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**AFRICAN DANCE IN ENGLAND –  
SPIRITUALITY and CONTINUITY**

**Two Volumes  
Volume 2**

**by**

**BOB RAMDHANIE**



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## Volume 2

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I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvellous. We read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world beyond the hills.<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Key Initiatives in Dance Development in the UK**

During the early 1970s African dance was in its infancy in the West Midlands although Hermin McIntosh (Birmingham) was employed as a youth worker within an educational community programme and saw dance development as an integral part of her work. In those early days, McIntosh was attempting to empower her young charges to build positive identities through their involvement in Caribbean and African dance activities but given the negative association with anything African amongst some sections of the black communities, many parents frowned upon this involvement.

In 1975 Chester Morrison (Wolverhampton) was involved in Lancel African Arts. In comparison to McIntosh, Morrison, a staunch Pan-Africanist, was working with a more mature group of musicians and dancers who had identified themselves as Africans and had some firm ideas both about the art form and why they were involved. He recalled that

There was nothing anywhere in society that was recognising that we Africans had a well-established culture and that those of us in the diaspora wanted to participate in our culture. To funders, and to be

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, America and England: Penguin Books, 1996), p.55.

honest, to many in the black communities itself, what we at Lancel were trying to do, was perceived as primitive with no place in England.<sup>2</sup>

History had left its mark. Black parents had internalised the European's view of African dance and wanted to maintain their distance from 'that' cultural heritage. In one inner city area, Handsworth, there were racial disturbances in the recent past (1977) and the relationship between the police and, especially, many young blacks, could best be described as tolerant. Handsworth was an area where white families were leaving and more and more black and Asian families were occupying private homes and establishing a wide range of businesses. Black churches, mosques and gurdwaras (temples) were visible and audible.

The cultural landscape of Birmingham City was almost barren in black arts and culture generally, black dance specifically. Performances and exhibitions were sporadic and there were no black venues or any other venue with a serious commitment to black cultural practice. There were a few prominent black sports personalities at Birchfield Harriers; Vanley Burke, Pogus Caesar, Gilroy Brown were acknowledged visual artists; Dark Movers operated as a community theatre company and Hermin McIntosh supported by Ben Baddoo had recently started Sankofa, a youth dance group. There was no recognised entry into the black arts arena, especially the performance arts, for individuals who simply wanted to participate for pleasure.

I chose the Probation Service in Handsworth to begin my professional career. Aware that music and dance were positive magnets to many young black people, I decided to investigate the cultural terrain to ascertain what opportunities there

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Chester Morrison, Birmingham 10 August 1996.



could be to encourage ‘users’ of the Service to become involved. My personal aim, with a few black youths who were not Probation clients themselves, was to informally explore leadership development and team building through the use of Caribbean and African music and dance; the only rationale for this pursuit being my limited ability to play a drum. The idea to explore these goals through light-hearted fun activities was paramount. Interestingly, out of these pleasurable pastimes emerged one of the leading African-Caribbean dance companies in the UK.

**(1) Mystic and The Israelites/Kokuma Dance Company**

Black youths in the 1970s were aware of racial tension in their local neighbourhoods and especially, in some schools. A significant proportion, covertly and overtly, were followers of the Rastafarian movement and almost all were inspired by reggae music and the philosophy of Marcus Garvey. Body language, dress codes, behaviour patterns and verbal communication were used by many youths to reinforce their ‘blackness’ and their identity and many distanced themselves from mainstream society. In their belief system, “white man’s Christianity” was now debunked in favour of the ideologies of the Rastafarian doctrine and black youths were looking to Africa for their inspiration and their spiritual guidance. Kokuma Dance Company evolved out of this situation.

Given the extremely unusual formation of this company, its history has been provided in some detail with more than usual references in the first person, due to my pivotal role in the establishment of the company. As a Probation Officer

in Birmingham the challenge was to find an alternative, dynamic and interactive way to work with young black youths. Music and movement became the medium and the message, the way to communicate effectively and a path to challenge ideas and ideologies. I explored options with both 'clients' and 'non-clients' and decided to introduce a Caribbean and African music and dancing project into my portfolio of social work interventionist practice. Arrangements to meet informally to 'drum and dance' at the offices of the Probation Service in Perry Barr created quite a degree of discontent amongst other colleagues, especially as most of the participants in this community project were not Probation 'clients'. Initially the numbers varied between six to ten and there were some humorous debates about the motives of 'an Asian man, working in the Probation Service but developing African dance and drumming.' The young women wishing to dance were aged between fifteen to eighteen and some were attending local comprehensive schools whereas the drummers, normally three (and generally erratic in attendance), were in their early twenties and all Rastafarians. No one had been involved in African music or dancing before and but all were steeped in reggae music and most had attended the black churches in their childhood. The young people were 'street wise', aware of the racial tensions in the community and proud to be Africans. The decision to join the African dance classes was the opportunity to express themselves through the language of dance.

Initially, the small group was meeting once per week but very quickly interest and enthusiasm was growing, and the frequency of these meetings increased. Rules were almost non-existent and certainly no one requesting to join was asked about skills or ambitions regarding black dance development. There was always



a spirit of excitement as the numbers solidified with steady musicians and dancers.

Having seen Ekome some years earlier, I began to network with the company in Bristol, with the specific view of getting them to provide training opportunities in Birmingham. Even before then, local community organisations who had heard of the project were asking the youths to perform and it was suggested that the group should give itself a name. The name Mystic and the Israelites was suggested by group members.

The nature of group composition, the organisational and administrative skill levels within it and the expectations of the members themselves, conspired to ensure that I co-ordinated all the activities for Mystics. An 'open-book' process to encourage the young charges to get involved administratively failed, solely because the expression of 'self' was more meaningful to them in body language. Where leadership development was failing, team building was successfully progressing! From informality to a more organised group, issues around costumes, administration and transportation were regularly discussed and I provided personal resources to enable Mystics to operate as a small dance company. The concept of creating work specifically for the stage did not trouble our minds nor indeed did we have the skills for doing so. Mystic and the Israelites was about recreation, personal enjoyment and 'self-identity' and an opportunity for young black people to express themselves in a medium which they, and not mainstream society, had selected. The dance vocabulary of the group was simple and limited but grounded in movement patterns which were

learnt from each other, appropriated from popular reggae dances and also from their memory banks from their childhood 'dance activities' within the black churches. The lower body, especially the feet and the waist, interpreted drum patterns forged from reggae and calypso beats, and upper arms, chest and shoulder movements moved fluidly from side to side to complement the foot patterns. The group rehearsed two particular pieces, *Motions* and another without a specific name. Both were a 'mish-mash' of ideas but which evolved into reasonable presentable African Caribbean calypso 'numbers'.

Already at this time, the importance of Africa as their symbolic and spiritual home was quite obvious and rituals that had subconsciously surrounded them for years were present at rehearsals. The 'Rasta' drummers introduced simple rituals and an element of African spirituality into the group since its formation and 'coming together' before a performance, reading the Bible (from an African perspective), pouring libation, and asking ancestors for guidance were regular occurrences when the group met.

Pat Donaldson, one of the original dancers and one of the young people who contributed to the first 'naming' ceremony for the group, recalled:

We never saw what we were doing as anything serious. It meant we could spend more time with our friends, get some nice leotards and dance which we enjoyed. At that time too, maybe we never expressed ourselves as Africans but being noticed as one of the dancers in the African group always made me feel very good. Before we were Kokuma, we were Mystic & the Israelites and we had I think one or two dances only. 'Motions' which we all put together always brings back nice memories and makes me laugh. It didn't matter to us that it was you doing it or the Probation Service or whatever, what was important to all of us was that we had an opportunity to do it and also later those opportunities you gave us to go to Africa and Jamaica to develop our skills professionally. Who would have thought we would have achieved that?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Pat Donaldson, Birmingham 15 June 1996.



'Mystics' was an example of positive and preventative Probation practice and the group grew from strength to strength. Interestingly the efforts and achievements of these young blacks were echoing amongst other youth groups nationally and Mystics began to receive invitations to perform at community social functions in several cities in England. The group's presentations, display dancing, would consist of two dance pieces and two drumming pieces, the drummers' 'set' providing ample time for simple costume changes by the dancers.

Given my propensity to work within the community, I applied for and was appointed as a Senior Probation Officer in 1978, entrusted with the development of a programme for community development. With Urban Aid funding, the Probation Service was able to establish a community based project and I introduced the concept of a Handsworth Cultural Centre (HCC) in Birmingham, insisting that the services to be provided were to be for all in the community who wished to participate. My working philosophy was to ensure that there was no differentiation between 'clients' of the Service and 'non-clients', especially as the project was geared to meet the needs of the local community. Probation practice however was never conceived in the format that I was proposing and there was always a tension between the HCC and colleagues in the 'mainstream' Service. Where, within the Service there was much disquiet about this new community approach rather than the 'one-to-one' approach, there was much appreciation from local people for this community arts and resource centre.

Mystics and many other informal and formal organisations within Birmingham began to receive training opportunities and rehearsal spaces without charge, and

there was now a growing, focused black artistic renaissance in the City of Birmingham. Writers, sculptors, photographers, musicians, filmmakers and dancers were meeting regularly at the HCC to exchange ideas, plan and produce work. The Centre itself offered limited office accommodation to artistes, spaces for exhibitions, as well as showcasing opportunities, and began creating national and international collaborations to enable black and Asian artistes to enter mainstream venues.

The management of the Centre as well as my direct personal involvement in Mystics was now occupying a disproportionate amount of my time and with great reluctance, I suggested that the group should take more responsibility for managing its affairs, though still receiving all the support from the Centre. The group decided that without me they would rather disband, an action, which took place a few months after my reduced involvement.

My disappointment at the demise of Mystics was profound. Pat Donaldson, Doreen Forbes and Hugh Watson visited me at home a few weeks later (May 1978) to suggest that Mystics should be restarted. After a frank discussion that evening Mystic and the Israelites was disbanded and Kokuma (a Nigerian Yoruba word meaning 'this one will never die') was born.

Kokuma Dance Theatre Company was the longest continuously established black dance company in the UK. Spawned out of Mystic and the Israelites and the enthusiasm and energy of a few young blacks in Handsworth, Birmingham in 1978, the growth and artistic development of the company have altered over the



past few years. Even though the original idea to develop an African dance project was based on fun and self-identity, as Paul Gilroy pointed out with regards to an earlier generation,

the black forms in which Britain's young people took pleasure during the 1950s and 1960s were not innocent. They were already articulated by political language, symbols and meanings given by the struggle of social movements for emancipation and equality.<sup>4</sup>

The practitioners, who now re-grouped as Kokuma, did so in the full understanding that they were Africans in the diaspora and wanted, as far as it was possible in contemporary Britain, to express themselves and be seen as such. By now, they were beginning to see themselves developing into a semi-professional dance company and were keen to attract financial support to consolidate and develop their art form. Within this growing period, however, they were reluctant to assume artistic and administrative control of the group, not least because they felt they did not have the skills and they were interested in performing rather than administering.

Derek Anderson, a former member of Kokuma and currently the Chief Executive of Wolverhampton City Council, stated many years ago when I asked him to manage the group in my absence.

The group is undisciplined and although I think they are quite keen, I feel that they do not listen to anyone but you. I found it difficult in your absence, to manage them, as they would only do what they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it and how they wanted to do it. I would go crazy if I were in charge!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilroy, op. cit. p.172.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Derek Anderson, Birmingham 3 April 1982.

Anderson's statement was not only a reflection about the group's behaviour, but about the potential that he saw for the group to become professional and the inability by the members within the group to appreciate and realise that themselves. He was frustrated by their lack of vision, something that I have often reflected upon, given my long association with the group. Whatever the truth, many of the founding members including Donaldson, Watson, Seymour, Daley and a few others, were determined to make Kokuma a professional company. The group by then had expanded slightly to include seven to eight dancers (all females without any formal dance training) and four 'Rasta' drummers. A programme of training was planned, inviting professional tutors as often as finances allowed, and the group began to build closer networks with many of the professional companies who were in existence at that time. Tutors from Ekome, Sankofa, Shikisha, as well as the individual talent of George Otoo were gradually brought into the company and Kokuma was slowly evolving into a semi-professional performing group. Although the group was always keen to recruit new members, it had in a sense become a closed unit focusing more on self-development over community oriented African dance classes. Repertoire development was seen as critical in moving forward and members became immersed in learning the specific music and body movements for social and ceremonial dances from Ghana. *Gahu*, *Kpanlogo* (silent K), *Agbekor* (war dance), *Bawa*, *Damba-Takai* and *Kpatsa* (patcha) were becoming commonplace forms amongst members who had only recently decided to develop their skills in African dance. The group was not in receipt of any public subsidy, excluding the small amounts that came via the Cultural Centre, and did not have a Management Committee. It operated as a co-operative in spirit, if not in practice.



At that time also, the Handsworth Cultural Centre was becoming extremely popular as the centre for black arts and this regional/national recognition enabled Kokuma itself to attract wider attention. The Centre began making links with African and Caribbean Institutes of Arts and Culture with the purpose of encouraging artistes' exchanges in the future. During this developing period, several positive steps were happening in African dance generally, the most notable being the availability of more dance tutors from the continent itself and the success of the Aklowa Centre, in Bishops Stortford, by the Ghanaian Felix Cobbson. Training weekends were arranged at Aklowa and that created new avenues and exposed group members to a slice of Ghanaian life and culture. Those weekends challenged many of their views of Africa and also their palates. Where they readily accepted the music, hairstyles, dances, costumes and drumming of Ghana, they were less than enthusiastic for the food and the discipline by Cobbson! Nevertheless, they were able to better understand African instruments and rhythmic patterns and became conversant with the drum language and patterns of the other support instruments. Used to a more relaxed pattern of rehearsals, the 'Rasta' drummers who always wanted to drift back into the safe singing and chanting of the Rastafarian rhythms were constantly challenged in terms of their seriousness to African drumming. Both drummers and dancers benefited significantly from those training programmes, possibly for the first time better understanding the relationship between each player in a Ghanaian drumming ensemble and then that between the dancers and the drummers. They were introduced to concepts of timing and spatial patterns in African dance presentations and questioned about their perception and attitude to the continent and its cultural practices. Those training weekends provided space

away from their local community and time for them to reflect, while also illuminating, in no small way, that African dance and drumming was not simple and straightforward but required dedicated hours and training to achieve any success.

Training at Aklowa introduced dancers and drummers to Africa, the physical construct which in turn helped them to clarify their own thoughts about the messages of Marcus Garvey and their spiritual connection to the continent. They were beginning to understand the deeper meanings of the rituals and symbols associated with African cultural practices and were keen to explore theoretical concepts about traditional religious practice and the specific meanings of religious dances from Ghana. Nationally, there was an upsurge in requests for training and for the first time in England, regular programmes of African dance training, more or less replicating music and dance patterns from Ghana, were becoming available. Kokuma, like several other groups from around the country, was using the services of the few tutors available and as most were from Ghana, almost all the dance groups at the time appeared to have the same repertoire.

Many years later Badejo observed,

Performances of African dance forms in Britain have so far been on a level of reproduction. Dances for different events in the African society, ritual, ceremonial or social, have been presented repeatedly. This of course has created spectacles for the audience, as it has been new and exciting. When the performances are continuously repeated, the show loses its excitement and becomes boring.<sup>6</sup>

The dangers of sameness, as Badejo noted, were apparent in the early 80s though by then members of Kokuma were planning grand ideas without the slightest indication of how these could ever be achieved. In those moments of our wildest

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 7 July 1988.



dreams, the group began to explore the possibility of taking a small group to the Cultural Centre in Jamaica, in an effort to increase knowledge, skills and cultural traditions and thus reposition the group in the market place. This would have added to the professionalism as well as the repertoire of the company.<sup>7</sup> An outreach programme to engage the company members within a wider area of black arts, planning and developing work in music and dance, visits to galleries, museums, theatres and arts centres was embarked upon. They, for the first time, were realising that someone external to their social grouping was committed to a programme of 'affirmation of self' and began to respond very positively, though often sluggishly, to those ideas. The educational visit to Jamaica became a reality during January and February 1980 and thirteen young people with 'leaders' combined official visits with seminars and practical workshops. Audrey Seymour one of the first members to join Kokuma wrote of her time in Jamaica.

My first few days at the Jamaican School of Dance were a bit strange because I was not used to floor exercises. I was accustomed to dance practice, using the first dance, as a 'warming-up' session.

I went through (or it seemed like) a whole book involving dance – I thought it was impossible, but I managed to maintain a high standard and was surprised that I was able to perform so well.

The staff also were fascinating to watch; to look at them walk down a corridor appeared to me that they were performing a dance.<sup>8</sup>

The Jamaican experience was added too by more Ghanaian input over the next few years and Kokuma became a vibrant element in the cultural life of Birmingham City and in the country generally. The company numbers fluctuated and there was no process for auditioning or recruiting new members. Dancers

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<sup>7</sup> In 1980 I co-ordinated and raised the funds for twenty young people, including Group Leaders, Derek Anderson, Baroness Amos, Hermin McIntosh and myself to travel to Jamaica on a cultural study programme from the Cultural Centre in Handsworth to the Cultural Training Centre, now The Edna Manley School of Performing Arts in Kingston.

<sup>8</sup> Audrey Seymour, 'Speaking Personally' in *Handsworth to Jamaica 1980*, ed. by Bob Ramdhanie (Birmingham: Handsworth Cultural Centre, 1980), p.11.

and musicians invited friends whom they felt could contribute to the group but almost exclusively, all the new members arrived without any skills whatsoever, except an affinity to Africa and a love for reggae music. This informal and flexible way of working was not entirely conducive to the advancement of a professional company but was inherited from the Mystics' experience. The under-skilled but keen dancers meant that the group was always in a state of flux with constant training rather than creative development. During this period there were significant changes, in the sense that the company was able to recruit male dancers for the first time (Derek Anderson and Desmond Pusey), improve the calibre of the music by adding more skilled drummers and also permanently retaining the services of a highly skilled Ghanaian master drummer. The company's repertoire was increasing and they were being invited to give more performances nationally. The demands on my time, from Kokuma and several other diverse quarters, meant I was being overstretched and I wished for group members to accept responsibility for the continuation of Kokuma. After a period of unease, Derek Anderson, who by then had left the company, was available and agreed to return.

