RIGHT: NIRAV PATEL

dear Mum,

you say *these neighbors are going to KNOW where I'm from today* with a pleased defiance

this backyard of immigrant dreams

speaker blasting Ebenezer Obey Iyanla Lágbájá and on

once again you're encircled

the alaga, the drummers, friends in bright blue purple aso-ebi

the brightness stamping the backyard walls weaving around your rose bushes.

you dance the decades and decades in this country

dressing your children in an inconspicuous corner of Murtala Muhammed to flee and to arrive

everything remembered as labored breaths swallow your delight.

oh but dear Mum,

you in the most common of rooms

home shopping network humming as backdrop, the warm light overheard peering into the circular glass top of the dining room table

that sony tabletop black CD boombox nearby ready to host this dance party of one

and today it's PM Dawn and then it's Janet and then it's more Janet

then that specific Fela album and then it's your beloved P-Square.

sometimes i wander into the kitchen, drawn by the echo of your faded pink indoor slippers, glance at the forgotten stew simmering on the stove and look over to you

your eyes closed, wrists swinging extended above your head

shoulders laughing half turn to meet my gaze

beams of sweat resting on your folded upper lip, you point your hands to steal my heart

then turn back to that dancing, to that joy

uninterrupted refuge.

— KEMI ROLE



**KEMI ROLE** is a writer and poet drawn to explorations of family, grief, migration, and what it means to be present. Kemi has been blessed to spend almost the last twenty years working in spaces building towards racial and gender justice and worker power. Kemi is nourished by beloved family and community and quiet alone time watching the same movies on repeat.



# FIRST HOUSE PARTY

## ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT LIU-TRUJILLO

ROBERT LIU-TRUJILLO is a lifelong Bay Area resident. Born in Oakland, he's the child of student activists who watched lots of science fiction and took him to many demonstrations. Always drawing, Rob grew up to be an artist falling in love with graffiti, fine art, illustration, murals, and children's books. In that order, sort of. Through storytelling he's been able to scratch the surface of so many untold stories. Rob is the author and illustrator of Furqan's First Flat Top and he's illustrated numerous other children's books. Rob is a co-founder of The Trust Your Struggle Collective, and a contributor to The Social Justice Children's Bk Holiday Fair.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT LIU-TRUJILLO



## "1ST HOUSE PARTY"

I WAS 10 YEARS OLD, A TOTAL NERD. AND ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS INVITED ME TO HIS HOUSE FOR A PARTY. "A HOUSE PARTY?" I THOUGHT. HE SAID IT LIKE IT WAS NOTHING. I WAS BOTH EXCITED AND TERRIFIED. I'D NEVER BEEN TO ONE BEFORE. WHAT DO I SAY? WHAT DO I WEAR? WILL THERE BE KIDS I KNOW THERE?

I TOLD MOM, SHE PRESSED UPON ME THE NEED TO LOOK MY BEST. WHAT FLY MEANS TO A KID AND AN ADULT ARE TOTALLY DIFFERENT THOUGH. I KNOW SHE MEANT WELL. I GOT DRESSED UP. NICE SHIRT, PANTS, DRESS SHOES, AND EVEN COLOGNE! I WENT AND NOT A SINGLE KID WAS DRESSED UP. THEY ALL WERE WEARING THEIR SCHOOL CLOTHES, SNEAKERS, SPORTS GEAR, ETC.

DANCING AND MUSIC. I LOVE HIP HOP AND RNB AND THEY WERE PLAYING GOOD MUSIC. IN FACT WE LISTENED TO MC BREED'S "AIN'T NO FUTURE IN YOUR FRONTING" 10 TIMES OR MORE THROUGH THE COURSE OF THE NIGHT. MOST OF THE KIDS WERE DANCING, WITH THE LIGHTS OFF. THEY KEPT STOPPING THE MUSIC AND TURNING ON THE LIGHTS TO SAY "Y'ALL BETTER DANCE". AND I WAS. BY MYSELF.

THIS OLDER (LOUD, PRETTY, CONFIDENT) GIRL NOTICED AND GRABBED MY HAND SAYING, "YOU NEED TO DANCE WITH SOMEBODY!" BEFORE I COULD SAY ANYTHING SHE WAS PULLING ME TO GIRLS IN THE "GARAGE" WHERE IT WAS HELD W/ A BOOMBOX FOR A SOUND SYSTEM AND ASKING GIRLS "YOU WANNA DANCE WITH HIM?" OMG, HOW EMBARRASSING!

FINALLY AFTER MULTIPLE NO'S, A GIRL RELENTED. SHE PUT MY ARMS ON MY SHOULDERS AND I PUT MY HANDS AROUND HER WAIST. OF COURSE THEY DIDN'T REPLAY BREED, THEY PLAYED A SLOW JAM. AGGGH, I AWKWARDLY TRIED TO DANCE WITH HER. HER BREATH WAS NOT THE BEST SMELLING I REMEMBER, BUT SHE WAS NICE. I CAN'T REMEMBER HER NAME BUT THAT WAS IT. I SURVIVED MY FIRST RICHMOND CALIFORNIA HOUSE PARTY. 5TH GRADE. 1990.

Rob Liu-Trujillo

*THE  
DO'S  
AND  
DON'TS  
OF THE*

# *SOUL TRAIN LINE*

*by ARIES JORDAN*



## I'm NOT FROM a dancing FAMILY!

But some of the most iconic family memories have come through dance, particularly the Soul Train Line. Like the time Granny almost fell while doing her infamous "Twist", or the time when my reluctant uncle who rarely attends family events, went into his Michael Jackson bag and to our delight gave us some thriller moves. Then there is the newest lil' addition to our family who is cheered on and ushered down the line for simply walking. One cannot forget the family member that is known for their dancing filled with technique, choreographed moves and even rare dance moves brought out only to declare a dance off when another dancer has joined the line. The Soul Train Line comes from the popular syndicated weekly show "[Soul Train](#)" that began in the 1970's and lasted thru the early 2000's. Soul Train featured Black musicians and most notably dancers that captivated audiences as they made their way down the Soul Train Line. What began as a way to end the show evolved into an essential part of Black cultural celebrations bringing people of all ages and abilities center stage. My family was no different and though we rarely broke out in dance, on cue someone would yell out "Let's do the Soul Train Line". Effortlessly the parallel lines were formed, the bravest went to the front and it naturally ended; something I thought innately everyone knew. But after countless failed attempts at social gatherings by someone trying to get the party started, I have come to realize the Do's and Don'ts of the Soul Train Line in group settings need to be explained.