Derek's intervention was timely and critical. He brought new and different ideas to the group and having worked in the company before, was quite clear about what was needed to progress as a professional company. Based on his previous experience, Anderson had a rather more dictatorial attitude with the company, but coming from the local community, he was able to motivate them to another level of their development. He was ambitious and pushed the company to realise some of its potential. He created and directed *Unwanted Prince* (1983) and *Nine*



*Nights* (1984) as the group shifted its focus from display dances to dance-theatre. In 1984, Derek continued the tradition of inviting international artistes to work with company members and invited Francis Nii Yartey (the artistic director of the Ghana National Dance Company) and Barry Moncrieffe from the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica to create *Transcended Spirits of Africa* for the company's next presentation. The group moved into larger rehearsal spaces at Unemployed Youth Activities (UYA) and actually incorporated the UYA under the Kokuma brand some years later. The company expanded, attracting members from other smaller groups in Handsworth<sup>9</sup> and dancers, again all females, numbered approximately thirteen. The numbers of musicians generally remained static at four but were practically more experienced than the dancers.

Through my new role as the Director of the CAVE Arts Centre, I had invited Jackie Guy (a former member of the Jamaica National Dance Theatre Company) to spend a sabbatical year (1985) developing dance in the region. During this period he worked with Kokuma, strengthening their Caribbean vocabulary, but more importantly, introducing a degree of professionalism and discipline. That relationship with Guy was productive; the company had grown in confidence and their dancing skills had improved and in 1987 Guy was again invited to Kokuma to choreograph a production for the company. He took the company to a new level of professionalism and he launched this third phase of the company's development with a new work – *The Trails of Abo* (1985). Where I was Probation Officer, friend, mentor and nursemaid to a group of black, inner-city youths, Anderson was a dancer, practical, focussed and determined and Guy

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<sup>9</sup> During this early period in the 80s in Handsworth, besides Kokuma there were about 4/5 other small companies including Sankofa, Dance De L'Afrique, Uhuru Dancers and Wantu Wanzuri Dance Group.

became tutor, choreographer and PR agent but with a new dimension and determination for the community oriented Kokuma Dance Company.

In 1988 Guy was approached in Jamaica and invited to return to Handsworth to the position of Artistic Director of the company. He saw the offer as a challenge and as he wanted to test his artistic skills in the international arena, accepted the post. According to Guy

I remember Kokuma was vibrant and they had a very talented group of dancers and drummers, especially within the African and Caribbean styles. The company was enthusiastic and keen to learn. However, there was no discipline. The performers did not see themselves as professionals and there was a laid back, nonchalant attitude.<sup>10</sup>

This transition for Guy from invited guest choreographer to full-time Artistic Director was initially quite challenging. On his return as Artistic Director he believed that

The company appeared static and seemed to have no historical perspective of who they were. The dancers did not have an intellectual grasp of what they were doing and their reading and social skills were extremely poor whilst their personal lives and relationships were always presenting problems.<sup>11</sup>

Guy's analysis was quite accurate but he brought sharply into focus the cultural and educational gaps between young people in the Caribbean and young British born black people. As a relative newcomer to England, he, like other visiting tutors, saw Britain as 'the land of opportunities'<sup>12</sup> for everyone at every level whereas the experiences for those young, black people in Handsworth were diametrically opposite to Guy's perception. Their lives were ones of constant aggravation from law enforcement officers, marginalisation within the education

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jackie Guy, Birmingham 17 November 1988.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jackie Guy, Birmingham 17 November 1988.

<sup>12</sup> This 'land of opportunities' philosophy was a common belief among visiting tutors from developing countries who saw in the UK, compared to their own countries, a wider range of opportunities and who assumed that the young black people were refusing to accept them.



system, unemployment either for themselves or their siblings and lack of visible role models. They were pleased with the opportunity of expressing themselves as proud, black people with a history and connection to Africa, a situation forced upon them by a dominant white society. The outsider's perception resulted in confusion for both. Guy however had worked in a variety of situations in Jamaica, including cultural work in the Prison Service (with the international Jamaican comedian Oliver Samuels) and thus was accustomed to inner-city attitudes and expressions of 'self'.

The challenge that Guy was seeking became evident upon his arrival in the full-time post. According to him, he had to lead Kokuma artistically, physically, spiritually and intellectually. He approached his task with a degree of immediacy and following his earlier success with the company with *The Trails of Ado*, he began choreographing a new work, *Elements* (1988). The media gradually began to recognise that Kokuma existed in the City and in an interview with Terry Grimley, Guy spoke of *Elements* as "a spectacle of dance and music inspired by the energy of traditional West African dance forms...It will be a 90-minute production that goes very fast and I would call it a family programme. It's very energetic".<sup>13</sup>

Jackie Guy wanted to improve the social skills of the company as much as he wanted a professional performance company. He invited Peter Badejo, Chester Morrison, Dr. S. Berryman-Miller (USA), amongst others, to undertake a series of discussions and workshops with the company, with the aim of developing the company in a holistic manner. Guy wanted every one of his performers to

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<sup>13</sup> Terry Grimley, 'Dancing to the roots', *The Birmingham Post*, 8 September 1988.

understand the power of their history from Africa and the Caribbean and therefore use that internal African spirit to guide them in rehearsals and performances. He introduced a comprehensive programme.

I actively sought the support of the Board members and set up a range of sub-committees around arts and education. We began curriculum development and lesson planning for those who were teaching and through friends of the company, provided basic education and social skills as well as providing the company with a perspective for their work.<sup>14</sup>

By 1989, he felt that company was progressing in the right direction. Kokuma was becoming essential to the artistic fabric of community life and the organisational relationship with UYA changed in that, “having by special resolution changed its name, (UYA) is now incorporated under the name Kokuma”. See page 243.

Artistically, *Elements* was positively received as indicated by Bill Harpe in the *Guardian*.

For these 10 drummers and dancers, who have been celebrating the performing arts of Western Africa from their Birmingham base for over 10 years now, have a drumming combo (led by lead drummer Silbert Dormer) which offer a full-tilt, mathematical juxtaposition of rhythms and tones to set the spine tingling and blood racing, while the dancers attack their hip swings, and body ripples, delicate, determined and sensual footwork and armwork as if dancing is life itself and deserves nothing less than all you’ve got.<sup>15</sup>

Guy appeared to assume overall control of Kokuma. He was the appointed Artistic Director but was deeply involved in all other aspects of the performance company including costume designs, music, choreography, administration, social welfare and technical services. He had set himself the task of creating a new

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Jackie Guy, Birmingham 10 March 1990.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Harpe, ‘Kokuma’, *The Guardian*, 7 March 1989, page unknown.



production for the company each year and he invited writers and choreographers, stage and set designers, directors and technical specialists to help him realise the full potential of the company. The company needed and found, better equipped rehearsal and office spaces at a local church in Lozells. Kokuma's touring and education programmes increased and productions were adapted to suit a variety of venues. Guy brought a new sense of professionalism to the company and heightened the identification with Africa and the Caribbean. Their dancing, as Bill Harpe noted, became 'life itself'. Kokuma, during this third period of transition, had now embarked upon a programme of recruiting, through auditions, professionally trained dancers (most came from the Northern School of Dance) and Guy had to manage a 'meshing process' to utilise the skills of some of the very competent African and Caribbean 'informally' trained and self-taught dancers with those from formal contemporary dance education. A professional company by now, dancers were being contracted; were generally professionally trained and aged over twenty-one and were expected to apply for their 'jobs' at the start of every new financial year.

As far as choreography for the company was concerned, Guy indicated that he did not want to choreograph all the company's productions, and "chose black choreographers to complement and extend the range and vocabulary of the black dance experience".<sup>16</sup>

Between 1988 and 1994 under the artistic direction of Jackie Guy, the company created and presented *Elements* (1988), *Soul Less Game* (1989), *Still We Rise* (1989), *Profiles in Black* (1990), *Repercussions* (1991), *History of the Drum*

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Jackie Guy, Birmingham 6 April 2002.



# KOKUMA

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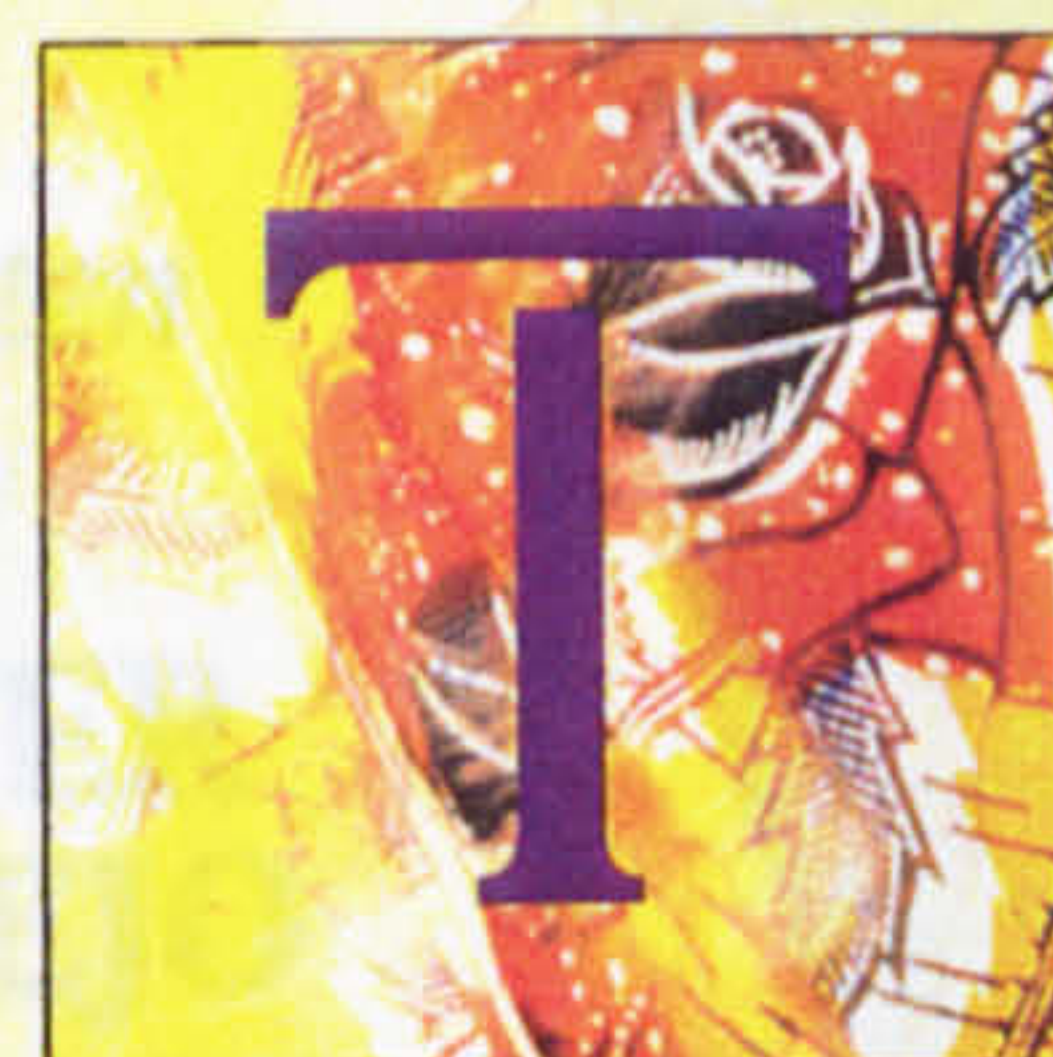
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with support of West Midlands Arts and City of Birmingham

**THUR 15th, FRI 16th, SAT 17th SEPTEMBER 1988. 7.30pm**

**Tickets £4.00 / Concessions £2.50**

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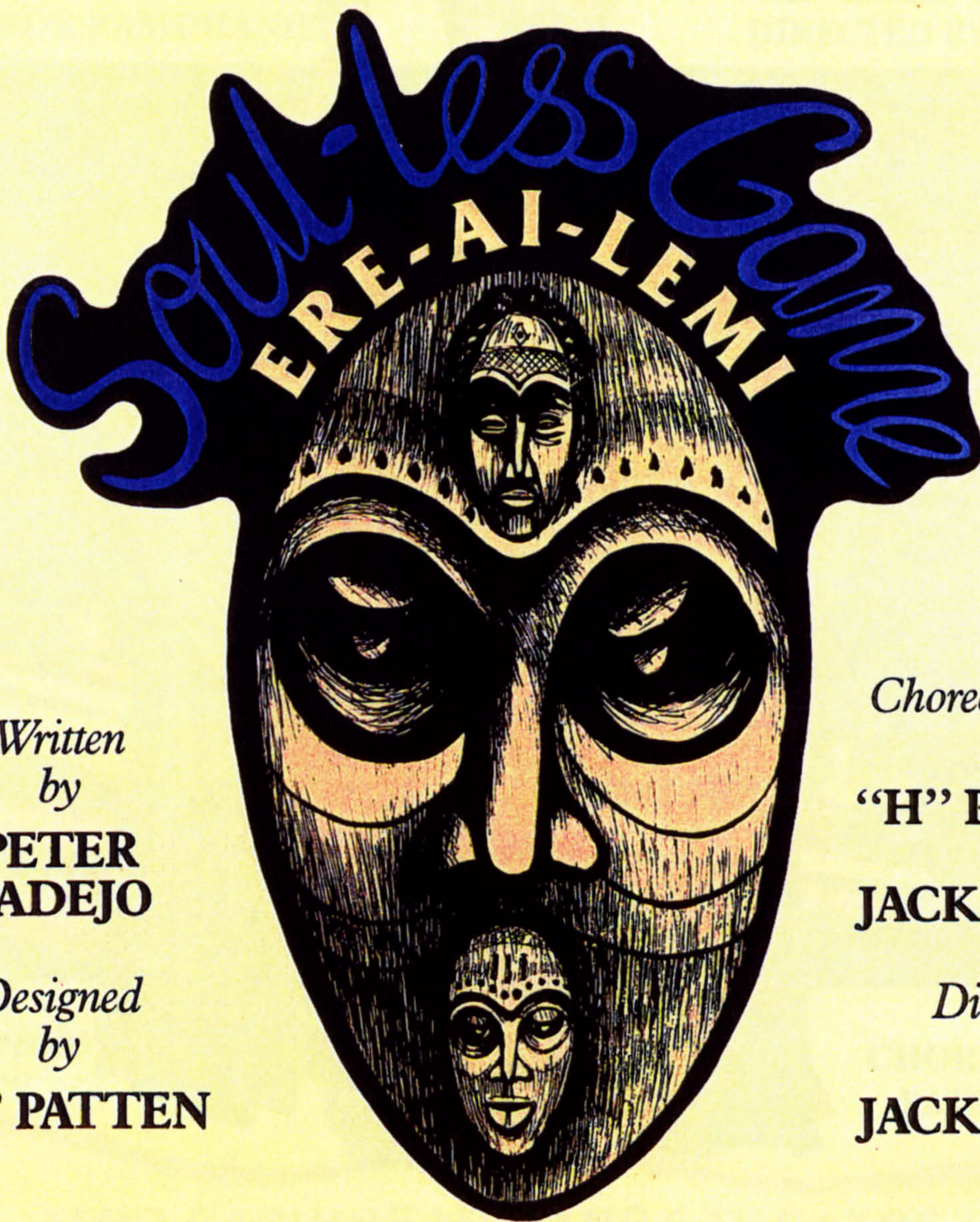




# KOKUMA

## PERFORMING ARTS

*Presents*

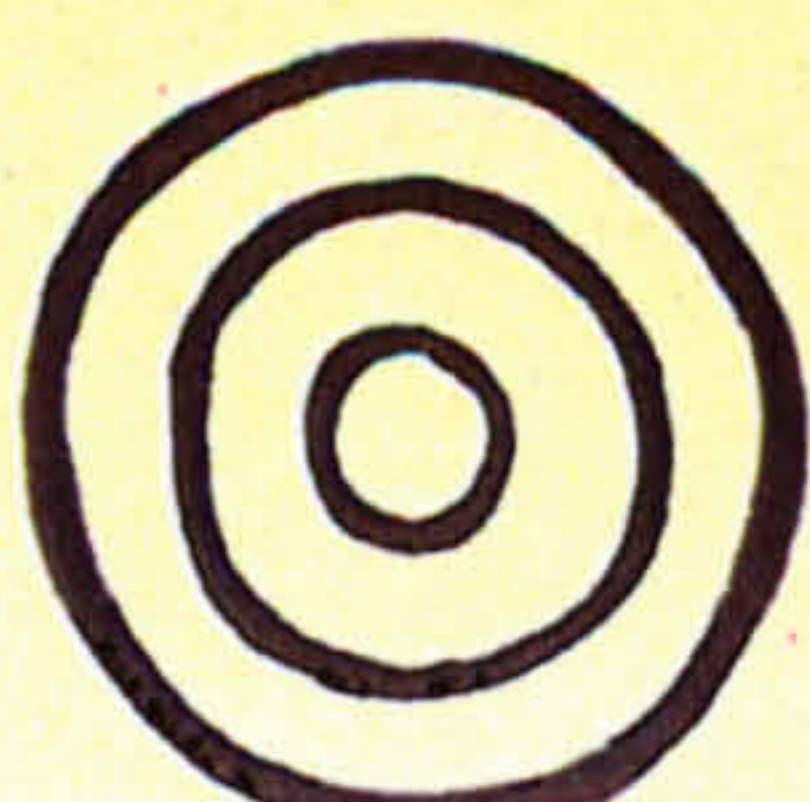
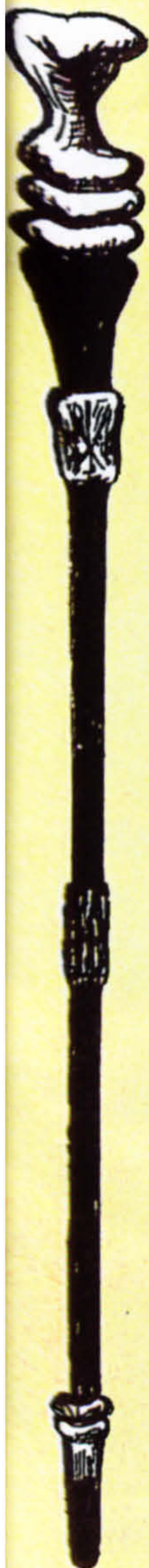
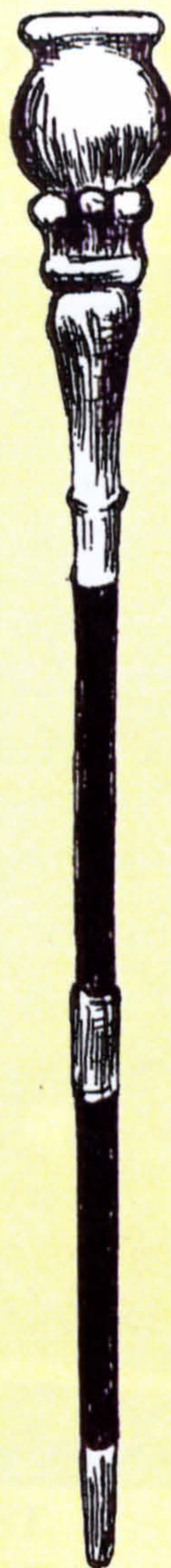