**Get in formation and stay in it:** Parallel lines are essential to a successful Soul Train Line! There should be enough space where someone is able to bust a move without busting someone in the head. This is not the Conga Line, wait until the person has reached the end of the line before you start. Unlike circle dances where someone is in the middle and onlookers and dancers alike fight to get to the center. The parallel lines allow everyone to see and be seen.

**Move authentically:** The Soul Train Line is your moment to shine; Do the dance you finally mastered in private. Feel the beat and work with what you got. I will never forget an event where a woman dropped it low and swung her cane in the air #toptier. Know thyself and determine your comfort level from the sidelines. If the idea of everyone looking at you while you're dancing causes instant panic, it's best to stay at the end of the line and high five people.

**Do the most, it is expected:** It is mandatory that you show out with old school moves and dances associated with the song playing. Then there are partner dances like "The Bump" or "Kid and Play". These dances can be tricky and require coordination and finesse. If done correctly you and your dancing partner will definitely wow the crowd.



**Don't skip the line:** Now this is very important depending on how turned up the group is, this might save your life. Whatever you do, don't skip the line. Your turn will come, I promise. The only exception to this rule is if someone isn't ready to go down the line and tells you to go in front of them.

**Do not repeat dance moves:** Unless you're going to up the ante, don't repeat moves someone else has done. The Soul Train Line is all about creativity, nostalgia, and originality. No one wants to see the same moves over and over. If you must repeat a move, put some stank on it, add razzle dazzle or something extra.

**Keep it moving, literally:** The Soul Train Line is a conveyor belt of movement and good times. Don't stay in the same spot. The goal is to get everyone to the front and down the line. I have seen the epic fail of the Soul Train Line simply because people stopped moving. If you're scared or changed your mind it's okay to just step out of the line to keep the train moving.

If you find yourself in this, now rare, group dance, no excuses you know what to do!

**ARIES JORDAN** an educator, writer, and Chief Circle Keeper of the Just Write Experience, dedicated to meeting writers where they are at and providing a supportive space to simply just write. Her writing weaves prose, proverbs, and explores cultural narratives of the African Diaspora to provoke thought and inner reflection.

PHOTO BY JUST WRITE EXPERIENCE

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**SAFE  
HOUSE  
ARTS**



# Discarding our Dance means Defacing Ourselves

by IFEANYI AKABUEZE | illustration by BRUNA BORGES

Traditionally, Igbo communities have dance practices that guide essentially every aspect of life, and it is critical that we preserve them.

### AFRICANS DON'T NEED ANYONE TO DEFINE US.

Our cultures are the fabric of our skin, our blood flow, our heart beat. By the age of 3, an African child can move aptly to African rhythms. "Who taught them?" No one. It's in us.

When I was 5, I followed my mother to a burial of a prominent Chief in my village in Amichi. It felt like a Carnival. Many dances, rituals, and masquerades were on display, but one engulfed me in its spirit. Egwu Amara. As the dancers emerged with energy and grace, my mother was stunned as to how, without much effort, I joined them, copying every move to the letter. My ability to execute the movement, despite my young age, meant that people sprayed me lots of money to show appreciation. At the climax of the performance, three performers in costumes depicting mermaids danced onto the stage with pythons curled around their waists. I got terrified and ran to my mother to seek refuge. Clutched to my mother's thighs, I watched, entranced as the performer conveyed tenderness, majesty and many other emotions hard to describe.

Thinking back to this moment, I can't help but think about dance as not just a discipline and form of entertainment but of who we are as people. Traditionally, for us, dance is embedded in every aspect of our culture; spiritual, occupational, rites of passage, communal, and yes also entertainment.

If we lose our dances. We lose our culture. We lose our traditions. We lose ourselves.

Traditionally, Igbo communities have dance practices that guide essentially every aspect of life, and it is critical that we preserve them.

For spiritual health, we have practices such as Ese music and dance from Mbaise, Imo State used to bid farewell to an accomplished and of-age (70+ years) person who has died to the realm of the ancestors. Or Egwu Amara, by the riverine (River Niger) communities in Anambra and Delta state, used to venerate water deities, and portray their agency over territorial waters and underwater life.

As an occupational practice, we witness friends and family coming together in solidarity and support during farming season. They sing and till soil in the rhythm of the music. Which makes farm work less tedious, and more fun. They chant songs with their names to motivate and boost morale and mock those lagging behind. In turn, some of our Igbo dances exist as depictions of our occupational activities like farming, fishing, wine tapping, hunting, as reminders of our roots.

During marriage rites, and initiation into stages or sectors of society, dances like Nkwa Umuagbogho and Ikorodo serve as tools to engage attendants while also providing an avenue to expose people of marital age to potential suitors.

Okanga, from Enugu state and Ikpirikpi Ogu aka Ohafia War Dance serve as tools for communication in communities, passing down messages, historical information, and words of

wisdom to those who witness. Okanga, a dance specifically for accomplished men, have dancers use body movements to depict to the audience how many cows or horses they have killed, as these animals are seen as highly valuable. In Ikpirikpi Ogu from Abia state, the dancers are seen carrying human heads (props) on their heads to show victory over their enemy. Additionally, some Igbo traditional musical instruments, like Ekwe, Ogene, and Oja are used to communicate to the community in the cases of danger, death, emergency, or celebration.

Atilogu/Atilogwu and Ogene are Igbo folkloric dances that have roots in traditional forms, but emerge primarily for entertainment. Atilogu, a high-energy and acrobatic form is experienced at burials, New Yam festivals, coronations, weddings, carnivals and any event that calls for sideshows and attractions.

Africans are rich in tradition, and we have so much already available to us. My Igbo people, our culture is gradually eroding, and unless intentional and deliberate measures are taken to preserve our beautiful and dynamic traditions, we will go extinct.

I have started my own work towards the goal of replanting our traditional dances, and thus practices. I formed [Okachamma Dance Troupe International](#), a dance performance group that explores many forms of dances not just from Igbo communities but from other Nigerian cultures, to preserve our cultural dances and pass the knowledge to the next generations. Okachamma shares histories, artifacts, and practices in conventional schools, community arenas, and the public sphere.

Because if we lose our dance, we lose ourselves, and I will do anything for that 5-year old child, clutching his mothers thighs, entranced and engulfed, feeling the pride and certainty of his culture.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IFEANYI AKABUEZE

**IFEANYI AKABUEZE** is a performer, and cultural director from native of Amichi in Nnewi-South Local Government Area, Anambra, Nigeria, and is based in Ibereko Badagry, Lagos State. Ifeanyi received the recognition of Best Dancer/ Actor of NYSC batch B set of 2004/2005 which gave him the opportunity to be selected by African Leadership Forum (ALF) an NGO based in Otta Ogun State for a leadership training program

A seasoned banker with an accounting degree from the Institute of Management & Technology, Enugu, Akabueze found his passion by contributing to molding of the future (youth) as the President of Armed Forces Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (AFCYON) Zone 5 Lagos (2015-2017) and also as National President in 2018.

Ifeanyi is the founder and director of Okachamma Dance Troupe International, a multicultural Nigerian group that has activated community arenas and reputable world stages in and outside Nigeria. His dream is to preserve our cultural heritage through our God-given talents, dance, drama, and, folksongs.





**LOVERS  
OF HOME**  
*The Diouf Family*

BY NKEIRUKA ORUCHE  
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANEESAH DRYVER | CREATIVE DIRECTOR: NKEIRUKA ORUCHE



Clockwise from top, L-R: Sakeenah McCullough Diouf, Demarcus; Madiou S. Diouf; Bottom L-R: Demarcus, Maya, Ibrahima O. Diouf, Naomi Gedo Johnson-Diouf, TAKH



**It's 8:37 am** on a Saturday in March, at the home of the Diouf family. Mama Naomi is up in her chambers, doing her best to stay out of the way as our shoot team has descended on her bedroom, with lights, plugs, clothes, makeup and bodies in every corner, trying to do everything. Many of the other rooms of the house are filled with people, of various ages, looking through piles of clothes, sipping from a disposable hot drink cup, rolling around under blankets, peeking into a bathroom mirror, or walking around with a cell phone lodged between their ear and shoulders.

'Everyone' is here. Mama Naomi Gedo Johnson-Diouf, her children, Esailama, Sakeenah, Madiou, Ibrahima, and Fatou Kine, and her grandchildren, Makai 16, TAKH 10, Maya 6, Kayden 4 and Demarcus 4. Papa Zakarya Diouf, who began his ancestorship journey on October 9, 2021, is also here, in spirit, in photos, and on a piece of mail with his name boldly written in all caps, that catches my eye. I imagine this is him reminding me that I need to style him too.

"Ahhhhhh!" It's Ibrahima, responding to his older sister Esailama's pounce on him, that makes them topple onto their mother's bed. Esailama clutches on to him, and smothers him with hugs and kisses. When she's finally satisfied that she's imparted enough, for the moment, she releases him. I see my opening to ask for her to meet with me, so that we can make some decisions about her outfits for the shoot.

Our 6-person photoshoot team arrived before 7am today to kick things off, and although seemingly under control, it's not just a regular Saturday. It's arguably the busiest weekend in this family's schedule. Aside from the full family photoshoot, it's also the weekend of their dance company [Diamano Coura's](#) annual *Collage des Cultures Africaines*, a multi-day conference of dance and drum workshops, performances, and activities with local and international guest artists alike.

Still, I don't think I've taken in the enormity of the situation, but it wasn't lost on me that this was exactly what I was curious to discover. To the rest of the Bay Area dance community, there was a conference happening, which meant attending classes and connecting with other African dance lovers. But here I was in their home, watching

Esailama ask her family for their coffee orders, letting her mother know that her preferred tea order was not available by delivery app, while also toggling between phone calls, troubleshooting lodging and accommodation mishaps associated with the conference.

While it seemed too busy for a photoshoot, it was also the opportunity to be able to have all the family back home in one place.

As I tinkered with furniture pieces and picture frames, selecting outfits, I can't help but wonder what it would be like with Papa Zak in person. I knew him as my instructor of West African Dances at Laney College, before I dropped out because 'life' got busy. In that time, I was struck by his precision in the craft, and commitment to education and higher learning.

I had to stop myself from spending time staring at photos all around the house. Because even if all I wanted to do was sit around and sip tea drinks, and ask more questions like if "Fatou Kine is the Kim K of the family then what is everybody else?"

"Nkei come and tie me Nigerian gele." Mama Naomi called from the room. It was action time.

[Dr. Zakarya Sao Diouf](#) and [Naomi Gedo Diouf](#) are culture bearers and artists from Senegal and Liberia, respectively, who have contributed to the practice and performance of West African dance, drum, and culture in African diasporic communities for more than four decades. Before immigrating to the U.S. in 1969, he led the Mali Dance Ensemble and served as artistic director of Les Ballet Africaines of Guinea and National Ballet of Senegal. In 1969, Zakarya joined the faculty of Southern Illinois University and was invited to dance with the dancer and choreographer Katherine Dunham.

Naomi Gedo Diouf grew up in Liberia and danced at Kendeja Cultural Center of the Liberian National Troupe and with prominent dancers and musicians from other West African nations. She came to Los Angeles as a high school student as a member of the Youth for Understanding Exchange Program and later returned to the U.S. for university. In 1979, she met Zakarya who asked her to join his new dance company.





Clockwise from bottom, L- R: Esailama Diouf-Henry; Sakeenah McCullough Diouf; Fatou Kine M. Diouf and Kayden; Kine, Sakeenah, and Esailama; Naomi Gedo Johnson-Diouf

**Introduce your family to us.**

**MAMA NAOMI:** Naomi Gedo Johnson-Diouf and Zakarya Sao Diouf (Ancestor). Children, Ousmane Diouf (Senegal), Adjie Diouf (Senegal), Esailama G. Diouf-Henry, Sakeenah McCullough Diouf, Madiou S. Diouf (Son #1 in the US), Ibrahima O. Diouf (Youngest son in US), and Fatou Kine M. Diouf (daughter in Atlanta).

The Grandchildren, Makai 16, TAKH 10, Maya 6, Kayden 4, and Demarcus 4.

**Go back, where did it all start?**

**ESAILAMA:** Papa Zak & Mama Naomi met on the dance floor...

**Okay, before that, who are your people?**

**Where are you from?**

**IBRAHIMA:** My people are Senegalese, but me and my siblings came up with the name Senegaberian. We put it in that direction mainly because, your father first and then your mom. My dad's from Senegal. My mom's from Liberia. Our people come from Medina. My dad is Serrer,

from Kaolack, where he was born and then he traveled over to his family in Medina.