*Written  
by*  
**PETER  
BADEJO**

*Designed  
by*  
**"H" PATTEN**

*Choreographed  
by*  
**"H" PATTEN  
&  
JACKIE GUY**

*Directed  
by*  
**JACKIE GUY**





# KOKUMA

PERFORMING ARTS

## PROFILES IN BLACK

WRITTEN BY BOB RAMDHANIE

DIRECTED BY JACKIE GUY



DESIGNED AND  
CHOREOGRAPHED  
BY JACKIE GUY

GUEST  
CHOREOGRAPHER  
PATSY RICKETTS

AFRO CARIBBEAN DANCE THEATRE



# REPERCUSSIONS

DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY JACKIE GUY  
WRITTEN BY ALMA MOCKYEN  
DESIGNED BY BELINDA ACKERMANN



DANCE

KOKUMA

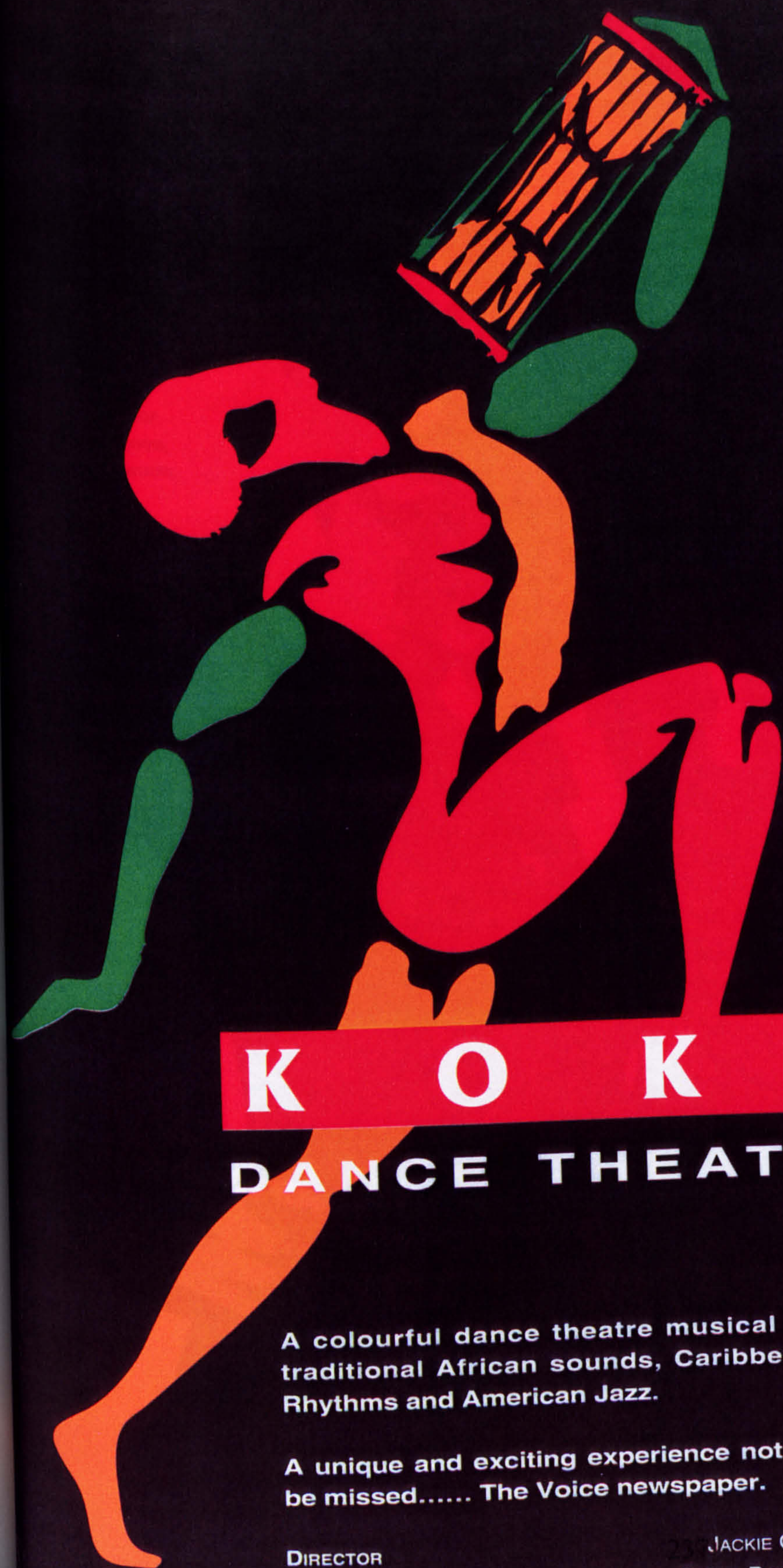
THEATRE



Birmingham City Council



# HISTORY OF THE DRUM



## K O K U M A DANCE THEATRE COMPANY

A colourful dance theatre musical of traditional African sounds, Caribbean Rhythms and American Jazz.

A unique and exciting experience not to be missed..... The Voice newspaper.

DIRECTOR  
CHOREOGRAPHER  
MUSICAL COMPOSER

JACKIE GUY  
PETER BADEJO  
PETER ERSKINE



SUPPORTED BY  
Birmingham City Council







# The Awakening

WRITTEN BY KWESI OWUSU DIRECTED BY PETER BADEJO  
CHOREOGRAPHED BY JACKIE GUY DESIGNED BY FAROUQUE ABDILLAH

**K O K U M A**  
DANCE THEATRE COMPANY

A new and vibrant  
production unfolds  
against a  
backdrop of  
striking images,  
pulsating African  
Caribbean dance,  
music and theatre.





# BENIN

DIRECTED BY JACKIE GUY  
CHOREOGRAPHY BY  
CECELIN JOHNSON AND  
URSELLA LAWRENCE  
DESIGNED BY TONY PHILLIPS  
MUSIC COMPOSED BY  
ANDREW KRISTY

"An enlivening montage of images  
created through dance and music,  
based on the  
great Kingdom of Benin."

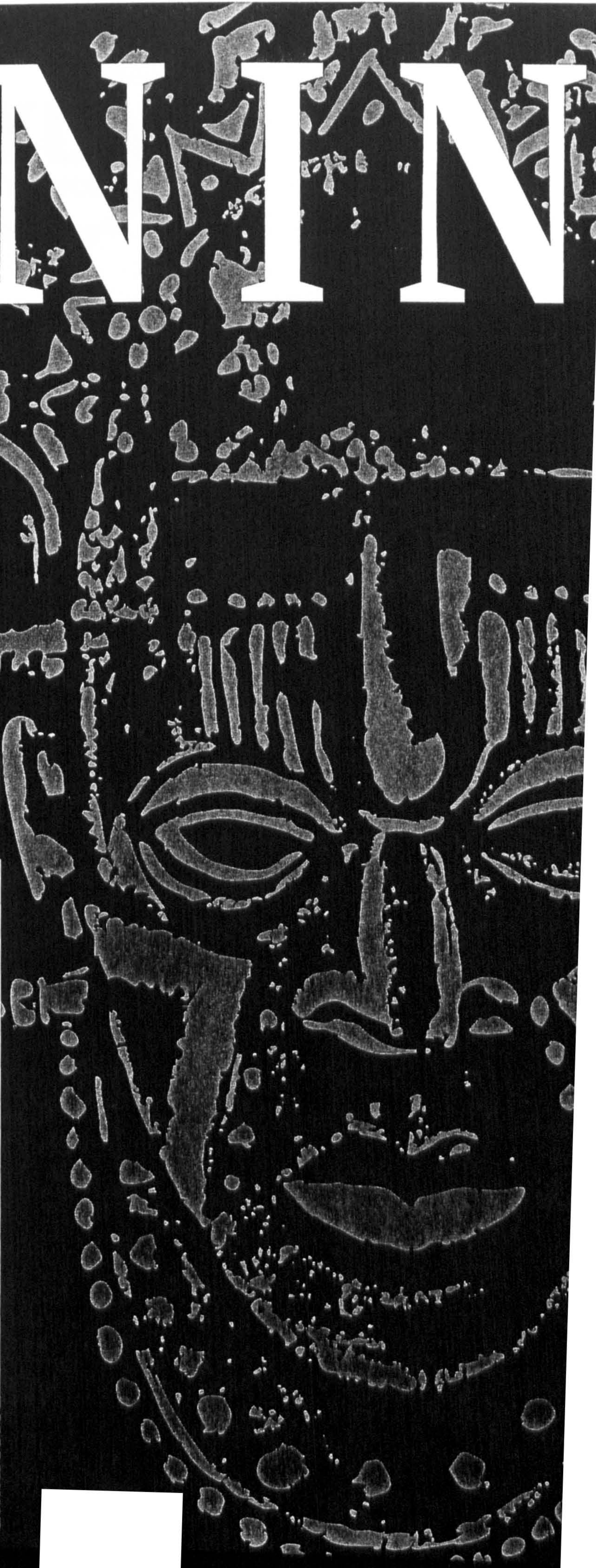
**K O K U M A**

DANCE THEATRE COMPANY



S U P P O R T E D B Y  
Birmingham City Council

Arts Council Funded





**KOKUMA**  
PERFORMING ARTS

*Presents*

# ***BANKRA***



**AFRO CARIBBEAN  
DANCE THEATRE**





# REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS



DIRECTED BY JACKIE GUY

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# SPIRIT of CARNIVAL



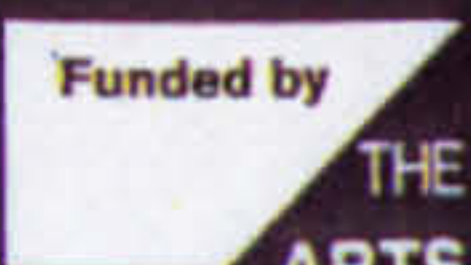
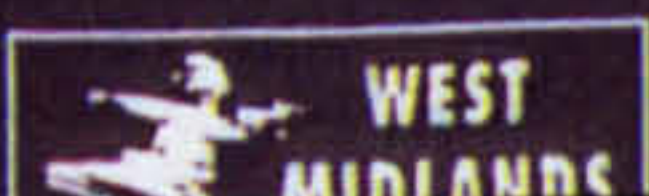
"Mosaics of beats that cover every surface of the auditorium and reverberate in your stomach... the dance, a driving and demanding combination of pulsations and undulations that travel through the body like electricity."

Written by  
JEAN BINTA  
BREESE  
Choreography  
JACKIE GUY &  
KOFFI KOKO  
Musical Composer  
GERALDINE CONNOR  
Set Design SHEILA FAWKES  
Costume Design 'H' PATTEN  
Director JACKIE GUY

...The Times

## K O K U M A

### DANCE THEATRE COMPANY



SUPPORTED BY  
Birmingham City Council







# **CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION**

## **ON CHANGE OF NAME**

**No. 2124147**

**I hereby certify that**

**UNEMPLOYED YOUTH ACTIVITIES**

**having by special resolution changed its name,**

**is now incorporated under the name of**

**KOKUMA**

**Given under my hand at the Companies Registration Office,**

**Cardiff the 2 FEBRUARY 1989**

*C R Williams*

**MRS. C. R. WILLIAMS**

**an authorised officer**

(1992), *The Awakening* (1993), *Benin* (1993), *Bankra* (1994), *Reflections* (1994) and *Spirit of Carnival* (1994). Kokuma had firmly established itself as a leading African and Caribbean Dance Company in the UK and was by now receiving some degree of financial support through public subsidies. During its embryonic stages, the company was financed largely through the efforts of its founding administrator and mentor, but by 1988 it received support from both the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Board. The table below provides a snapshot of the support from West Midlands Arts.

**TABLE 7<sup>17</sup>**

**West Midlands Arts – Support to Kokuma**

YEAR	AMOUNT
	£
1988/89	45,000
1989/90	60,000
1990/91	60,000
1991/92	65,000
1992/93	68,250
1993/94	70,300
1999/2000	248,000
2000/01	76,375

Funding support to the company increased incrementally, though in 1999/2000 there was a ‘one-off’ increased award to support a particular project. In addition

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<sup>17</sup> The information provided in this table is taken from West Midlands Arts (now Arts Council West Midlands) Annual Reports.

to West Midlands Arts, Kokuma received support from Birmingham City Council and other smaller educational and project grants for specific pieces of work. As the company has disbanded, it was quite difficult, except for public records, to get any detailed accounts or other financial information.

Politically and artistically, the terrain for African and Caribbean dance presentations was shifting and officers from public funding agencies were beginning to demand from the company, 'more post modern' choreographic pieces. 'He who pays the piper calls the tune' was becoming a real problem for Kokuma even though the company was still receiving positive reviews. Towards the end of the 20th century, almost eighteen years after the establishment of the company, the company began experiencing some organisational difficulties. It was becoming publicly apparent that artistic vision, administrative development and the aspirations of the public funders were out of synchronisation. Guy himself was always seeking opportunities to consolidate and expand the work of the company and having worked with one of the world's leading contemporary African dancers from Senegal/France,<sup>18</sup> he approached her son, who was a dancer also, about the possibility of joining the company as a dancer in 1995. Patrick Acogny felt that the time was ripe for a move to England from France but by the time Acogny arrived in 1995 he found himself immersed in a very tense and artistically unbalanced situation. According to Guy there was now

A self-appointed temporary Artistic Producer working on a contractual part-time basis, a long serving Artistic Director who was in limbo in terms of getting a new contract and the company was in some degree of

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<sup>18</sup> Germaine Acogny is an international dancer, choreographer and tutor who has been involved in formalising and teaching contemporary African Dance for several years. Currently she is in the process of establishing a permanent school in her native Senegal.



disarray. Patrick by then was invited to become Assistant Artistic Director to me and almost immediately was appointed as Artistic Director.<sup>19</sup>

Kokuma was about to enter another significant developmental phase. After seven distinguished years with the company, Guy's contract ended in July 1995. At 32, Patrick Acogny was an unknown dancer or choreographer in the UK. He was bright, charming and soft-spoken with a French-Senegalese background but it was noticeable that the tension that existed within the company structure did not make for the changeover as planned. He was keen to continue in the direction that the previous artistic directors had been exploring and invited H.Patten, Peter Badejo and George Dzikunu to support him in auditioning new members for Kokuma's next production. Auditions were conducted in August 1995 and the company retained some of the existing members but recruited others to join in this next phase.

Acogny choreographed *Guddi* as his first contribution to black dance in the UK. In October 1995, at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the season's production was launched and the media received his work with a lukewarm response. This was to be expected, especially when you take into consideration the atmosphere under which he was working and the fact that Guy had become synonymous with Kokuma and 'opening nights' for seven years before him.

*Guddi* was not a disaster by any means. Whereas Guy and the various choreographers he had worked with in the past developed their presentations using Caribbean and traditional African dance vocabulary, Acogny introduced a

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Jackie Guy, Birmingham 6 April 2002.

new style into the company's work. His vocabulary was less regimented, more fluid and tended towards more defined line and length, accommodating more Western contemporary influences but retaining some essences of an African aesthetic. The dancers and musicians interacted on stage, complementing each other in subtle and more extroverted ways and his use of lighting to accentuate specific passages of movements ensured that all aspects of his presentations evoked emotions in the audience. His design of costumes reflected an extension of and use of the body, reminiscent of the way Peter Minshall revolutionised carnival costumes in Trinidad decades earlier and overall, the audience appreciated the collective efforts of the company. At the end of the first performance, his mother who was anxiously sitting in the first row of the theatre ran onto the stage and embraced him. That embrace, according to him "was confirmation and affirmation for me knowing that my work pleased my mother and the audience here in England".<sup>20</sup>

A period of stabilisation for the company was paramount for its continuance and Acogny settled into a routine with rehearsals and a touring programme. There were considerable pressures from particular funders to use that particular moment in time to have the company re-locate out of its familiar, community setting to a city-centre arts based environment. With thirteen full-time members, dancers musicians, administration and technical staff, Kokuma moved to the Custard Factory, a franchised artistic space reclaimed from derelict factory buildings. Like other 'foreign' artistic directors working with British-based black companies, Acogny felt that "the company members were not professional at all,

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Patrick Acogny, Birmingham 16 October 1995.

seeing their artistic development as the responsibility of the company and not their own". According to him

Throughout my entire dancing life I had to pay to attend classes in order to improve but here it seems that dancers expect the company to do everything for them. I have made some arrangements with the DanceXchange in terms of using their space for the company and in exchange I teach classes there. Hardly any members attend.<sup>21</sup>

Acogny presented some new and interesting challenges for the company and the African dance sector as a whole, given that he was the first Francophone African leading a national, long-established, professional company in England. The history of the sector was filled with contributions from the Caribbean and from West African choreographers and so he genuinely wanted to offer something that was distinct and contemporary yet acceptable to the major funders and audiences.