**ESAILAMA:** On the Liberian side, we come from Lafayette Couya Johnson and Naomi Goede Johnson. Mama Naomi is named after her mother and both of those people were born in Cape Palmas, Liberia. That is where both father and mother of Mama Naomi come from. L Couya was an orphan raised by his uncle in Monrovia, the nation's capital, where Mama Naomi was born. There are about 18 documented ethnic groups in Liberia. Ours is Grebo. They were known to be warriors who held heavy resistance in times of enslavement.

**What was home like for you growing up?**

**MAMA NAOMI:** My dance started in the home arena, in my father's house, (although) in my immediate family who dances on this performance level. My father had this grand celebration that the president of Liberia (at the time) attended. And normally in our tradition when you have these, there is traditional dance. For Grebo people,

for the men it's the Doglor and for women it's the Boyeh. When you're honoring a big person, you have to do these dances. That was my history. My first love with traditional dance. That was the marker.

**SAKEENAH:** For San Diego life, our day to day was typical. Kids went to school in the morning. We had dance class one night a week like on Wednesday nights or Thursday nights. That night was usually an eat-out night. We had our responsibilities, we had chores. Our parents were very particular on our homework. No matter what they had going on, they took time out to make sure that our homework was done, and we were on top of our things. Mommy really trained us up, on domestication. We knew how to do laundry, sort clothes, and cut chicken.

**ESAILAMA:** What she forgot to say is that, we were living with the majority of the Liberian National Culture Troupe. There were about 15 people in a 2-bedroom apartment in La Jolla (San Diego). My mom was finishing her bachelor's in computer science engineering.

During that time, a lot of music and dance took place in the house. There's a history of West African dance in the United States. A lot of the people who have companies now were one large company performing in the San Diego Zoo or EPCOT Center and living together in one house talking about sewing, talking about music, about dance. A lot of the stuff that my mom learned came from those environments. All they did all the time was talk about drumming and dance. Dancing in the living room, drumming in the living room, rehearsing in the living room. Singing and dancing all day, arguing, fussing, doing all that comes with a whole bunch of people in a two-bedroom house.

**SAKEENAH:** And then the family transitioned and moved to the Bay Area.

**ESAILAMA:** Only thing that changed from San Diego to the Bay Area was that the house got bigger. You still had a lot of people. There's three waves of households. From the 1980s, up to the 2000s, the household has been a



Pictured: Opposite Page: Fatou Kine Diouf; Top Right: Madiou Diouf and Makai; Bottom Right: Maya, Madiou and Makai; Bottom Left: Ibrahima Diouf

community house, where you have dancers, musicians, costume makers, and singers.

**MADIU:** Once we got up to the Bay Area, it got a little bit more youthful. We had a lot of young drummers too. By the time Ibrahima was born, Esailama and Sakeenah were in college, some cousins joined in with us and we were all living together, growing up together. We just always shared our parents with everybody for our whole life.

**Some of you have started your own families and households. Is it like how you grew up? How is it the same or different from how you grew up?**

**SAKEENAH:** I am married. And, to have a million people in the house. There was a party at my house. Right? So I think there's nine people in the house right now. Now who lives here? There's four of us. But this morning, there's nine. And I don't think anything of it. It's just natural. I'm accustomed to that now. My husband comes from a small nuclear family, where it was always just him, his siblings and parents. I won't say he's getting used to it, but he just sees it. This is just who I am. This is just how we are.

**IBRAHIMA:** I don't have any kids. I have my goddaughter and nieces and nephews, but it's me by myself. I'm dedicated to my work at this time.

**ESAILAMA:** Yes. There's a lot of people who come in and out of my house and my back house is a rotating house for people to live in.

**MADIU:** Kinda is like that a lil' bit not to that extreme... but in its own way.

**ESAILAMA:** I think there is a little bit of a difference. I have people who come in and out of my house. People stay here. My back house is rotating. But there's a



TAKH and Esailama Diouf-Henry

little bit of a shift in the sense for my parents, there was rehearsals, classes, all that stuff going on all the time. And if we wanted to be together, we'd be in a rehearsal or a class or in a show. Looking at my relationship with my son, Sakeenah with hers, and Madiou with his, our children, this generation, they're doing their own thing very early on. We're very careful and mindful of allowing them that space. If they don't want to dance, they don't have to dance. They don't have to drum. We encourage

them and hope this can be a foundation because we love it and do it. We do take them to shows and rehearsals and classes, but we make space for them to explore and be whomever they are outside of that.

**How does your family background and parents as dancers influence you now?**

**KINE:** I would say we were kind of all born into it. It was our extracurricular activity that became our passion as we got older. For me, it was a wonderful thing to be born into. Being able to first be an apprentice under my own mother. Then study under my brother. That's how we bond. Besides dance, nursing was my calling. I could still have my nursing career and have my dancing career. I explored many different things. I did step, hip hop. I'm currently in a dance organization, House Arrest Two Championship Dance Team Inc., out of Chicago, Illinois which I joined in college at Clark Atlanta University.

**IBRAHIMA:** I was definitely born into the dance. The rhythm was in my body. I would not say I took dance seriously [until] about the age of 10 or 12. I danced with Diamano Coura West African Dance Company. I went to Berkeley High [where] my mom taught. That's where my dance choreography journey started at Berkeley High because of the African-American studies department. My friends thought I would be this famous choreographer but it took a right turn doing drawing and design, my first passion. I still keep West African dance. I have danced with choreographer Fatima doing contemporary styles, still based around African dance. I went to school for fashion design and I have my own clothing line, [Rebels of the Soil](#), challenging the eye of classification for men and women. Fashion and dance go hand in hand, because I first started learning how to sew garments and do things from watching my mother, her good friend uncle Nimely, and their friend who has transitioned, Papa Ibrahima Camara. I always tie my designs back to what I was born into.

**SAKEENAH:** I was first introduced to dance at around eight. It's in the home. It's what we do. I won't say that I have two left feet. I probably could have danced a little bit if I really kept up with it. I think I can claim one performance. I went off to college and then came back and we were doing big shows at the Calvin Simmons Theater and selling seats and I just jumped right in and took the hat of Ticketmaster for performances. When my dad was teaching the women's group [I took] classes with him. But I didn't perform. I'm in the audience, clapping my hands, and moving my body a little bit, but I'm not getting out there on the dance floor.

**MADIU:** I came into the picture when things were getting going in San Diego. My dad was dancing, but he was more so drumming. I went in the direction of the drumming. He kind of put that in front of me more. I wanted to dance at one point, so I dipped in it a little bit. I know how to dance because I've been around it, but I grew up more so drumming. At one point I focused more on sports, but I never stopped drumming. As I grew up, I've always been able to keep music and percussion. I went to college for audio engineering, so I can be an engineer and still create beats and record people and bring my own flavor that I've learned from growing up in the arts with my parents all these years.