At one of the events at the DanceXchange in Birmingham in 1996, dancers from different genres were invited to share their thoughts on the positive and negative aspects of dance development in terms of their own practice. Acogny felt that

As far as the negatives are concerned, there was a lack of opportunities and lack of artistic activity in Birmingham compared to London and Paris though on the positive side, there was a lack of pressure, better access to training facilities and it was easier to work with venues because of smaller sizes.<sup>22</sup>

Towards the end of 1996, Acogny was already in rehearsals for his new production, *Masks*. At a 'work in progress' discussion with a selected audience, Vivien Freakley introduced the afternoon by pointing out that

Choreographers invent their own aesthetic. Patrick was not using masks in the usual way but using 'the spirits' of the masks in the dance. His work will present challenges for the audiences as well as the dancers.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Patrick Acogny, Birmingham 14 July 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Dance Panel discussion with Patrick Acogny, Claire Russ and Paul Douglas at the DanceXchange, Birmingham 13 August 1996.



Audiences are looking for excitement and bursting energy and therefore often do not respond to work like this. Audiences will have to be more thoughtful and more accepting.<sup>23</sup>

Freakley was not apologising for Acogny's work but was sharing in the excitement and in the new directions of this young choreographer. In the discussion following the presentation, it was obvious that members of the audience felt that Acogny was taking the company in a totally new direction but he counter-argued pointing out that "to me, it is not the destruction of one that makes the other, but a true and genuine understanding of the old which informs the new and leads to creation and innovation, whatever you call it".<sup>24</sup> *Masks* toured with some degree of success although the numbers of performances for the company were reducing over the past few years. He had established a pattern of recruiting black dancers from France and the 'flavour' of the company was changing with a tendency towards contemporary, Western dance, though retaining a connection with its African roots. Acogny created *Pagan Masses* in 1998 and almost immediately choreographed *Bidonvilles* for the company's 1998/99 tour.

By this time the company had lost 'its footing' and the support within the local community, given its relocation to the south side of Birmingham City. The changes in Kokuma appeared to be not only about geographical location and artistic direction but also fundamentally about a reduction in its collective spiritual orientation. Previous leaders of the company were able to gel 'the team'

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<sup>23</sup> 'Patrick Acogny's Masks: Work in Progress'. Vivien Freakley was the Chair for the discussion at the DanceXchange, Birmingham 28 November 1996.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* As above.

into a unit and use that energy to satisfy organisational and artistic goals. The company now appeared to be operating as ‘individual cells’ rather than as a ‘collective whole’.

Unlike Guy before him, Patrick Acogny kept an extremely low profile and had internalised what he later articulated. “I am not a Caribbean person and I felt like an outsider here. No one seemed to respect me and so I kept to myself”.<sup>25</sup>

Understandable from his viewpoint, his comments were not wholly appropriate, though many within the sector were now polarised in terms of loyalty. For many key players in the sector, “Patrick came and wanted to do his own thing. He kept to himself, did not contact anybody and sought to keep his connections with Paris”.<sup>26</sup> Acogny by now had changed the company’s logo from the modern image of the drum to a contemporary, tadpole-like image of two dancers and added a new by-line to the letterhead. Kokuma Dance Theatre Company was now marketed as KOKUMA: “An Afrikan Caribbean Dance Theatre Company of Today”.

Externally, the affairs of the company appeared to have been resolved though in April 2000 the dance sector was shocked when the *Evening Mail* in Birmingham reported *Dance Theatre forced to close*.

Birmingham-based Kokuma Dance Theatre, which pioneered Afro-Caribbean dance in Britain over two decades, is to close. The company blamed difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified artistic and administrative staff.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Patrick Acogny, Birmingham 21 January 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Comment from the informal working group who sought to get West Midlands, Birmingham City Council and The Company’s Board of Directors to rescind their decision in 2000.

The closure will result in the loss of four full-time jobs. The seven dancers and musicians employed by the company will be able to see out their contracts.

The company, which receives grants of £255,440 a year from West Midlands Arts and £91,000 a year from Birmingham City Council, has been financially stable over the last few years.<sup>27</sup>

Although a reputable collective of practitioners and others involved in dance (under an Adzido umbrella) contacted the company and key funders to try and reverse the decision, the die was cast! Responses from the Acting Chair of the company indicated that “I note your comments and offer of a recovery strategy and of course I will ensure that your letter, and a copy of this response, is circulated to my fellow Board members at our Board meeting at the end of this month”<sup>28</sup> but there was no other communication from anyone in the company. The response from the Chief Executive of West Midlands Arts was predictable and conciliatory.

We cannot agree with your analysis that this is the result of a “systematic decimation of black arts”. We are currently in urgent discussions with Birmingham City Council to ensure that black arts remain as high if not higher up the agenda than ever. Indeed we are committed to continued investment into opportunities for black artists and the development for culturally diverse work.<sup>29</sup>

Kokuma Dance Company ceased operating as a performance company in June 2000. This, the longest continuously established African Caribbean Dance Company in England, was in *the position* to continue setting the agenda for contemporary African dance in the UK but it was not to be. According to the Performing Arts Officer (Dance & Theatre) at the Regional Arts Board,

I deliberately stay away from the word ‘failed’ as I don’t believe it accurately describes why Kokuma is no longer here. I think it’s that thing

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<sup>27</sup>Evening Mail reporter, ‘Dance theatre forced to close’, *Evening Mail*, 5 April 2000, p.3.

<sup>28</sup> Helga Henry, Acting Chair of Kokuma Dance Theatre. Letter to Members of the Black Dance Sector. 12 April, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Sally Luton, Chief Executive, West Midlands Arts. Letter to George Dzikunu, Adzido. 12 April 2000.



we're all scared of – 'time to call it a day', 'shelf-life' or 'exit strategy'. No one is to blame. Kokuma Dance Theatre could not keep re-inventing itself, and anyway, to what end? In this context, the Board of Kokuma, having deliberated on their choices very carefully, decided that the company should cease trading in June 2000. This was not an easy task, nor a pleasant one but despite the initial shock, the decision was accepted in good grace by company members.<sup>30</sup>

The statement above did little to satisfy the wider dance sector, as many believed that a collective approach between some of the key players in the sector and the funders could have yielded a far better result. During the 1980s, the well-established contemporary dance company, Ballet Rambert, was experiencing similar difficulties but instead of a newspaper report indicating that the company was closing down, *Dance & Mime Newsheet* reported that "Ballet Rambert has announced the appointment of Richard Alston as Artistic Director in succession to Robert North, who left the company in January over artistic disagreements".<sup>31</sup>

From rather unlikely beginnings, Kokuma emerged as one of the most vibrant and dynamic African and Caribbean Dance companies in the UK. Under the leadership and direction of four key directors, the community oriented Mystics and the Israelites evolved into Kokuma Dance Company. Its aspirations were heightened in its second phase of development and the company changed into Kokuma Performing Arts. This period of stabilisation positively changed the artistic direction of the Company and during the third phase, the company changed its name to Kokuma Dance Theatre Company. In its final years of operations the company was known as Kokuma: An Afrikan Caribbean Dance Theatre Company of Today. Like the name changes of the company, there were accompanying changes of 'rehearsal bases' and gradually the company that

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<sup>30</sup> Anouk Perinpanayagam, 'What really happened?', *Dance UK News*, no.39 (Winter 2000/01), p.18.

<sup>31</sup> Dance Umbrella, 'Ballet Rambert' *Dance & Mime Newsheet*, no.24, March 1986, p.3.

started as a community-based dance group began to lose its foothold with audiences from its local community. Throughout its early history, dancers were 'locals' and were known and respected but by the end of the company's existence, many of the dancers were either from abroad or from regions outside of Birmingham. In reality many had no interest or connection to the local community. If all the changes were meant to create new opportunities and stabilise this well-established company, they failed. As Don Kinch wrote at the time of the Company's closure

Kokuma in its naïve drive to achieve honours had not only abandoned its artistic direction, but had also cut itself off from its history and vision. In so doing, its only success was to become another Contemporary Dance Company.

The rise and fall of Kokuma maybe described very simply in the words above. It may even be the story of many other companies. The journey, though, to its demise is far more complex. The questions which remain send a highly charged signal resounding throughout Black Dance and Theatre.<sup>32</sup>

Though Kinch's remarks were focused totally on the company, the demise of Kokuma was a much more complex affair that was adversely affected by its 'distance' from its community and its evolvment away from its spiritual base. The foundation laid by the untrained and undisciplined members of Mystics and the Israelites was grounded in a belief system that had 'direct' connections to Africa. It was articulated by the few through rhythmic drumming and 'free-style' dancing. The 'Rasta' drummers and dancers, who were at that time under 'siege' in their local communities brought together a degree of 'Africanness' and 'soul power' to ghetto dance. They became pioneers in African and Caribbean dance forms simply through the process of marginalisation by the dominant culture and yet were able to take the forms from the margins to the mainstream. The demise

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<sup>32</sup> Don Kinch, 'Black Theatre and Dance Kokuma: Dead?' Unpublished article July 2000.



of the company was a major shock, for having encouraged its physical movement from its local community and 'roots', a new Board with little understanding of the company's past history, and the funding system who wanted Kokuma to be representative of 'something new', collaborated to present a *fait accompli*. In its desire to satisfy external conditions, the company in its twenty-three years of existence, finally lost sight of its own creative forces, vision and spiritual motivation.

(2)        **The Black Dance Development Trust (BDDT)**

African dance practitioners realised that their interests to develop traditional and contemporary African dance forms were being thwarted by the sluggishness and lack of understanding from the regional and national arts funding organisations.

With the sector growing, the time was opportune to take the form to another phase and a small team of practitioners and administrators began to discuss future developments. During 1983 support for an umbrella organisation was canvassed among the different companies and there was a resoundingly positive response to the idea. The informal team opened discussions with a range of potential supporters and by 1984, it was agreed that the BDDT should be established. The programme notes for The Black Dance Development Trust Awards 1989 stated that

The BDDT evolved out of discussions between the Arts Council, Regional Arts Associations, Charitable Trusts, and many keen and committed Black practitioners and administrators in 1984. Black practitioners and administrators felt that their needs were neither being met nor even understood and an ad hoc body began having regular meetings in Birmingham. The CAVE Arts Centre in Birmingham orchestrated these early deliberations and out of these discussions a national Board of Trustees was appointed. Passion and commitment, in themselves, were not the only recipes for laying a firm foundation for this development and the Arts Council, East Midlands Arts, West Midlands



Arts, AEMS, Barrow & Geraldine S. Cadbury Trust and Birmingham City Council provided the funding for the birth of what is now the BDDT.<sup>33</sup>

The establishment of the Trust created some misgivings in the wider contemporary dance-world as sporadic comments and articles confirmed. Jann Parry, a dance critic for the *Observer*, appeared to be asking the Arts Council

Is there such a thing as Black Dance, as distinct from dance?...This daft policy lumps together Indian classical dancers, urban Africans recreating tribal rituals and Caribbean steel band troupes.

It deliberately ignores the work of Black Britons who are trying to find their own, original dance language – which may or may not refer obliquely to the culture of other countries.<sup>34</sup>

Although Parry was not directly referring to the BDDT she was aware of its existence and felt that she was reflecting the mood of other black dancers. At no stage in the development of the Trust however, did the organisation represent anything except the interests of the African dance sector in England. More pointedly in her comments however, is her lack of understanding for ‘Black Dance’. She wrote about ‘Indian classical dances’ but about ‘*Africans recreating tribal rituals*’. Neither the BDDT nor the Arts Council’s policy ignored the ‘Black Britons’ for they were already within the contemporary Western dance arena. Even at its inception, the Trust was already operating under some degree of scrutiny, for in accepting to become *the voice* of a desperately under-resourced dance sector, it began so without genuinely having the physical or financial resources to make a significant difference. In spite of inherent difficulties, the BDDT stated its aims and goals, setting its overall objectives in its mission statement thus:

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<sup>33</sup> Bob Ramdhanie, ‘Black Dance Development Trust’, *Awards 1989 Programme*, 13 January 1990, p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Jann Parry, *The Observer*, 1 March 1987.

The Black Dance Development Trust is a national organisation representing the interests of African Peoples dance and music forms. Its mission is to develop, support, sustain and promote all aspects of theory and practice within the Art forms by working with local, national and international professionals. In carrying out these activities, the Trust is committed to working closely with other organisations that share its objectives. It sees development of the *form* within the context of Britain as a pluralistic society.<sup>35</sup> [My emphasis]

The mission of the Trust clearly differentiated between black people in dance (whether African, Contemporary, Ballet etc) and the development of African dance in England, focussing on the development of the *form* and introducing theory and *spiritual guidance* into the infrastructure for development. For the first time in England, African dance was beginning to advance the principles of continuity, through adopting a new approach in tandem with professional practitioners from the continent and the diaspora. As black dance was used as a shorthand, *political* label for many years, the rationale for calling the Trust the Black Dance Development Trust was quite deliberate at that specific period in time, for it encapsulated the political, the social, psychological, spiritual and religious meanings for large sections of British black society. Most importantly for the dance sector there was now a growing black continental connection.

The Trust had quite early identified the gap between African dance practitioners and venues and promoters and although numerous attempts were made to address those issues strategically with the venues and promoters themselves, there were never any serious dialogue to take the ideas further. Offers to funding officers to act as mediators between ‘the product and the marketplace’ also did not yield any positive results and though venues, promoters and arts officers voiced support about the development of black dance in the UK, a genuine marriage of similar

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<sup>35</sup> The Mission Statement of the BDDT.



thoughts never materialised. Creating work with limited opportunities to promote it, hampered African dance development, and the Trust, conscious of the fact that it was having little impact with external agencies, focused on its own internal vision and rapidly began to develop programmes where it felt it would have a greater impact, that of continuous professional development.

The Trust had set itself a very challenging programme in its effort to re-present and re-define African dance in England. It forged several new alliances and established meaningful connections between Africans from the continent with black practitioners in the UK. It developed a global view of the African, combining the sentiments and teaching of Marcus Garvey, the belief systems of the Rastafarians, the scholarship of African dancers and musicians, with regular dance practice to lay bare the distortions about the practiced forms. It offered new insights into African dance primarily through directly improving the quality of dance training and thus through this, supporting the growth of more professionally choreographed presentations by the existing companies. African dance energies, for the first time, were being co-ordinated nationally into a more cohesive and organised dance voice in the UK. The Trust complemented, nurtured and nourished independent dancers and professional companies and provided collective services on behalf of the dance sector as a whole. It was bold and ambitious in its outlook and detailed some of its specific objectives:

To provide access to international choreographers of African people's dance and to provide and develop support for a dance summer school providing training at various levels in African music and dance.

To further develop the infrastructure which is currently sustained on an ad hoc basis by existing companies, participants and supporters, by establishing co-operative schemes with trusts, local authorities and other regional and national funders.



To establish links with research institutions and practitioners wherever African people live.<sup>36</sup>

The formalisation of the Trust as a registered charity meant that there was a constituted body to represent the interests of African dance and the Board of Trustees was expanded. Mike Huxley and the late Peter Brinson were stalwarts in their support for the Trust and acted as Trustees for several years.

The activities of the Trust were varied and included regular training programmes in music, dance practice and arts administration. It hosted an annual Summer School with national and international tutors, introduced a programme of African Dance Awards, published an African Dance Bulletin (BAD NEWS) and supported ten members from the Trust to undertake an Open University Programme in Dance. In its keenness to satisfy demands, it established an Outreach Team based in the East Midlands. Initially the outreach team consisted of Carol Arthurs and Nicky Reid, and later H. Patten replaced Arthurs. The team serviced the development of smaller companies in the East and West Midlands.

The annual Summer Schools invited the best from the continent and the diaspora to share and engage with aspirants in the UK; to challenge and be challenged by the participants and to join in and celebrate with the African dance sector. These Summer Schools were extremely successful and since the demise of the Trust over ten years ago, they remain the one significant element of the Trust's activities that practitioners still clamour for. Summer School II in 1987 focussed on *Religion and Religious Rituals* and brought together distinguished international practitioners and academics to discuss and develop critical

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<sup>36</sup> BDDT, 'Constitution', Objects, 2.1, 2.3 & 2.4., 1984, p.1.

is alive and that one is appreciative of the breath that God has given.

- ii. A strong belief that the survival of the individual depends upon the survival of the entire group is perhaps the most distinctive feature of sub-Saharan values. This sense of community is reflected in the communal organisation of sacred and secular institutions with drumming at their core.
- iii. And the drum is a living thing – libation is poured on the finished drum as it is poured when the tree is cut and the skin is taken from the animal sacrificed. The drum is believed to have been created by the Supreme Being after the town crier and is both the voice of God and the chronicler of history.
- iv. The spirit world is not separate from the temporal. Together they make a unified whole.
- v. The relationship of man to the universe is important. This universe has many forces – man alive or departed, animal, vegetable, mineral. Some forces are negative. Man has in him the power and ability through the life force to control the negative elements. Hence the devotion of black people to rituals which centralise and unify the community forces and calls upon ancestors and the Supreme Being. Man has a God-given urge to search for knowledge to control negative forces. From the Supreme Being man draws his source of power. If this power is correctly employed, then man succeeds, if he deviates he loses control over the elements and evil results.
- vi. Agoro Nya Odomma – to play – singing together begets children of love<sup>39</sup>

Practitioners in England were reinforcing the value systems that had remained dormant in their souls but which now found external expression in music and movement. The Trust purposefully introduced ‘joined up’ thinking into practice and heightened practitioners’ awareness of the value, significance and meaning of African dance and of the relationship between man and his spiritual and physical environment. Through working with international tutors, British born dancers were being exposed to the complexities of various elements of African

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<sup>39</sup> Professors C.K. Ladzepko and A.M. Opoku and Sheila Barnett, ‘Narration’. Paper produced for the dance presentation of the BDDT’s Summers School II at Scraptoft Campus, University of De Montfort, Leicester, 14 August 1987.



approaches to dance presentations in these areas. British-based African and Caribbean dancers and musicians supported the international tutors and, for the first time, the Summer School introduced an arts administration programme.<sup>37</sup> African dance practices that were once banned by the British centuries ago in the Caribbean were now being implanted in British soil by young, black Caribbean dancers. Music, movement, meanings and collective energies of the religious dance forms often ignited into explosive but controlled workshops as H. Patten remembers

I remember one of “CK’s” classes where we danced *Husago* over and over until the room became spiritually charged and the rain started to fall heavily on the glass windows. On another occasion during an evening session we started to dance Kumina. Carol Arthurs and I were dancing together and I remember it got to a stage where we just seemed to be gliding around. It felt very good until Emmanuel Tagoe took over the lead drum and started to play some contrary breaks which just changed the mood and took the ‘charge’ out of the air. Afterwards he said that we looked like we were about to get possessed which is why he changed the drumming.<sup>38</sup>

A joint paper by the international tutors highlighted the significance of the theme and underscored the relationship between religious practice and dance and its meaning for its practitioners.

To fully appreciate and understand Black dance knowledge of sub-Saharan concepts become necessary. The following are concepts which influence attitudes and values that affect sub-Saharan Religion and Religious Rituals:-

- i. Dance is a manifestation of creation and life. It reflects the breath of God, the Supreme Being. It is an acceptance of the fact that one

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<sup>37</sup> Professors Albert M. Opoku and C.K. Ladzepko led the seminars and workshops from an African perspective; Sheila Barnett and Loris ‘Billy’ Lawrence explored the themes from a Jamaican viewpoint and the British-based practitioners who complemented the work of the international tutors included Jackie Guy (Jamaica), George Dzikunu and Emmanuel Tagoe (Ghana) and Nomsa Calusa and Joe Legwabe (South Africa). Ifemu Omari co-ordinated and led the arts administration programme.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003. “CK” is the familiar name of Professor Ladzepko. See footnote 36 for details of other tutors.



performing arts and directly being nourished to continue their own work.

Summer School II crystallized the relationship between religion and dance practice and encouraged practitioners to be guided creatively - through spiritual enrichment - in their performance programmes.

Some dancers were for the first time beginning to fully appreciate the all-compassing nature of the form in which they were involved. Other practitioners who were already spiritually motivated and were familiar with African forms of worship agreed that the Summer School provided nourishment for the 'souls' of the Black dance performers and teachers. Cemented throughout the two-week period and reinforced both before and after these international Summer Schools, African dance had a solid foundation in terms of theoretical guidance and practice. Dancers from the Caribbean and British blacks were now meeting and working more regularly with dancers and drummers from Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia and South Africa and the transmission of African values and beliefs were percolating through these formal and informal sessions. These practical workshops were providing opportunities for understanding and challenging, for clarification and reinforcement and for a thorough grounding in the forms of African dance through 'self-identity'. Members of the Trust participated in a stepped programme of learning, moving from locally based training programmes throughout the year towards the two-week specialist Summer School programme.

The Trust was pivotal in providing both political and spiritual stability, though in the process, it also had to manage internal conflicts that seemed to remain at the surface, especially because there was competition for resources. Feelings of



displacement, and of not being acknowledged as the ones who had laid the platform for African dance development in the UK, led some Caribbean members to see continental dancers as usurpers. Conversely, some continental Africans adopted an attitude that they were the 'true' Africans with the knowledge, history and ability to disperse African cultural traditions and felt that some of their Caribbean 'brothers and sisters' were not sufficiently grounded in the practice, yet they wished to lead. There were elements of the truth to both sides of this debate and the Trust clarified the position, which led the way to a better understanding between the two differing views.

Like many other small black organisations the Trust was attempting to satisfy a broad range of demands. In an independent external research programme entitled, *African People's Dance: The State of the Arts in 1987*, it was noted that

On paper, the Trust's aims and objectives cover many of the areas discussed in this report; in practice, priorities between artistic, creative development and administrative progression do not appear to have been clarified.

Individuals within the RAAs, the ACGB, and organisations such as Dance Umbrella or the National Organisation for Dance and Mime, while being aware of the Trust's existence, are generally unsure of its role; indeed, the same is also true of some members of Black Dance Companies themselves. As a comparatively young organisation, it is clear that the Trust is still defining its own role within the Black dance profession, although improved communication both internally and externally must be seen as an immediate priority.<sup>40</sup>

Anne Millman's conclusions were not totally unexpected given that staff at the Trust was in post for between twelve to eighteen months. However Millman did not fully appreciate that the Trust had specifically chosen a particular route to follow in its early stages of development. Efforts to engage key external players

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<sup>40</sup> Anne Millman, 'African People's Dance: The State of the Art', *Research Findings*, September 1987, p.48-49.



had been saturated, hence the decision to deliver quality services to the diverse, demanding sector. Secondly and more importantly staff were constantly engaged in fundraising to keep the organisation afloat and when outputs are viewed against the reality of that type of situation, the Trust was highly successful during its relatively short period of existence.

In order to assess the strategic importance of the Trust, there were two other levels that should have been taken into consideration. In the first instance *the level of tangible and visible activities*. In that respect, the Trust filled gaps that were both glaring and desperately needed within the African dance sector. There was no African dance sector, except for the activities of a disparate number of individuals, before the BDDT was established and the Trust has to be credited for bringing into existence an African dance sector through its creative and imaginative series of training programmes, Summer Schools, Dance Awards<sup>41</sup>, seminars, conferences and celebration events. Excluding the international Summer School that is being developed by Badejo Arts (see chapter five) no other collective activities are currently undertaken on behalf of the sector. Those programmes were seen as critical to the development and profile of the form in the UK and keynote speakers at those events included Larry Hudson (University of Warwick), the late Bernie Grant MP<sup>42</sup> and Professor C.K. Ladzepko (Berkley University, USA).

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<sup>41</sup> Award winners over the years included Barry Anderson (Ekome Dance Company), Peter Blackman (Steel & Skin), George Dzikunu (Choreography, Adzido Pan-African Dance Ensemble), H. Patten (Choreography), Jackie Guy (Choreography, Kokuma Performing Arts). In 1988 I received an award for my ambassadorial contribution to African Dance in the UK.

<sup>42</sup> Bernie Grant MP pointed out the need for dancers to be aware of and become more engaged in the struggle against racism and xenophobia.



On a second level, the *intangible benefits, immeasurable yet operational* in the lives of practitioners. They were introduced to new and critical ways of thinking about and presenting African dance forms, through using knowledge of African religious practices and spirituality. The Trust provided opportunities for members to enjoy spiritual rejuvenation which led to a greater realisation of 'self' as a black dancer in the UK. 'Self' as African dancer, as African and Caribbean and British; 'self' that was nurtured and not negated and 'self' that appreciated African dance had its own aesthetic. African dance is not about space and time, line and length, professional training, use of the body and choreography, it is fundamentally about a spiritual force, in essence 'the soul force' which Fielding Stewart and Barrett alluded to and which finds expression within religious practice and within collective, community activities. Summer Schools created a cohesive structure in which participants shared in a spiritual process through the creative use of movement, music and theoretical insights.

Core funding to the Trust directly came from the Arts Council of England and during its six year operations, that was added to by contributions from West Midlands Arts, Calouste Gulbenkian, A.E.M.S (Arts Education in a Multi-cultural Society), generated income, the Cadbury Trust, Birmingham City Council and East Midlands Arts. Specific support for the Summer Schools came from a mixture of sources including the Arts Council (Training and Music Departments), Regional Arts Boards, Visiting Arts Unit, The Baring Foundation, Allen Lane Foundation and direct contributions from participants.



Throughout its history, the Trust ensured that African dance practitioners were rooted in a theory and practice that had been evolving for centuries. International tutors to Summer Schools were selected specifically for their in-depth knowledge of the traditional forms. They understood the power of the ancestral belief system, knew the deep meanings and functionality of the range of dances and provided a solid foundation for development of the forms. Attention to details in theory, form and structure, interpretation and costumes, relationship to music, musicians, other dancers and audiences were at times too taxing for practitioners who simply wanted to dance. Summer Schools initially catered for musicians and dancers but later offered programmes in arts administration and attracted participants from professional companies in the UK and also had some international students. Altogether there were approximately forty participants for the full two-week programme with other participants attending on a daily basis.

In 1991, the Arts Council appraised the Trust. In the Summary of the final appraisal report, it noted that “The Black Dance Development Trust (BDDT) has achieved substantial development for African peoples’ dance in the first five years, particularly in the areas of training, international contacts/networks, and advocacy”.<sup>43</sup> The Appraisal Team, consisted of six members (three blacks and three whites) and they made several pertinent observations on the practical aspects of the Trust, but focussed on the external ‘observables’ and ignored the importance of the ‘spiritual’ dimension and the ‘sector cohesion’ that the Trust provided and which no other organisation since has been able to provide. There was the standard checklist that highlighted areas that the Arts Council wished to

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<sup>43</sup> ‘The Black Dance Development Trust, Appraisal Report: Confidential Draft’, *Arts Council Report*, 27 February 1991, p.3.



see implemented or improved before it would continue its support to the organisation. The list was not particularly onerous and the Arts Council recognised the need for a longer-term funding arrangement to assist the Trust in its advanced planning.

By now the Arts Council's funding to the Trust was becoming problematic, essentially because the dance department at the Arts Council was ambivalent in terms of its attitude to traditional African dance. There was a growing band of British born and trained contemporary black dancers and though not explicit, the Dance Department felt that the Trust had satisfied a role at a point in time and that dance had moved on. There was no open dialogue with the Trust about how black dancers in Western forms and black dancers in African and Caribbean forms could operate in a multi-diverse Britain and there was a general feeling that 'form' was subservient to the issues of colour. Black dance was about black people. Activists within the African dance sector at that time felt that the Department wanted to dictate how African dance should develop in England and their preference appeared to be in favour of supporting 'blacks in dance' and not culture-specific dance forms. The relationship between the Arts Council and the Trust was fractured, and although at that point in time I was not directly working with the Trust, I was commissioned by the Trust to undertake an internal review.<sup>44</sup> There were anomalies on both sides that could have been rectified within a time-scaled period but there was open distrust between the organisation and the funding system and funding for the organisation ceased in 1990.

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<sup>44</sup> At this point I had already left the BDDT though still maintaining regular contact with the Trust.



The Trust had operated successfully for over six years and witnessed changes in the understanding and practice of African dance in the UK. In that one specific sense, it was of immense value and laid the foundation for much of what is continued in African dance today. In other areas, its sense of achievement was much more short-lived primarily as groups and individuals reverted to operating in isolation from the sector in the absence of a unifying organisation working and planning on behalf of the African dance. However, the Trust both formally and informally re-connected the roots between the continent and the diaspora, solidified the relationship between dance and its wider role in the life of black people everywhere, spawned several new activities, encouraged international links to grow into internal collaborations, nurtured new dance companies and left a legacy upon which much of African dance development today is building.

The influence of the Trust was felt nationally and reflected in dance development initiatives in the regions. In the report, *Black Dance Development on Merseyside in 1991*, issues which the Trust were addressing were identified as the issues affecting black dance in Merseyside. “The major needs in relation to the development of black dance can be summarised as follows” and the report identified those as training, administration, performance opportunities and inspiration.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in a proposal from East Midlands Arts (1991) to establish a Black Dance/Music Development Worker, there was correspondence with the ex-Director of the Trust. Accordingly, black dance “is taken to mean the traditional dance and music styles of the peoples of Africa and the Caribbean,

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<sup>45</sup> Susanne Burns, ‘Black Dance Development on Merseyside’, Merseyside Arts Report, September 1991, p.22.



and related contemporary forms”<sup>46</sup> as that was the generally accepted use of the term by the BDDT.

Five years after the Trust had ceased to operate, it was noted in an Arts Council Consultative Green Paper that

New young work has found it particularly hard to establish itself in the absence of infrastructure and clear career paths. Useful initiatives like the Black Dance Development Trust which increased the skills and range of the sector could not be sustained. Major showcase events like the Black Theatre Forum Seasons have been stopped. International links, which provided stimulus and role-models, have declined.<sup>47</sup>

In recent times, the African dance fraternity has become more fragmented but with the existing companies and some independent artistes committed to the production of contemporary African dance in England, the dance form remains secure, though the regular funded performance companies may not be. With the possibility of the establishment of DanceAfrica (see below), African dance should re-surface to begin the fourth phase of African and Caribbean dance development in the UK.

### (3) DanceAfrica – (DA)

Though still in its embryonic stages, the idea of establishing DanceAfrica has been gestating for several years. Badejo Arts has been involved in this project since its inception and continues to be the lead organisation for the project. The concept received a boost in 2001 when I was commissioned by ACE, London to explore what were the relevant issues amongst the fragmented black dance sector

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<sup>46</sup> Rachel Gibson, ‘Proposal to Establish a Black Dance/Music Development Worker Post in Leicester and Leicestershire’, *Correspondence*, 4 September 1991, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> The Arts Council of England, ‘The Landscape of Fact: Towards a policy for Cultural Diversity for the English Funding System: African, Caribbean, Asian and Chinese Arts’, February 1997, p.21.





## MISSION STATEMENT

**Black Dance Development Trust** is a national organisation representing the interests in peoples dance and music forms. Its mission is to develop, support, sustain and promote all aspects of theory and practice within those art forms by working with local, national and international professionals. In carrying out these activities the Trust is committed to working closely with other organisations who share its objectives. It sees development of dance within the context of Britain as a pluralistic society.



## FOREWORD

### WELCOME

The purpose of African Culture is frequently used to cloud the diversity within it. This has caused wide scale generalisation, resulting in a denial of opportunity in some areas. For example, African Dance Companies here in the United Kingdom are not recognised by the British Council to be appropriate subjects for performance tours to African countries.

Often, some Venue Managers are unable to see differences in African Dance Companies. Consequently once they promote one company they consider it an adequate representation of African Peoples dance in their venue. This seems to suggest that qualitative differences are not entered on a comparative basis. Neither is there understanding of the context within which each company operates.

Five nights of performances are designed to show the rich cultural diversity of African dance. Occasions like these will become Annual platforms for showing the developed and developing choreography of African dance companies here in the United Kingdom.

Under Trustee and Convenor to the Board of Trustees I extend a hand of friendship and brotherhood in welcoming you to these five nights of performances. I also hope that you will be able to support the Trust directly through your presences here tonight and indirectly through your advocacy.

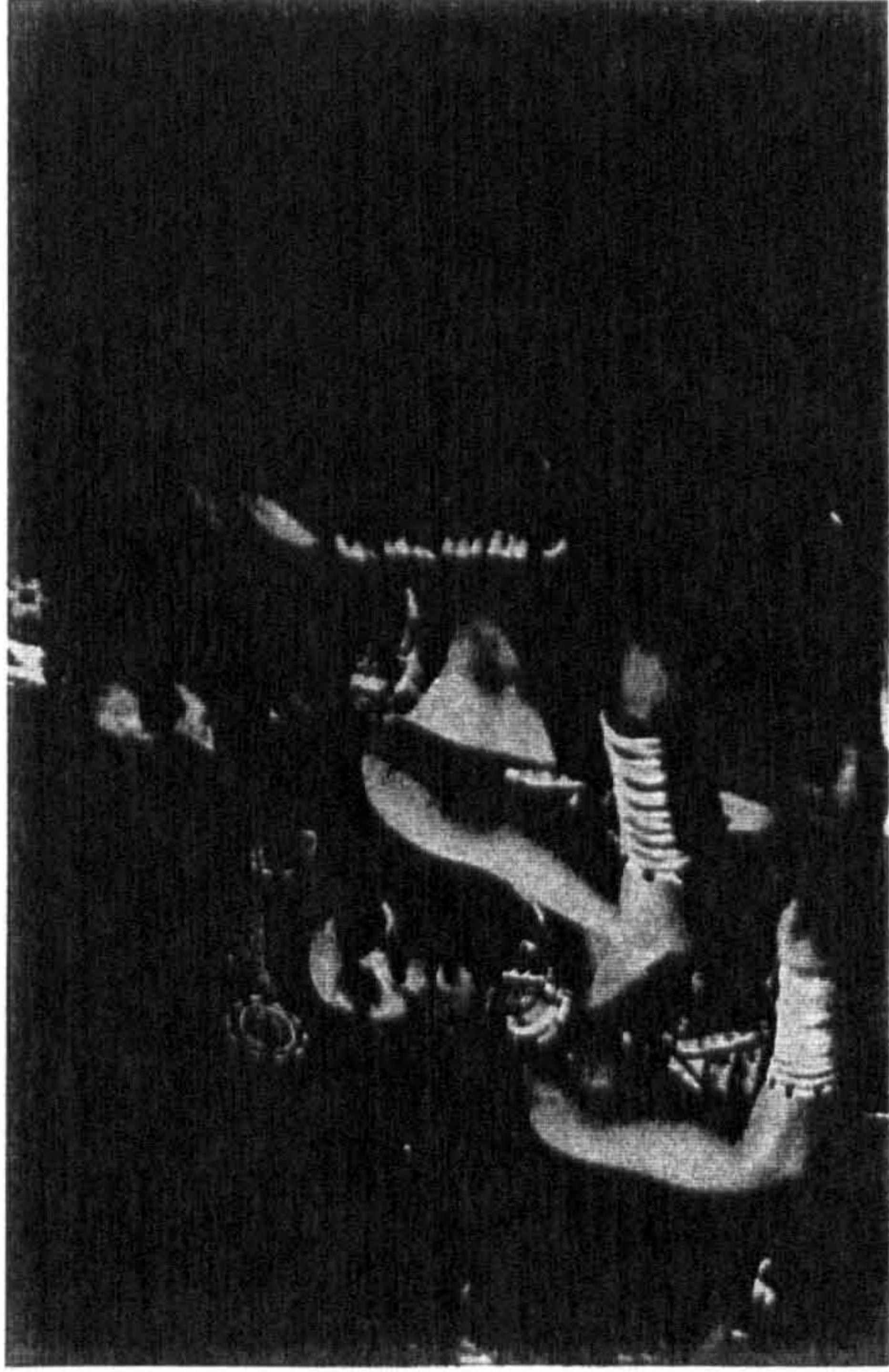
A most enjoyable evening!