**MAKAI:** I'm not that interested in dance, but I like watching the shows and being around it because it's pretty cool to me. It brings people together. I think I got [music] from my father because he drums and he's a music producer. I know a lot of rhythms.

**KINE:** My perspective of my parents, keeping it going to bring both their cultures to the states so people experience it. They've taught about four generations, from babies to adults, and it brought the culture and kept the culture going. And those people sometimes branch off and go to do their own thing and it becomes their passion.

**ESAILAMA:** My mom always talks [about her and her] brother Lafayette Johnson Jr. relationship with Cuban, salsa, merengue, and cha cha cha dancing. At that time in their youth there was all this cross-cultural inspiration between Liberia, Senegal, Brazil, and Cuba. Festac, the 1977 festival. Those cultural exchanges and how Latin dance influenced a lot of West African cultures.

**How does dancing connect you to your cultural roots & identity?**

**KINE:** [When asked] if I identify myself as an American or an African, I always identify myself as African. Not just because my parents are from Africa, but when I go to Senegal (I haven't been to Liberia yet), I feel like I'm home.

**ESAILAMA:** I remember as a child, when my grandfather L.Kwia Johnson passed away, I was standing next to my grandmother, and I was scared but it was the most fascinating thing you could have seen. Something you will never see on a performance stage. But it took place right there in the yard of our house in Fiamah, Liberia. These people came down from the countryside. They did the Doglor to commemorate this big person in that way. We saw the same thing in Senegal when (my father) Papa Zak passed away. He was celebrated in such a moving way in Medina (Senegal), where he was raised. One final sendoff, orators [singers], the dance was there through the music and song.



**When y'all are not dancing. What are y'all doing?**

**KINE:** We go out. When we're all in the Bay Area, we do brunch at home on Sundays and cook together. Watch our different shows together, and come up with new dance ideas or come up with new drum breaks. Go on trips, take the kids places. Bond together. Since, some of us are not with the rest, try to find that time. We talk on the phone every day. We have a sibling group chat. We are very family-oriented, so we're going to find ways.

**What does home mean to you?**

**ESAILAMA:** There's a man named Baba Bill Summers, who was a very good friend of Papa's. He said to me that the world is your house and these places that you are from are the many rooms in your house. So as we think about our house, and our house being the world, and our rooms being Senegal, Liberia, California, Atlanta, Cuba, wherever it is that we have planted seeds, those are the rooms in our house. When I think about home, I think about that. I think about my home being expansive and me having multiple rooms in that house that are various parts of the world.

**IBRAHIMA:** Love that! Love that explanation. I'm with you 100%.

**SAKEENAH:** I was just about to say what you just said.

**KINE:** Mhmm I agree.

**You can't take Esailama's answer.**

**SAKEENAH:** I can't take her answer, but it's funny because we call the house that our mother dwells at as 'The House.' Our parents' house. "I'm at 'the' house" not "I'm at my house." That's the phrase for home. I won't call it the foundation because of course we've lived in different places, but, this was the last home that, you know, that our parents shared. 20 years. I don't want to be cliché. Home is where the heart is. Home is where the love is. There are many aspects of what is home and what feels like home. And it's multiple physical spaces. We all have our individual spaces and places. The space where I come in and out, it's home for me. It's home for my son.

**NKEIRUKA ORUCHE** is a cultural organizer, multimedia creative of Igbo descent, who specializes in Afro-Urban culture and its intersections with social issues. She is a co-founder of BoomShake, a social justice and music education organization, and founder and executive artistic director of Afro Urban Society, an incubator and presenter of Pan Afro-Urban arts, culture, and social discourse. In 2022, she created and directed 'Mixtape of the Dead & Gone #1 - Ahamefula', a shit-just-got-real dance-theater piece about life, death, and what the fuck comes next.

She is a 2022 Dance/USA Artist Fellow, a Kikwetu Honors Awardee, a 2018 NYFA Immigrant Artist Fellow, YBCA 100 Honoree, and recipient of awards from Creative Work Fund, MAP Fund, New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, California Arts Council, among others.

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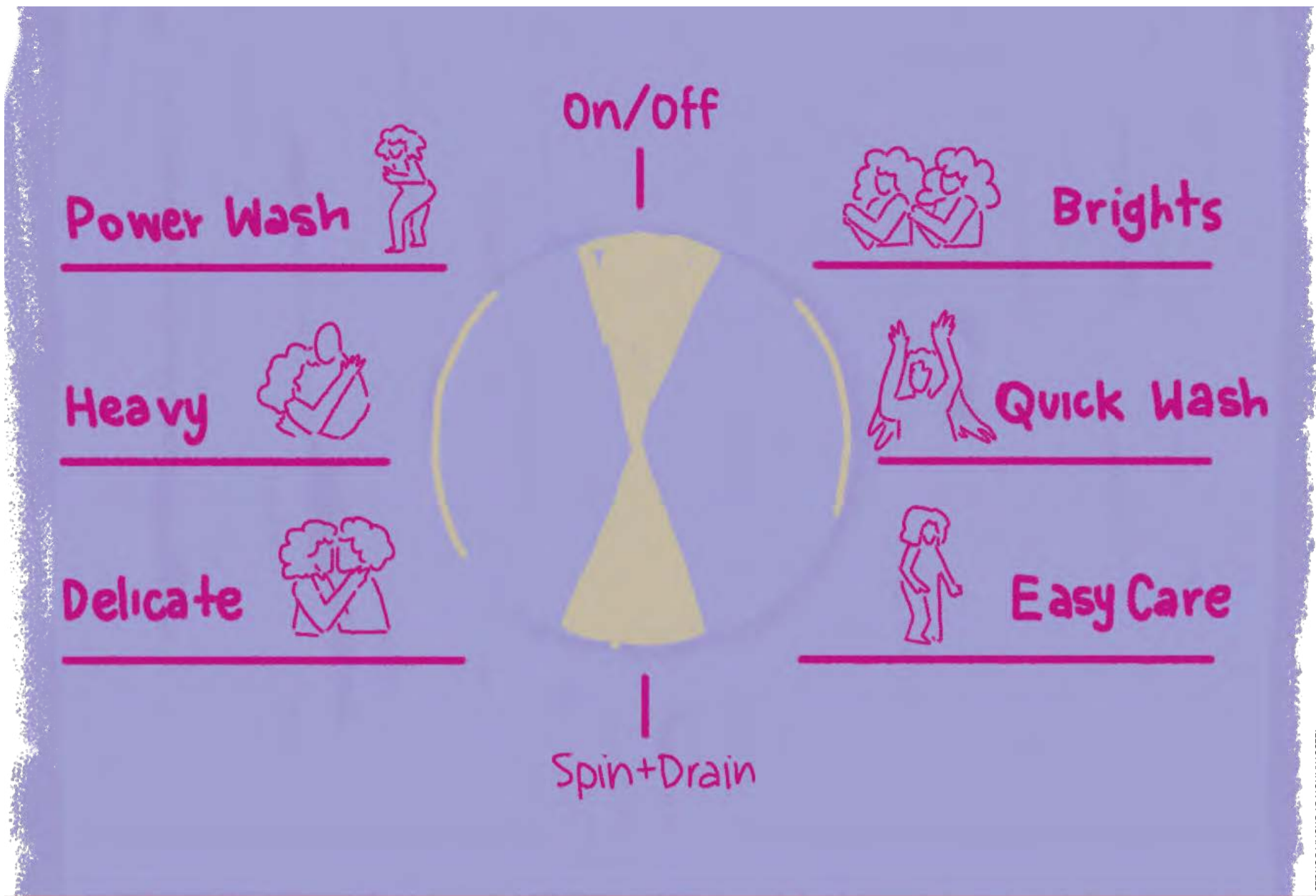