**Charles Washington  
CONVENOR**

## TUESDAY — 9th MAY 1989

### DAGARTI ARTS

A collective of seven musicians, dancers and drummers led by Mario Diekuuroh, (one of the best xylophone players in Britain). Dagarti Arts are currently touring with their latest production NUBA-SIER. In this one hour fifteen minute performance, song and rhythm are used in a refreshingly innovative way to present both traditional and imaginatively created dance pieces. The combination of 'talking drums' and xylophones is guaranteed good listening.



## WEDNESDAY — 10th MAY 1989

### ODEHE GROUP

A recently formed Ghanaian group from London, who perform traditional music and dance of Ghana.

This performance will be one of their first 'Public Performances' and promises to be 'a little different'.

### KANTAMANTO

**KANTAMANTO** was formed in Manchester by Kwasi Asare. Kantamanto is a traditional African drumming company. Kwasi specialises in the 'Religious' music of Ghana and the group passionately believes that drumming provides a direct channel to the spirit African ancestry.

### KIZZIE DANCE GROUP

**KIZZIE** is a young group from Leicester. Though they are not exclusively African based, Kizzie are a group who are keen to explore all black dance forms using drumming/reggae — any type of black music that inspires their creativity.

## THURSDAY — 11th MAY 1989

### KOKUMA PERFORMING ARTS

**KOKUMA** is a Yoruba (Nigerian) word meaning 'This One Will Never Die'. The Company was formed in 1978, out of a shared commitment to African dance and music, under the direction of Bob Ramdhanie.

In 1985, Kokuma staged two short dance/theatre productions, a first for Black Dance in Britain. Working with WATU WAZURI, they presented ABIBRIMMA and BACKRAMAN. UNWANTED PRINCE (1985/6) and NINE NIGHTS (1986/7) were produced under the Artistic Direction of Derrick Anderson. NINE NIGHTS celebrated Caribbean Focus, with a fusion of traditional African and Caribbean Culture.

TRAILS OF ADO (1987/8) performed to much acclaim and was choreographed by Jackie Guy, now KOKUMA's Artistic Director.

KOKUMA is celebrating its 10th anniversary with ELEMENTS, a spectacle of African and Caribbean dance and music, choreographed and directed by Jackie Guy.

## FRIDAY — 12th MAY 1989

### DADA BUKOM

**DADA BUKOM** is a dance troupe which grew out of Bukom Arts Workshop in London. They specialise in the performance of traditional dances from Afrika. These exciting musicians and dancers have been entertaining audiences all over London with their rich music, song and dance. Their performance is an event not to be missed. So too is their music and dance workshops which are held in numerous places throughout London.

## LANZEL AFRIKAN ARTS CO-OPERATIVE

**LANZEL** is a group of multi-talented performers specializing in Afrikan Arts. They combine music, song, dance and drama into one art form. The items in the company's repertoire depict stories, legends, religious and ceremonial festivals with community scenes as well as tribal warfare.

Lanzel is now well established and is the first Afrikan Dance Company to be linked with an institute of Higher Education (Wolverhampton Polytechnic) in Britain, providing performances, workshops and lectures on some of the modular courses leading to the B.A. (Humanities) degree, the Diploma of Higher Education course and the B.Ed. degree for students training to be teachers.

Lanzel has an experienced teaching team that undertake an educational programme, not only focusing on the particular skills involved in music and dance, but gives an awareness of social and economical factors within Ghanaian society, i.e. History, Cooking etc.

## SATURDAY — 13th MAY 1989

## ADZIDO PAN AFRIKAN DANCE ENSEMBLE

**ADZIDO** — in the Ewe language of Ghana — signifies the Oak Tree, around whose great girth no single man can reach. A resonant image for a company whose members are drawn from a dozen different countries and who unite in the cultural richness and diversity of the Great Afrikan Continent.

Adzido is now recognised as Britain's leading company in the field of traditional Afrikan dance. The company was formed in 1984, as the result of an extremely successful education programme, funded by the Manpower Services Commission. After two years of training, Adzido presented their first production, 'In the Village of Afrika' which toured Britain, for more than one year. The Company has achieved considerable critical acclaim, often performing to capacity audiences.

**ADZIDO PAN AFRIKAN DANCE ENSEMBLE** presents in performance a colourful and vibrant tapestry of dances from across Afrika, demonstrating the strength and beauty of Afrikan traditional culture.

A wide repertoire of dances is performed by the twenty-nine strong company of Master dancers and musicians, many of whom have established international reputations as leaders in their field.



The **Black Dance Development Trust** is funded by: The Arts Council, Barrow & Geraldine S. Cadbury Trust, Birmingham City Council, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, East Midlands Arts, West Midlands Arts. Occasional funds are provided from other Trusts/Companies. Celebration II is sponsored by the Arts Council, East Midlands Arts and the Black Dance Development Trust.

All photographs by **Nigel Madhoo**

Design: **Carbonel**





BULLETIN OF AFRIKAN DANCE IS THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BLACK DANCE DEVELOPMENT TRUST

# BDDT to launch new course with Open University



TRAINING THE TRAINERS. PHOTO: NIGEL MADHOO

**F**or many years music and dance practitioners have been yearning for a teachers training course. No longer will they have to wait. Beginning February 1990, the Open University in conjunction with BDDT will be running a Training The Trainers course.

Successful candidates will receive a half credit towards an Open University degree.

Additionally the course will provide a number of options from which participants may choose. They will be able to complete an Open University degree in Education or any other subject.

Alternatively, rather than regard the course as complete, they can choose

not to take the examination and see the course as skill enhancement training.

Recruitment will be through BDDT, anyone wishing to be on it can obtain an application form from BDDT or the Open University. Application forms should be returned to BDDT and not the Open University. If forms are returned to the OU it will cost an additional £30 or £40. The closing date is the 3rd of November 1989.

The course will begin in February and end in October, and will cost £230. On October 21st 1989, a meeting was held at Handsworth Cultural Centre, to discuss the programme.

For further details on the outcome of the meeting, contact the BDDT. 269

## Mission Statement

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BULLETIN OF AFRIKAN DANCE IS THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BLACK DANCE DEVELOPMENT TRUST

# Patsy Ricketts - 25 years of Dance Theatre

**PATSY RICKETTS** gained international recognition this year through celebrations of her 25 years within dance theatre. Tributes and representations from the Alvin Hayley Dance Company in the United States attracted television and radio coverage.

Miss Ricketts arrived in England on 18 July to prepare for the Sixth annual Dance and Music Summer School of the Black Dance Trust based in Birmingham. This will be her second year as one of the tutors at Summer School, and it gives us the opportunity to look back on a unique career that spans 25 years.

In 1979 she left the National Dance Theatre Company to have her first child. Children and family took up 5 years of her career, and she admits that "the thought of going on stage after such a long absence was really very frightening." But she took the decision to dance again, and with the support of her teacher L'Antoinette, she made a convincing comeback in 1984. She describes this re-learning process in her own words: "I had to learn everything all over again from scratch, like a baby learning to walk. At first my muscles wouldn't do what I wanted them to, but gradually, I remembered the technique and the things I had been taught by Arthur Mitchell when I was in New York in the

late sixties. Of course the spirit of dance was always there"

Although Miss Ricketts is reluctant to talk about her personal life, she briefly discusses her surprise decision in 1978 to become a Rastafarian. After 12 years, she still holds firmly to the Rastafarian faith. "I'm still a Rasta and I don't intend to change that because I know it's the right thing". As a devoted Rasta, she reads a chapter of the Bible every day and she says she has read it through, from Genesis to Revelation, twice. She also raises her children in the faith. Her only daughter, Tanya, already shows a strong interest in dance and she says that she will support Tanya if she decides to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Miss Ricketts has danced and choreographed for the National Dance Theatre Company, L'Acadco Dance Company, and teaches at the Jamaica School of Dance. Her success at presenting traditional Reggae dance for a contemporary stage makes her one of the most accomplished in the field. She will be passing on her ideas and expertise to the participants of Summer School.

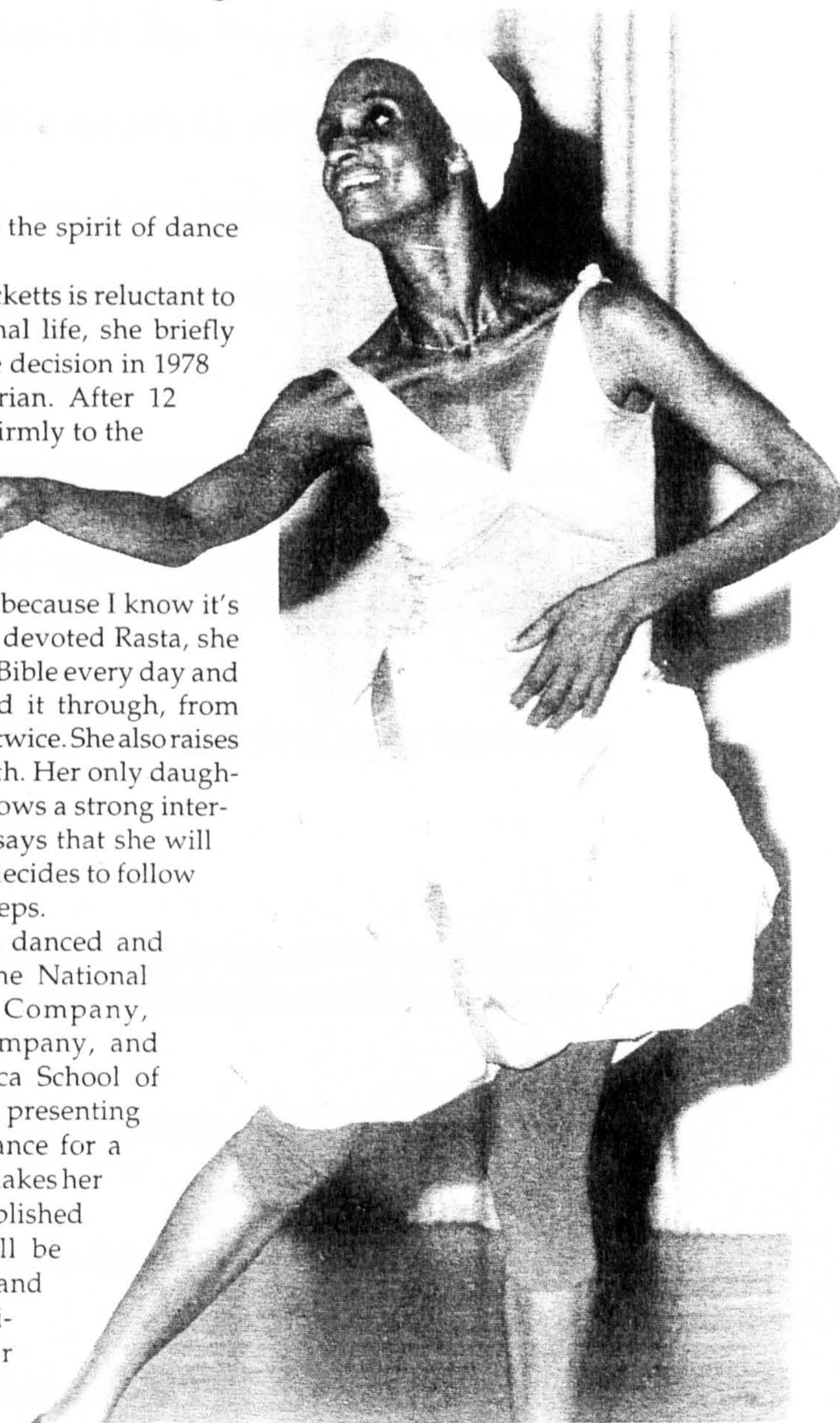


PHOTO: NIGEL MADHOO

**Patsy Ricketts will be in England until 5th November. Her schedule during the course of her stay includes:**

- Summer School - Black Dance Development Trust, Birmingham, 5th - 17th August
- Edinburgh Festival, Assembly Rooms - 20th/21st August
- South Bank Centre, London - 22nd August

● Place Theatre, London, International Workshop Festival - 1st/2nd September

● She will also be doing workshops in Yorkshire and the East Midlands, and working with Irie and Kokuma Dance Companies.

For the details of her schedule please contact Mr H Patten, Tel: 081 692 0297.

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in London. I inserted the question, 'Does London need a Centre for Black Dance?' The positive response from that survey (see Appendix 1) coincided with the Arts Council England ring fencing an allocation of capital funds to support the work of black and other ethnic minority arts organisations.<sup>48</sup> A consortium of white and Black dance companies were invited to join a loose consortium to develop the idea of an African Peoples' Dance House, ACE having notionally awarded £600,000 capital support for the project. Thus began this new approach to a Centre in London. In a recent paper to inform the future development of the Centre and provide a backcloth for ACE, Capital Services, the vision of the Centre was encapsulated thus:

DanceAfrica is expected to be a Centre of Excellence for African dance, based in London, but having a national profile. The concept is to develop a building based project to act as a magnet for the African dance sector whilst, at the same time, offering opportunities in dance for the wider public.

DA will strategically operate as a 'triangle' with three major interlocking points.

**(i) DanceAfrica as a School**

Within this context, school refers to training in general but will be subdivided into three segments. It is expected that all courses at the Centre will be accredited.

- (A) A Training School for companies and practitioners earning a living from African dance.
- (B) Training for Tutors in African dance
- (C) Training for Educational Institutions

It is hoped that DA could become a formalised training intuition in its own right providing a range of courses for schools, colleges and other higher education establishments. These are seen as being either 'termly' or

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<sup>48</sup> This was the second Capital Programme by ACE. In the first rounds, for a variety of reasons, black and other ethnic minority organisations were not represented and ACE believed that an allocation should be ring-fenced to support the aspirations of the smaller, experienced, black and other ethnic minority arts organisations.



Summer School programmes. These are expected to be accredited, starting from GCSE/O levels up to University level. These could be dovetailed to fit existing course, at all levels, with universities in Africa and the USA.

(ii) **DanceAfrica as a Centre for developing choreographers, researchers and writers**

(iii) **DanceAfrica as a Space for dance**

The Centre is being approached from a holistic perspective and thus viability and longevity depends on a Centre of Excellence also being a dynamic African cultural agency, an agency promoting the cultural richness and diversity of the continent as a whole. An organisation that will promote spiritual, mental and physical development in traditional values within a contemporary setting. The Centre will encourage and support the use of Information Technology in presentations and performances, arrange critical debates, seminars and conferences, create networks of international supporters whilst at the same time offering opportunities in a wide range of African cultural traditions including fashion and fabrics, food, traditional music, theatre, philosophy and systems of religious beliefs. DA will hopefully become an integral institution, an archive and resource centre for the African dance sector in London but supporting initiatives within the wider dance sector in the UK as whole. Inevitably the demands on its services will outstrip its resources but it will be structured and established to make an impact upon African dance development in England. It will introduce systems and mechanisms to ensure that the rich and various dance forms from the continent of Africa and the New World in general, are informed by and guide African dance development, through the core values and essences of traditional dance practice.



DanceAfrica has recently identified a suitable site in London<sup>49</sup> and has made an offer to acquire the building as a base for the development of Africa Dance in London. The vision for DanceAfrica remains closely aligned to the original vision for the LDH and as part of a developmental programme, ACE has permitted DanceAfrica to use a proportion of its capital allocation for developmental programmes and research. An initial pilot project (see later) was launched in 2004 and DanceAfrica expects to continue with a new programme from April 2005.

The Development and Business Plans for establishing a Centre were submitted to ACE in December 2004 and the decision from ACE Capital Services to determine whether the project will be supported financially is due in April 2005.

In the Business Plan submitted to ACE, the Chair of DanceAfrica noted

DanceAfrica is a strategic response to the acute lack of infrastructure and support for African dance practitioners in Britain. Fundamentally, this process has been in the making for almost thirty years and it is this seeming unfairness that there is not a single centre in the capital where African dance practitioners can legitimately claim to be their common base for artistic development that DanceAfrica seeks to redress. The centre is a means to an end. The end is to meet the critical but diverse needs of African dance practitioners, the absence of which is threatening the continued survival of the arts of 5% of the population and indeed, approximately 20% of the population of London.<sup>50</sup>

DanceAfrica has been rallying dancers and musicians, theatre performers and teachers for the past twelve months in an effort to address their needs in a suitable base and remains the only genuine organisation with a vision for the continuation and development of African dance in multi-cultural Britain.

DanceAfrica will represent the broad and diverse interests of black and other

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<sup>49</sup> The property, an existing gym and keep-fit centre, is situated in north London and has four dance studios, a fully fitted gym, offices and other facilities.

<sup>50</sup> DanceAfrica, Business Plan for the purchase of the Factory, November 2004, p.3.



dancers in London but *its focus for its developmental and training programmes* will be geared towards the needs of dancers and choreographers working in traditional, contemporary and experimental dance movements grounded in some aspect of dance from Africa or the African diaspora. Conscious of its need to have a wide appeal, DanceAfrica has been having discussions with a wide range of existing tutors and promoters of African dance in London, exploring positive ways of working with them in the future. These have included Sunduza Dance Theatre (Zimbabwe), Guillermo Davis 'el Iyawo' (Cuba), Afidance, Felix Cobbson (Ghana), Francis Angol, Step Afrika! UK and ADAD. Discussions with FE colleges in the north of London and Middlesex University are also being advanced with a view to having training programmes accredited in the near future.

Whether DanceAfrica, the building based project to take African dance into the future materialises or not, Patten and Badejo will continue to distil and develop work in the UK and elsewhere. Both are accomplished choreographers and dancers promoting the best in contemporary African dance in the UK and abroad. Both are committed to producing work that has universal as well as local appeal and both create work for the stage from their religious and spiritual backgrounds. They are heavily influenced and driven by their own spirituality and faith systems and are grounded in black cultural traditions from the Caribbean, Nigeria and the wider African continent, which they use to communicate in a modern, expressive body language. In the following chapter the choreography of Peter Badejo and H Patten is examined in the context of their religious and spiritual base.