ILLUSTRATION BY BRUNA BORGES

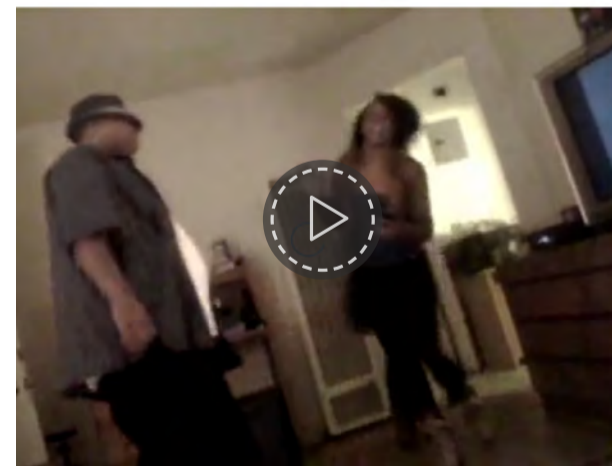
# WASH SPIN REPEAT

## The eMotion Machine

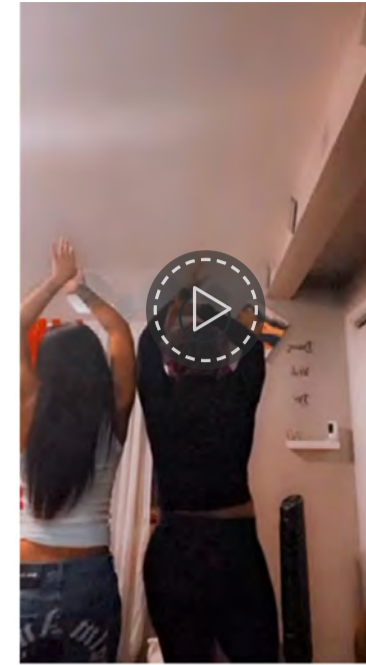
by LAMISHA DUREE

### HEAVY DUTY

Heart severely stained  
the day my dad left  
behind his human shell  
A muddy mess of ruin  
and denial  
Unable to grasp the  
emptiness stinging me  
to a low hummmm  
Bone aching waves in  
this whirlpool of breath  
snatching sorrows  
Tumbling from one memory to the next  
The emotions ricochet  
Soggy and heavy when I think it's over  
The flood is back before my lungs can get air  
Rinsed and twisted with a ear splitting feral cry erupting from a  
place I don't know  
And when it's done I'm not soggy but still definitely heavy  
The pure scent of smiles and laughter diverge  
Examining each wrung out piece of me when my heart contracts  
Missed a spot  
Start cycle again



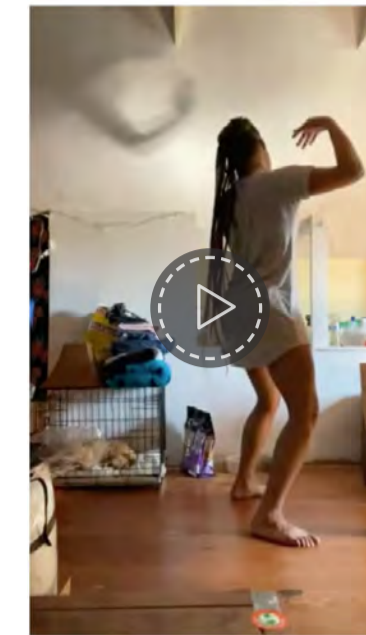
### QUICK WASH



The feelin' of warm light  
signals my eyes to open  
I'm not down bad but I ain't  
fresh either  
i need to shake things up for  
a quick reset  
Slow hustle to the bathroom  
Slow hustle to my damn room  
Hell I deserve a joint for a treat

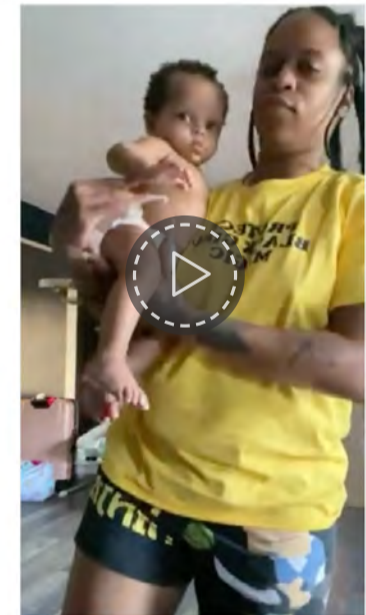
The music trembles through  
me I'm moving all of me  
My hands wave in the air  
I'm whipping my hair  
I'm tryna see if I got  
stallion knees!

### NORMAL



It's a rite of passage  
The music wakes you and  
instantly you wish you could have  
slept through it  
If you don't leave your room now  
your mom will be in there any  
minute doing it for you  
Throwing you into the load of  
refreshing your home  
If you stay on top of the mess  
there's not much to do  
Sloshing around and sudsing down  
Before you know it's you waking  
your little ones up to shuffle around  
the home you've made

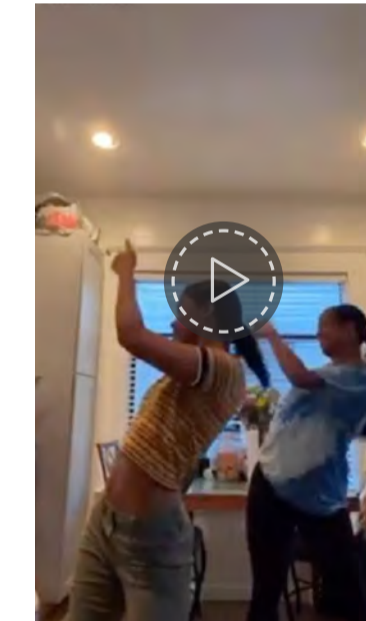
### HAND WASH/DELICATES



Oh, Mommy!  
Worn out wouldn't accurately  
express all this mess  
Milk soaked shirts and jammies  
covered in poop  
Food spills as I hurry to eat  
before those precious cries tell  
me my time is up  
On the tenth day I cried.  
Thought it was all under control  
The help that'd been  
promised was hard to find.  
So it proved true, the  
responsibility would be all mine.

I've always wanted to be a mom  
I had no idea it would beat me through my transition  
Giving so much of me that it feels I'd need forever  
until I noticed me  
And when I get that break I've been dreaming of  
I spend it looking at pictures and videos  
Reminded that such a beautiful mess  
needs to be treated with care  
Spot cleaned by hand  
Brightened up by those wide eyes  
A very gentle cleaning seeing those tiny fingers on  
my chest

### BRIGHTS



If I could choose my sisters  
I'd choose these joyous headaches  
every time.  
The first babies I raised  
The people I'd go to war for  
Yeah they work my nerves but even  
a global cooties outbreak  
couldn't keep me from sharing  
space with them  
Your cooties are my cooties  
Teach me the TikTok let's shake  
our booties  
  
Wash spin repeat  
Goes life and all its memories

LAMISHA DUREE, artistically known as Mishimama is a multi-dimensional artist born and raised in the Bay Area who lives by her motto, "Hella into art. Hella figuring out my own."

# How we danced at home

by ZIORAMMACHI BENDER-DEMOLL

**W**hen I got asked to create something for this issue, I had a lot of different ideas. I finally decided that I wanted to interview people to ask them about what kinds of dances they grew up doing at home, with their families and friends. After I talked about it a few times with my mom, I used my mom's phone, and sent texts, voice notes, and made calls messages to adults in my community. I asked them to share what dances they did at home, and record themselves doing it. Here are a few of them featured in this video.

**Thomas, San Jose/Bay Area, CA:** He shared what dances he did in San Jose/Bay Area, but he 'cheated' by recruiting a friend to do it for him. Lol

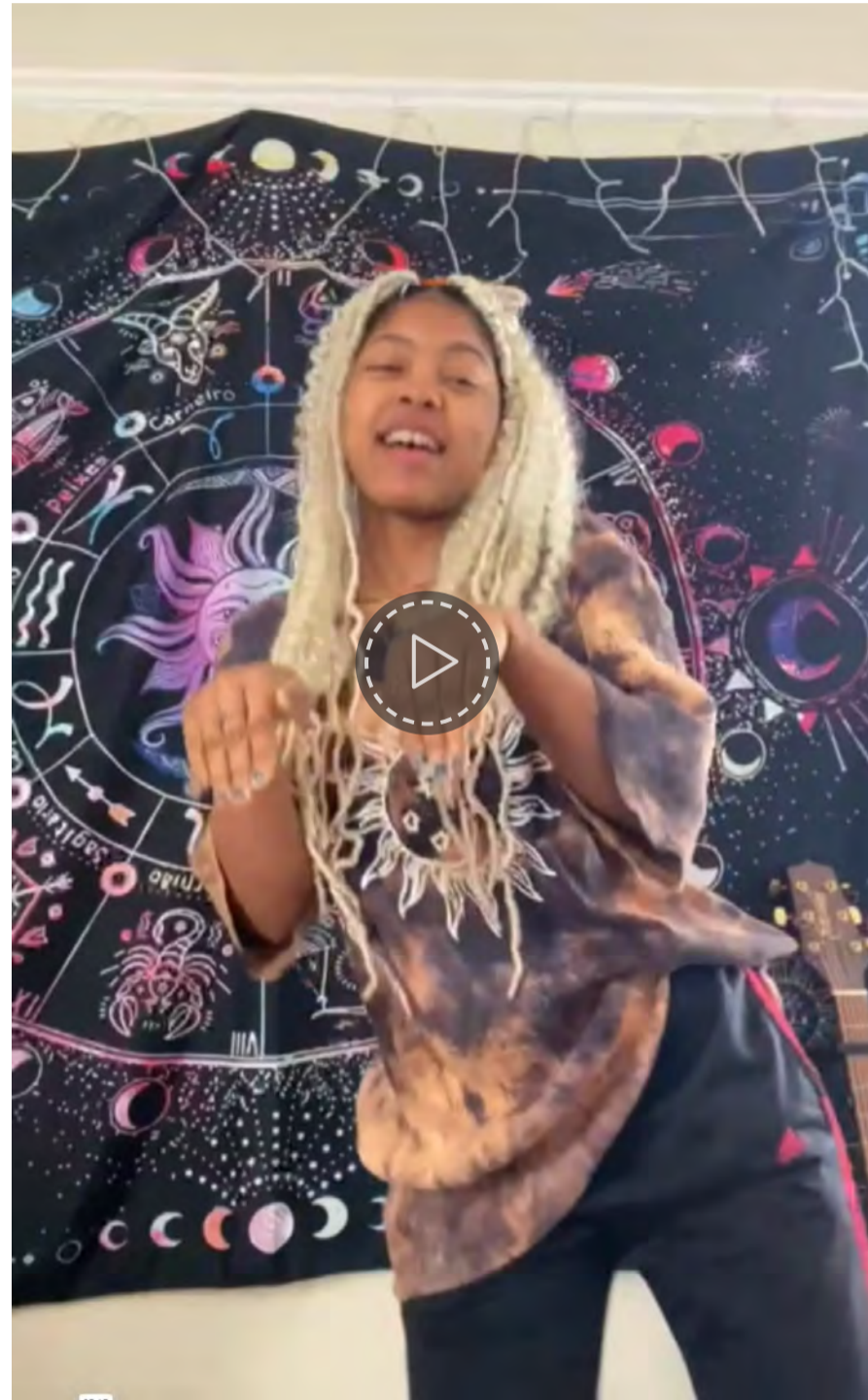
**Chidinma, Imo State, Nigeria:** Shared dance moves she used to do in her hometown in Imo State in Nigeria. She didn't really have specific names for the dances but she was very happy doing the dance.