## DANCEAFRICA KICK-OFF - AUTUMN 2004

**DANCEAFRICA MISSION** - To promote, support and sustain the advancement of the art of African Dance, and dance in general, through innovation and collaboration nationally and internationally.

DanceAfrica Kick-Off begins what will be a regular series of events for dance practitioners and those with an interest in the culture, history and development of African dance.

### SPEAKERS

**Peter Badejo OBE**, Artistic Director of Badejo Arts, is part of DanceAfrica's internal management. He has had a major impact on dance development both in the UK and internationally for over 20 years, and has seen Badejo Arts evolve into one of the most enterprising and creative contemporary African dance companies in England.

**June Gamble** is a freelance Arts Manager and Consultant who currently is Coordinator of the Independent Dance Managers' Network, Development Coordinator for Sankalpam, Tour Coordinator for Niki McCretton and Project Coordinator for Remit Productions. Her consultancy and training clients include Robert Hylton, Jan de Schynkel, Martin Robinson, Biserk, Menelva Harry, Frauke Requardt, Hofesh Schechter, IDMN, Dance South West, Dance North West and The Place Artist Development.

**Jackie Guy** is an international choreographer and one of Britain's leading tutor/lecturers in the area of Afro-Caribbean dance forms. Dynamic and inspiring, he fuses an authentic traditional vocabulary with elements of modern/contemporary dance technique. He is the former Artistic Director of Kokuma Dance Theatre Company, and in 1998 was appointed Course Coordinator for Britain's first and only Diploma course in African and Caribbean Dance, accredited by Birkbeck College, University of London.

**Dr. Neville Linton** is a former academic from the University of the West Indies, Trinidad. He lectures in the UK, USA, Africa, and the West Indies, is a senior adviser to Transparency International and a diplomat with the Commonwealth Secretariat. Dr. Linton has done considerable work within Caribbean NGOs, as well as within the broadcast media.

**Akin Olukiran**, currently Chief Executive of Disability In Camden and former Chief Executive of Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, has been a supporter of DanceAfrica since its inception. Akin is also a financial consultant and holds a Masters degree in Social Policy. Akin has been involved in the arts at a senior level for several years.

**Rufus Orisayomi** is Artistic Director of Ritual Theatre Arts, a film maker and dramatist. His other main interests include documenting dance and dance research. Rufus met Peter Badejo at the research centre of University of Ife when Peter had just created 'Opa Oye'. Rufus's interest in film was also fired up by the work on documentation & analysis of African dance being undertaken by senior research fellows Peggy Harper and Frank Speed (an ethnomusicologist). Rufus has since worked closely with Peter producing dance on film. Rufus also produces Kayode - a bi-annual publication profiling African and Caribbean artists.

**'H' Patten** is Artistic Director of Koromanti Arts and has developed a national and international reputation for his work in African and Caribbean arts over the past 21 years. An experienced choreographer, filmmaker, storyteller and performer, he has worked with top Black dance companies in Britain, Africa and the Caribbean. Currently 'H' is carrying out research in Benin, Ghana, Haiti and Jamaica for Ritual- his latest and most exciting project to date.

EVENT	DETAILS	DATE & TIME	VENUE & COS
Towards Self-Assessment & Certification in African Dance forms 1	Geared towards professional African Dance practitioners. An exploration of the various teaching methods currently employed. Attendance by invitation only.	Wed 6th Oct 6pm - 9pm	The Tudor Lodge Free
Seminar & Open Discussion Speaker: <b>Akin Olukiran</b>	<b>'Arts policy objectives and the role of African dance'</b> An examination of; the changing cultural landscape, influencing and shaping arts policy, the economics and future of African dance in the UK. Key questions to be raised: 1. To what extent are black people instrumental in determining the future of African dance? 2. Is signing up to African dance signing up to poverty? 3. What is mainstreaming and what is marginalizing? 4. The European influence.	Thurs 21st Oct 6.30pm - 8.30pm	Diorama Arts £7.50 / £5 concs
Film presentation Speaker: <b>'H' Patten</b>	<b>'The Road to RITUAL'</b> will look at 'H' Patten's multi-faceted career and the development of his own technique, drawing out 'the artist within'. It will also highlight the importance of spirituality in his work, his use of multimedia and 'Dance for Camera' techniques.	Mon 25th Oct 6.30pm - 8.30pm	Diorama Arts £7.50 / £5 concs
Towards Self-Assessment & Certification in African Dance forms 2	As above. Attendance by invitation only.	Wed 10th Nov 6pm - 9pm	The Tudor Lodge Free
Seminar & Open Discussion Speaker: <b>Dr. Neville Linton</b>	<b>'Cultural Retention in the Diaspora'</b> People of the diaspora face challenges of cultural retention whilst dealing with challenges of the host country's culture. A discussion of; what is to be retained, how much is to be retained, how long to retain it for?, and the various ways subsequent generations manage.	Thurs 18th Nov 6.30pm - 8.30pm	Friends House £7.50 / £5 concs
Film presentation Speakers: <b>Peter Badejo, Rufus Orisayomi</b>	<b>'The Film maker, The Choreographer: Friend or Foe? In search of a common language in dance film'</b> . A discussion of the relationship between dance and film based on the personal experiences of Peter Badejo and Rufus Orisayomi who have collaborated artistically for a number of years. Excerpts of the artistes' work will be shown.	Mon 22nd Nov 6.30pm - 8.30pm	Friends House £7.50 / £5 concs
Seminar & Open Discussion Speaker: <b>June Gamble</b>	<b>'The Management of African/Black dance companies in the UK'</b> A sharing of June's experiences administrating and managing African/Black dance companies. In light of her role as coordinator for the Independent Dance Managers' Network, June will talk about the future of dance management and ensuing effects on development of the African dance sector.	Thurs 2nd Dec 6.30pm - 8.30pm	Friends House £7.50 / £5 concs
Film presentation Speaker: <b>Jackie Guy</b>	<b>'Spirit of Carnival'</b> Directed and Choreographed by Jackie Guy, who will be showing process and product, and share thoughts on the dance aesthetic and vocabulary used within dance format, and the importance of cross fertilisation and artistic matrix.	Mon 6th Dec 6.30pm - 8.30pm	Diorama Arts £7.50 / £5 concs
Towards Self-Assessment & Certification in African Dance forms 3	As above. Attendance by invitation only.	Wed 8th Dec 6pm - 9pm	The Tudor Lodge Free



## DANCEAFRICA VENUES

**Diorama Arts [Diorama 2],**  
34 Osnaburgh Street,  
London, NW1 3ND

**Tube** - Warren Street (Victoria, Northern lines), Great Portland Street (Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith & City lines)  
**Buses** - 10, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, 73, 88, 134, 205, 390



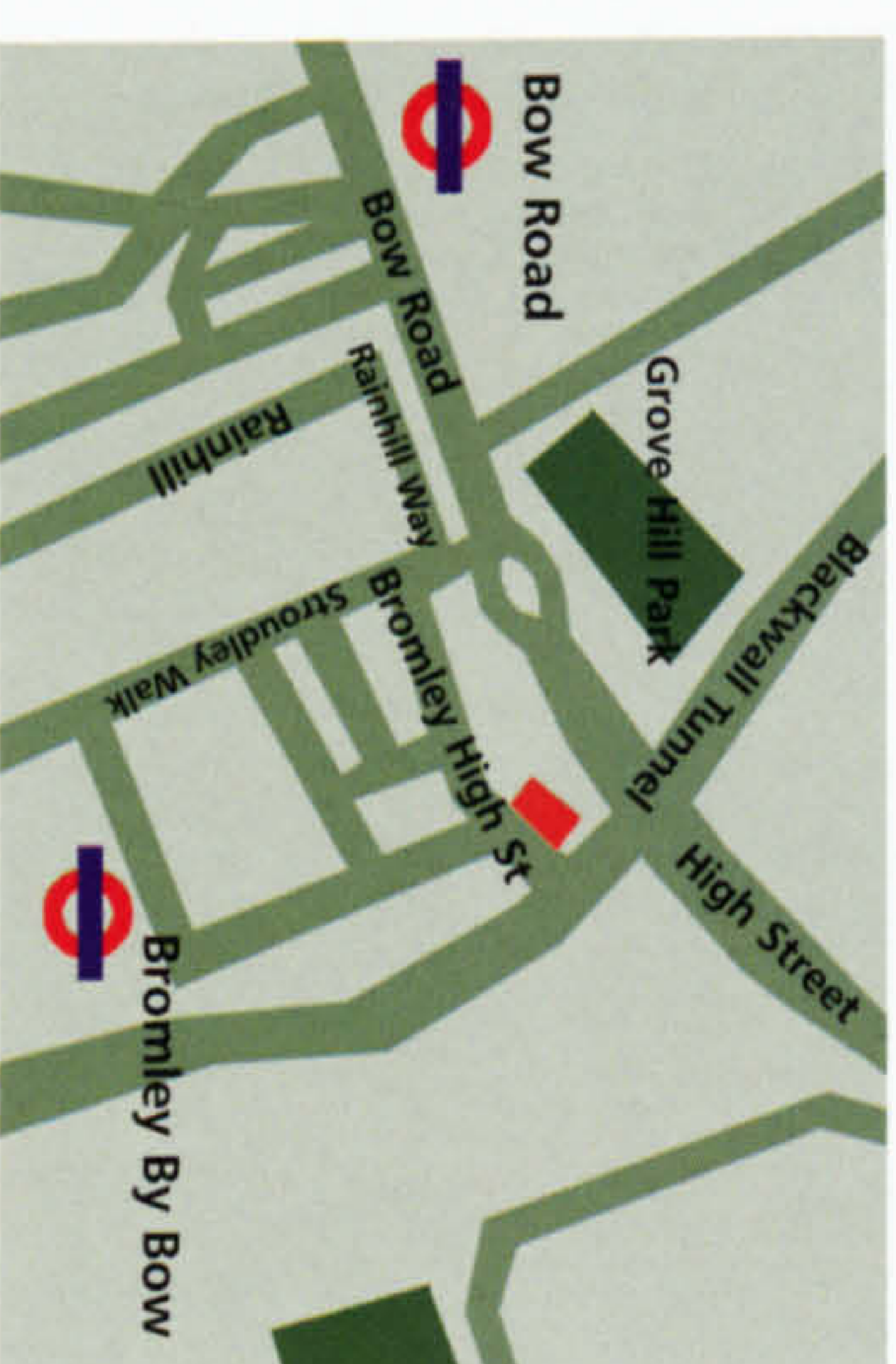
**Friends House,**  
173 Euston Road,  
London, NW1 2BJ

**Tube** - Euston (Victoria, Northern line), Euston Square (Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith & City lines)  
**Mainline** - Euston station is directly opposite; King's Cross & St Pancras stations are a 10 minute walk away  
**Buses** - 10, 18, 30, 59, 68, 73, 91, 168, 205, 253, 390, 476



**The Tudor Lodge,**  
95 Bromley High St, Bow,  
London, E3 3EN

**Tube** - Bromley-by-Bow, Bow Church (District, Hammersmith & City lines)  
**DLR** - Bow Church  
**Buses** - 8, 25, D8, 108



Call **020 8465 9292** or email [admin@londondancehouse.org](mailto:admin@londondancehouse.org) for more information and to reserve places.

DANCEAFRICA, 6B Holland House, Seager Distillery, Brookmill Road, London, SE8 4JT

# DANCEAFRICA

## working for dance in London

DanceAfrica is a newly established organisation working towards creating a centre for African Dance\* in London. DanceAfrica seeks to develop this building-based project within the creative industries sector. The centre will act as a magnet for the African Dance sector, and offer opportunities in dance and associated cultural developments for the wider public.

*\*African Dance is used as a generic term to mean music, dance, drama and storytelling found within performances on the African continent and the diaspora.*





... there are the new experiments in “creative” dance, some of which are based on traditional forms, while others are based unhappily on material and models from African-derived dances from the other side of the Atlantic. The demand for cabaret form of entertainment in hotels and night clubs and the attractions of the tourist trade have tended to have adverse influence on the quality and scope of some of the experiments. It appears, however, that this situation will change as dancers and choreographers of today become more and more familiar with traditional African dance forms and the values that guide performance.<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **African Dance Development: Spirituality and Continuity**

Although J.H. Kwabena Nketia was expressing concerns about the impact modernity was having on dance development in Ghana, his concerns are equally applicable to creative artistes working in African dance practice throughout the diaspora. In England currently, African dance development is at a crossroads. More choreographers and dancers are beginning to explore new forms of contemporary African dance presentations but often, without having the basic vocabulary in traditional practice to underpin their work.

The emphasis in this chapter is on the continuity of African dance forms in the UK through the spirituality of two choreographers, H. Patten and Peter Badejo. Both are London-based choreographers who work nationally and internationally

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<sup>1</sup> J.H.Kwabena Nketia, *Ghana - Music, Dance and Drama A review of the Performing Arts of Ghana* (Ghana : Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1965), p.47.



and both are committed to the development and practice of African dance forms that are guided and inspired by their beliefs in traditional African religious practice and its core values. Both are practising Christians yet both draw upon and use traditional religious values to create traditional and contemporary African dance forms for Western stages. They express their spirituality in their work, with intuition and with their belief systems and way of life, percolating through at all levels. They are maintaining a universal connection between Africans on the continent and Africans in the diaspora and positively highlighting that the dances from the African continent are neither lewd nor vulgar but are 'art forms' responding dynamically to its new environments whilst retaining its traditional and spiritual values. Badejo sums up his views about his creativity and his aspirations about educating dance audiences, artistes and participants, and to a large extent, also reflects the views of Patten in the sense that both speak about the educational role of their dance practices.

The leading inspiration to my work is my spirituality and my relationship to our belief system and the balance of nature. We are spiritually gifted and people of faith. Whatever religion we find ourselves in, we bring our spirituality to play. I guess this is my driving force.

By bringing this to the practice of African Dance/music, I hope the participants, the audience and the artists are educated to a level of understanding and respect the tested philosophy behind the music and dance expressions of the African people. As it is, our dance/music expressions have been drawn into an arena where the non- essentials of Western arts have overshadowed our purpose of artistic expressions.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar manner to Nketia, Badejo is also reflecting on African dance development in the wider context, and expresses concern about the orientation of the forms. He believes that even those with the requisite skills to continue

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 14 April 2002. Additional comments received 9 June 2002.



promoting contemporary forms from an informed perspective, are discarding the core values and essences of the dances, merely to satisfy consumer demands

More and more of the current practitioners and ‘arrangers’ are from the African continent itself and many, for economic and social reasons, are gravitating to ‘cabaret form of entertainment’. Their patterns are similar to the ‘giggers and dance acts’ of earlier decades though today, many of these new ‘giggers’ complement their performances by conducting drumming and social dance classes; classes that introduce new forms and techniques in African dance and necessary for the continuance of the form. Complementing the social dance classes, are dancers who also offer specific training in religious aspects of African dance forms, including *Sango* and *voodoo*. See appendices 3 and 4.

As far as international ideas are concerned, there appear to be two avenues of African dance development between Europe and the African continent. In the first, there is dance development between France and the Francophone countries and in the second, dance development between African dancers in England with the English-speaking African countries. Although these ‘schools’ of development have been operating primarily along political alliances out of the periods of annexation and colonisation and thus language commonality, there is now more overlapping and exchanges throughout Africa and Europe. As will be observed later in this chapter, the *Bami jo* Summer Schools by Badejo Arts have been instrumental in bringing many Francophone Africans to share their skills and experiences with practitioners in the UK, although Badejo points out that black Africans with common religious and cultural commonalities have always shared



ideas together, regardless of the artificial and arbitrary European divisions on the continent.

African dance in England but specifically in London, is once again de-fragmented and un-coordinated. But if African dance is to truly articulate its own feelings, aspirations and visions in England and build on what has gone before, then as outlined in the previous chapter, there has to be an independent Institute to provide the infrastructure for stability and growth. Individual practitioners and companies are not best placed or resourced to undertake that task on behalf of a disparate sector, but they are ideally situated to continue creating work in new, interesting and challenging ways.

**(1) H. Patten: African Dance as Identity and Expression of Self**

H. Patten, of Jamaican parents, was born in Birmingham on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1961. An ardent practitioner of African dance for over twenty years, Patten has consistently investigated and researched African and Caribbean dance forms ‘at source’ and as such, has a thorough understanding of the meanings and significances of rituals and symbols in dance presentations. Patten’s parents were devout Christians, (Tabernacle Church) although when he was younger, they attended the Pentecostal Church of God. Later he became a choirboy in the Anglican Church, but at the age of fourteen, Patten returned to the Pentecostal Church of God, as it offered him a more conducive environment for worship. He vividly recalls

The way of singing and clapping was exciting but for me it was also about identity. The type of singing in the Anglican Church did not make me *feel* comfortable. In Church of God, I felt I belonged. The Elders and others use to sing in harmony and *I always felt that there was a spirit with*



*us. Singing in the round was enjoyable because you were getting a kind of energy from each other.*<sup>3</sup> [My italics]

Reggae music, 'black Christianity' and the Rastafarian philosophy occupied centre stage in his young life and at a very early age, he accepted that he was an African with cultural traditions and belief systems outside of England. The Pattens, like many immigrant families, were deliberately trying to escape being 'the other' by absorbing the external values of the 'white' Christian faith and working diligently from 'morning till night'. His insistence on positively being 'the other' was at odds with the family values and he recalled his parents' objections and displeasure to his acceptance of Africa as his homeland. His mother in particular was fond of reminding him that "Me is Jamaican, yuh father is Jamaican so ah don't know which part of you is African",<sup>4</sup> yet "she often spoke about many African rituals which she did in Jamaica but no longer did in the UK".<sup>5</sup> The Patten family were not unusual in this respect for they had imbibed all the negativity that the British had firmly implanted in the Caribbean about anything African. As Patten recalls, "my family use to say that in Jamaica to describe a very black man you would normally say he was African, implying a negative value and stressing the African part".<sup>6</sup> He felt that issues about their black identity was an issue within the family setting and it revealed itself in very subtle ways. "My mum used to talk about her mother's long, straightish hair down her back and was sad that her girls didn't have good hair like that".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003. For example, at Easter time she would break an egg and 'read it' for guidance in life, or open the windows at midnight on New Years' eve, to usher 'old spirits out and new spirits in'.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.