**Lindiwe, Johannesburg, South Africa:** Lindiwe swears she's not a dancer but she was getting it with those dance moves.

**Moses, Brooklyn, NY:** He said his knees were not giving him what he needed. It was 7am!

**Natacha, Haiti:** Aunty Natacha shared the konpa from Haiti, and she gets extra credit for doing a partner dance with her kid.

What are the dances you did at home?



[Video Description & Transcript](#)

**ZIORAMMACHI** is a 10-year old who is curious about the world around her. She loves to write, play, climb, read (taking away books is a dreaded consequence), draw, take photos, listen to music and a lot of other things. She is grateful for being invited (thanks mom!) for this issue. She is a co-author of the [Notable & Notorious Nigerian Women Coloring book](#)

# AbbaLe

June 15 - 18  
Tickets/Info:



a dance-theater memoir  
written, choreographed and performed by  
Andrew Pearson

directed and developed by  
Lisa Owaki Bierman

'a tour de force'

Barbara Mueller-Wittmann  
Curator of Dance  
Odyssey Theatre Ensemble



Who's your Daddy?



## Detour Dance

*We Build Houses Here* is about a band of shipwrecked castaways and their search for sanctuary. In this immersive work of dance theater, audiences may choose from a variety of itineraries as they explore Oasis nightclub transformed into a desert island. A cast of 11 performers will share stories of hardship and survival. [detourdance.com](http://detourdance.com)

PHOTO BY ROBBIE SWENBY



PHOTO BY RIJUNA

## SHARP & FINE

What would happen if you could see the future? Featuring five performers and four musicians, *Imaginary Country* tells the story of a friendship altered when one of the friends can suddenly see the future.

[sharpandfine.org](http://sharpandfine.org)



SELF-PHOTO, GRAPHIC DESIGN BY PAUL HUGHES/PEW

## THE BLACK LANDSCAPE PODCAST

Hosted by Andréa Spearman, this podcast spotlights small businesses and provides in-depth interviews with emerging and established Black leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area in various industries including the performing and literary arts, Oakland City Council, labor unions, entrepreneurship, event management, holistic health, etc.

Past guests have included Babatunji Johnson (LINES Ballet), Tonya Amos (Grown Women Dance Collective), Tammy Johnson (Egyptian style belly dancer & equity consultant), Cherie Hill (Bridge Live Arts, IrieDance), Traci Bartlow (Starchild), Jameelah Lane (Afro Urban Society), Sarah Crowell (Destiny Arts), Erik Lee (Dimensions Dance Theater, PUSH Dance), and Noah James III (Visceral Roots Dance Company). [theblacklandscape.buzzsprout.com](http://theblacklandscape.buzzsprout.com)



PHOTO BY JOANNA RUSKMAN

## WHEN EYES SPEAK

The fourth iteration of When Eyes Speak, San Francisco's first South Asian Choreography Festival, is set to take place from May 12-14 in Dance Mission Theatre and the Mission District. Join us as we celebrate Space, Place, and Ancestry, featuring Joti Singh's Ghadar Geet with Duniya Dance and Drum, and Barnali Ghosh and Anirvan Chatterjee's Radical South Asian History Walking Tour. [facebook.com/wheneyesspeak](https://facebook.com/wheneyesspeak)



## WEAVING SPIRITS FESTIVAL

Curated by an intergenerational team of Two-Spirit community leaders, Weaving Spirits features local and national Native American artists whose offerings range from traditional music to experimental performance and drag. Learn more about the upcoming activities. [weavingspirits.com](http://weavingspirits.com)



PHOTO BY BART NAGEL

## Alive and Well Productions

Meeting #7 is a one-woman show created and performed by Annie Kahane. In this performance, an orientation leader welcomes the audience as if they are extraterrestrials who have just arrived from space, offering strategies to survive on planet earth. The evening-length monologue is punctuated by projection and dances. The work premieres at the SF International Arts Festival, Fri-Sat, Jun 16-17. [aliveandwellproductions.org](http://aliveandwellproductions.org)



PHOTO BY MANISH BHANDARI

## BOLLYWOOD DANCE CENTRAL

BDC has locations in 3 different states including local cities Oakland and San Francisco. Students train weekly to master various Indian dance styles including Bollywood, Bhangra, and Raas/Garba. This past year they have performed at several national dance competitions and NBA games. They are very excited to bring Bollywood to the San Francisco community. [bollywooddancecentral.com](http://bollywooddancecentral.com)



# BIPOC RESIDENCY SHOWCASE

1PM & 3PM  
APRIL 23RD  
5PM PARK

The BIPOC Artist Sanctuary & Enrichment Residency Showcase is a culmination of a 2-month creation process for teaching artists and cultural practitioners to deepen their relationship with their communities located at PUSH's new sanctuary home at 447 Minna Street in SF



Ethan Clyde "Clover"      Nitya Narasimhan      Danielle Smith      Kim Requesto      Héctor Jaime

FREE WITH REGISTRATION AT  
**pushdance.org**

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**BOPSIDY** | **AfA**  
AFRICA IN AMERICA

THE FIRST ONLINE HUB  
FOR AFRICAN DIASPORIC  
MUSIC AND DANCE



Musicians



Dance Groups

“The fact of the matter is, African Diasporic music and dance styles will go mainstream. And participants who are new to it will try to possess it. But what I want to always propose is for it to always be in the hands of the artists, teachers, and educators who have already paved or are paving the way.”

With the Bopsidy hub, if we choose, there never has to be a speaker for us. **Your gift will continue to speak for itself.**”



**KARA MACK**  
Founder of Africa In America®,  
"Coming 2 America" Assistant  
Choreographer, "Black Panther:  
Wakanda Forever" Dancer

*pictured (clockwise from top left): Tania Santiago, Diarmano Coura West African Dance Company, Ramon Ramos Alayo, Susana Arenas, Kara Mack, In Lak'ech Dance Academy, Bongo Sidibe, CubaCaribe*

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ABOUT DANCERS' GROUP AND PAST *IN DANCE* ARTICLES

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