Many black youths in their teens in the 1970s were in a state of mental ambivalence and personal confusion. Many were born in England and were experiencing difficulties within the education system and found themselves gravitating to ideas and symbolisms that offered them positive images of themselves. Marcus Garvey, reggae and 'soul music', African and Caribbean 'soul-dance' and 'soul-food' filled the gap by providing new visions. Patten was a part of this social upheaval, an element in the whirlwind that was shaping the views, attitudes and behaviours of young black people. Articulated or not, rituals and symbols from Africa were having a profound affect on many young blacks and these were apparent in their attitude, their style of walking, their method and codes of communications, their dress code, their religious practices and their African hairstyles.

At the age of 16, Patten read *Vanishing Africa*<sup>8</sup> and that dramatically altered his lifestyle. He decided then that he would have to go to Africa himself and almost immediately began to more fully explore his African roots. Within two years he joined the Afro-Peoples Organisation (APO) in Birmingham and for the first time he danced in public as a member of a community group within the APO. He recalls with some delight that "it was one number and we danced to Sata Masagana, the old reggae song".<sup>9</sup> Patten had found his source of inspiration; he became more politically and culturally aware and searched for and found the African Liberation Movement, attending their political and social events around England.

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<sup>8</sup> *Vanishing Africa*, written in 1971 by Mirella Ricciardi, included a wide selection of pictures from the African continent which captured the imagination of Patten and, to some extent, altered his lifestyle.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.



His self-discovery as an African is epitomised in what Fielding Stewart refers to as the ‘soul force’ and the ‘cultural soul’ in the sense that the former “is the dynamic impetus for positive change” and the latter “is that regime of value and belief giving permanent sanctity and identity to black life as a positively unique cultural and spiritual entity”.<sup>10</sup> His allegiance to the APO began to create divisions within his family as his parents believed that his direct involvement with the organisation would become a barrier to his progression within white British society. They saw his connections to the APO only in a negative manner and felt that his involvement would “soon bring the police to break down their doors”. Patten knew and understood that his parents were proud black people from Jamaica but they were masquerading under the banner, “when you come to the white man’s country you must just fit in and behave like them”. He recalled

I bought some African carvings and put them on the mantelpiece with my mother’s other ornaments. When she saw them she demanded that they be removed and kept in my room. We had a big argument and I remember saying if the carvings go, I go. Eventually after some arguments, she allowed me to leave them in the front room.<sup>11</sup>

Patten’s struggles against others who would not accept his ‘Africanness’ were further galvanised by his attendance at university to undertake a degree in Fine Art. He shared accommodation with Nigerian students who referred to Africans from the Caribbean as ‘slave children of mixed race’ and that became the source of regular heated debates. By this time, he had already accepted and synthesised who he was, though he thought it was funny “that black Caribbean people were telling you that you were not an African and Africans were telling you that you

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<sup>10</sup> Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Black Spirituality & Black Consciousness*, op. cit. p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003. He also recalled that years later when he was leaving the family home to live on his own, his mother refused to let him take the carvings as ‘they belonged on the mantelpiece’.



are not”.<sup>12</sup> Patten went to Jamaica as part of his degree programme. Whilst there he taught at some of the local schools and because he was based at the Edna Manley School of Performing Arts, “that campus brought me into closer contact with the other art forms more directly. I then decided to include aspects of the performance arts into my final thesis”.<sup>13</sup>

Conflicts around personal and family identities continued within his family and for Patten, it was heightened when he returned to Birmingham on the successful completion of his degree. During his final year at university, he began taking African drumming classes at the HCC and later joined Danse de L’Afrique (DLA) in 1982. His parents felt that he should be concentrating on his studies, but he travelled between Cardiff and Birmingham juggling rehearsals with DLA and his BA. Patten shifted his energies and focus from the visual to the performing arts and spent six months training and researching traditional music and dance in Ghana as part of DLA’s training programme. Following periods of further training and research in Africa and the Caribbean, Patten joined the staff at the CAVE Arts Centre as Deputy Director before moving to London to join George Dzikunu’s Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble.

Unlike most British born black dancers within the African dance sector, he immersed himself in African and Caribbean cultural traditions and researched what he was doing in detail. With *Adzido* he soon became one of the principal dancers and performed in their first three productions, *In the Village of Africa*, *Coming Home* and *Under African Skies*. This period with Adzido enabled Patten

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 4 August 2003.



to explore music and movement from his own source of spirituality, knowing that within the largest company of African dancers in the UK, he was able to nurture his inner 'self' and be inspired by colleagues who were born into traditional dance practice from several countries in Africa. In tandem with his performances, he was also being commissioned to choreograph for theatre companies and he successfully worked with Staunch Poets and Players, Tara Arts and Temba Theatre Company, all leading national companies at that time. Patten's success was being noted and his professional commitment and personal beliefs in traditional African dance led to international opportunities with the British Council.

In 1990, I did my first full-length production in Malawi for the Kwacha Cultural Troupe (now the Malawi National Dance Troupe.) This was through an invitation from the British Council. The troupe had forty performers, drawn from around the country with two members from each province.

Three hours after I arrived in Malawi I was taken to see a performance by the Troupe. They danced in circles, like the presentations we use to do in DLA years ago. Their drumming was a bit different to what I was used to from Ghana and it took a few minutes for me to absorb and understand the drum patterns and the dances.

The dancers needed to be unified. They looked like forty individuals dancing and not a company of performers. Their strongest pieces were their solos in a dance that reminded me of Kumina from Jamaica, called *Vimbuza*. It was a spiritual and a healing dance.<sup>14</sup>

Patten, a talented individual, was constantly in demand and he began to explore ways of utilising his creativity and his spirituality through his own productions and international commissions. A product of England, Patten believed that he was 'shunted' through the formal education systems and that he survived because of his alternative lifestyle and belief systems. He had committed himself to a

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 15 August 2003.



lifestyle as an African and was becoming troubled by the rejection of many of his peer group of their African origins. Regular attendance to the black church still provides the source of Patten's inspirations and he integrates his Christian beliefs with his African faith system to shape his lifestyle, attitude and creative endeavours. Patten was keen to share his ideas about Africa and the direct connections to black communities in the Caribbean and blacks in England and created his first one-man performance, *Ina De Wildanis* (In the Wilderness). The notes from the programme stated that

The spiritual power of African culture was carried with the African slaves to the Caribbean where it met and merged with European culture on foreign soil. Through migration this same force moved to Britain where Caribbean Africans came into contact with traditional African and European, culture....and the result...new explosions of artistic energy!<sup>15</sup>

Patten's life is guided by a 'soul force' (an African spirituality) and this is reflected in his practice of his African arts. He pointed out that this first production "came to me in a vision", following a period of research in Malawi and Zambia.

I was asleep and could see the entire show coming together piece by piece. It was a clear dream and suddenly I woke up and wrote it down. By the morning I had written the narrative and knew all the songs and dances to go with it. In the show also there is the letter to Mama and that too came in the vision.

It should be understood that there is a big difference between dancers who are seeking technical perfection and someone like me who dances with the spirit. Sometimes on stage, I just let go and the spirit moves me in whatever directions it chooses.<sup>16</sup>

*Ina De Wildanis* is a production of three acts. The narrative traces the vibrancy of the African 'spirit' from the continent, to its period of settlement and adjustment in Jamaica and to its re-emergence in England. The performance begins with the

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<sup>15</sup> Notes from the programme, *Ina De Wildanis*: Dance theatre by 'H' Patten with live music, 1992, p.3

<sup>16</sup> Interview in London with H. Patten of 17 December 2004.



mask dance, the '*Likishi*', an initiation dance from Zambia. Principally used to invoke the spirits of the ancestors, Mwanapwevwo,<sup>17</sup> the custodian of cultural heritage dances to bless and sanctify the space and provides comfort to the young ones who have been initiated into their community. The entire body of the dancer is concealed; movement is centred on the hips and the feet, the latter being adorned with rattles to provide complementary percussive sounds for the dance. Knees are slightly bent as the dancer moves around with rapid footwork. The dancer leads in song and the musicians follow in a typical African call and response manner.

Prose, songs and a children's game link the rituals in 'the sanctification of the space' to the strength and power of the African spiritual force that Patten believes is in all Africans. The work flows into a second masked dance (the Gulewamkulu) from the central region of Malawi. H points out that

Gulewamkulu means the big dance. This mask tradition is a religion of itself and one cannot belong to Gulewamkulu and say a Christian church. This dance brings together the spiritual and physical worlds and the movements are angular and pulsating, with the feet shuffling along the floor and occasionally kicking outwards. When this (the feet kicking outwards) is done in the local community, the sand and the dust kicked up create a sort of haze that adds to the mysticism and spiritual feel of the dance. This is lost on stage so I accentuate movements to the drumming to create the mysticism. The dance pattern is dance, dance, dance, dance, then stamp, stamp, stamp to the patterns of the drums to make the kind of spiritual connections.<sup>18</sup>

The interpretation of the narrative introduces audiences into the spiritual approach that Patten uses in his work. In *Ina De Wildanis*, following the initiation and the introduction into an aspect of African spirituality, the healing

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<sup>17</sup> Mask dances in African traditional culture, are almost exclusively performed by males, who are covered 'from head to foot'. In the *Likishi*, the mask used represents a female, the 'comforter' of the community.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 June 2004.



dance (*Vimbuza*) from Malawi/Zambia is juxtaposed with the religious African, *Kumina* from Jamaica, showing a continuity of religious practices and belief systems between the continent and her ‘offsprings’ in the New World. The wrapped headwear and ‘colours’<sup>19</sup> of the *Kumina* symbolising the new birth of African religious practice in the Caribbean. The *Kumina* dance is performed in a circular motion, with the feet ‘inching’ along the ground and the body slightly tilted backwards. The drummers dictate the tempo and rhythm and there is much singing as the spirits are called upon to come and join in the celebration. Patten’s method of working and thus his spirituality is further evidenced through the selection of particular forms of dances and the use of the *Jonkunnu*, the *Revival* and the *Nyahbingi* forms from Jamaica, maintaining that African link with blacks in the diaspora, and in the case of the *Nyahbingi*, highlighting how the Rastafarians created their own ritual drumming and chanting as part of their ‘mental and spiritual’ journey back to Africa. As the *Nyahbingi* rhythm ebbed, the power and spirit of the black church was introduced, with new dance vocabulary from Africa and the Caribbean combining with contemporary movements; ‘gospel dance’ was the result. The performance ends with the celebration of carnival as he cleverly uses the stage ‘prop’ as the final costume. For Patten, “carnival captures life as a full circle, in the sense that it combines all the values and mysteries of the mask dances, costumes, physical movements into a modern vibrant form with links in Africa and the Caribbean”.<sup>20</sup>

From his lifestyle and his deliberate and positive choice to create work out of an African and Caribbean religious experience, Patten signifies his artistic

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Colours’ refer to specific colours wrapped around poles in a *Kumina* ‘yard’ and also to the same colour of costumes worn. These signify the specific reason for the dance performance.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 June 2004.



intentions. He introduces his work to the public through rituals to ‘sanctify the performance space’ and then selects specific movements, songs, music and games to draw audiences into a world of traditional beliefs with meanings for influencing life in the present. He creatively uses lighting design, purposefully uses colours in costumes to maintain their ‘religious’ significance and introduces symbols and ‘ritual paraphernalia’ in the floor patterns of the performance space. As if to ensure that there is consistency and authenticity in the development and production of his work, Patten frequently seeks guidance from experts from traditional Caribbean and African cultures as he embarks on his version of African and Caribbean dance theatre. *Ina De Wildanis* was a traditional yet a modern piece of work, combining dance, music, storytelling, games, prose and poetry.

Developing his first one-man performance was a new experience; it was a personal journey that Patten felt he had to make and that was evident in performances. As Patten himself summed up his own feelings following the tour,

I had to come to terms with the fact that I am not a fully-fledged Jamaican or African but really a synergy of them. Understanding that placed me *Ina De Wildanis* with no direct home or direct link or all the keys within any of those societies but yet within me there is Africa and Jamaica, which makes me a child of them both. It is the spiritual guidance that I receive from these cultures that help me create work for the stage.<sup>21</sup>

Bill Harpe of *The Guardian* wrote

“Ina de Wildanis” is both the story of a person and the story of a people. It is both a solo performance and an epic performance. Bringing together the startling and purposeful drama of traditional costumes and masks alongside contemporary theatre techniques – and encouraged and uplifted by the drumming and music of Winston Lewis, Stephen Blagrove, and Chancey Huntley – this work recreates the deep and eloquent power of

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 December 2004.



African religious and social traditions, explores the transformation of these traditions when African and European cultures collided on the soil of the Caribbean, and concludes with the musical and spiritual renaissance which resulted when African, Caribbean, and European traditions met in urban Britain.<sup>22</sup>

At the very outset of establishing his own company, Patten was secure in knowing the kind of work he wanted to create for the stage. “My work is for a particular audience. It will make sense to some people but not all as they would not understand it. I hope that it will educate the audience but maintain its special focus”.<sup>23</sup> Interspersed with creative commissions abroad, Patten developed his second touring production *Dis Ya Set Up* in 1994. The theme was about the ‘wake observances’ that many black communities from Africa and the Caribbean still practice in London. From the *Programme Notes* for the production.

The ‘Nine Night Set Up’ or ‘Set Up’ tradition (wake keeping death observances), has been transported to and continued in Britain by the older Caribbean community. Here, it has grown and developed into a larger ritual than can be found in the Caribbean and Africa itself. What was a ‘simple’ gesture in the Caribbean e. g. turning the deceased’s bed around as a sign of respect, joined with gestures offered by people from other parts of the Caribbean and the African continent, is now a full blown ritual.<sup>24</sup>

In *Dis Ya Set Up* Patten invited two Jamaican artistes (whose understanding and knowledge of ‘wake keeping’ complemented his choreography), an external director (Anton Phillips) and a consultant choreographer (Peter Badejo) to complement and strengthen his own creative and choreographic skills. In a similar manner to his first production, he was continuing and building on the themes of traditional African religious values and the influences of them in the daily lives of black people.

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<sup>22</sup> Bill Harpe, ‘Ina De Wildanis’, *The Guardian*, 16 September 1992, p.26.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 15 October 2002.

<sup>24</sup> H. Patten, ‘Dis Ya Set Up’, *Programme Notes*, 15 October 1994, p.3.



*Dis Ya Set Up* incorporated dances from the Caribbean and Africa that are linked to death observances. The story focused on two young people (one from Britain visiting Jamaica) who were attending a ‘wake keeping’ but who themselves were involved in an accident and almost died. On awakening from their ordeal, they are greeted by ‘a stranger who takes them on a journey of self discovery’.

This production relied more on the spoken word and rituals than on creative dance, though modern African Caribbean forms, *Dancehall*<sup>25</sup> and the *Dinkie Minnie* were used to convince the young couple to seek the traditional values of African life. Patten has researched folk and modern music and dance forms in Jamaica and adds that

In my work I use *dancehall* as a modern phenomenon and it also keeps my work fresh. What many people don’t recognise is *dancehall* music uses revival beats within the music itself and you are caught up in the rhythms and that takes you to a different level. The *rhythm in the voice* is more important than the words themselves and although many people think that *dancehall* is all popular ragga, that’s not the case.<sup>26</sup>

Patten, like Africans generally, believes that “black people see death as a transition to a new and better life”<sup>27</sup> and in Jamaica, the *Dinkie Minnie* is still practised because of the deep African values associated with the form. Hilary Carty in her study of the folk forms of Jamaica notes that

With the African’s particular situation in the Caribbean – uprooted from his homeland and forced into an alien environment and lifestyle- in an attempt at self preservation he held on even tighter to old customs. The African funerary rites were some of these. The Africans had always believed that in death one joined one’s ancestors, and in Jamaica this belief was strengthened. ...In this foreign land, it became even more

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<sup>25</sup> Dance Hall: Popular form of movement to ‘dance hall’ reggae music. An individual show of ‘style’ rather than a group activity.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 18 September 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 December 2004.



crucial that the dead person be properly and safely sent to join his ancestors – in Africa – where he could regain peace.<sup>28</sup>

The emphasis in this second production was on the retention of those African values that Patten believes are still valid and *functional* in black societies today. He uses symbols, systems of beliefs and rituals in dance to make direct connections to both African and African diasporic communities today and challenges black audiences in the West for negating African values whilst adopting more modern ones, without realising the direct connections between both. From funerary dances of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago (*the Bongo*), Patten introduces the *Kpele-Oto*, from the Ga people of Ghana, West Africa. This dance was generally used to give thanks to the gods before the Ga nation went to war, but today it is used as priest and priestesses go into a trance to act as a medium between the two worlds. *Dis Ya Set Up* makes connections between the physical and spiritual worlds and allows the young couple to recognise that the stranger courting them is on the verge of death, indeed, dancing with death, before travelling on to a better life and thus sharing his spiritual knowledge with them. Religious music from Zimbabwe is linked to the popular calypso dance, *Jumbie Jamboree*, to end the journey of self-discovery for the young couple.

Unflinching in his drive for perfection in his own work and in that of others, have seen Patten working continuously and internationally and in 1995, whilst researching for and producing his own production *Open Yu Mouth Tory Jump Out*, he was appointed as the Artistic Director and Co-ordinator for the ‘Pan-

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<sup>28</sup> Hilary Carty, *Folk Dances of Jamaica, An Insight*, op. cit. p.32.





H Patten - 'Ina De Wildanis' (1992) Photo: Jacob Ross





H Patten - Dis Ya Set Up (1994)



Essent-Move' for africa95<sup>29</sup> in Zimbabwe. That programme brought together musicians, dancers and choreographers "from 11 African countries and the African Diaspora...at the resort town of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, and immediately (they) declared that to dance is to take part in the cosmic change of the world".<sup>30</sup> According to the final Report of the project,

'H' Patten explains that the workshop was divided into two parts. The first part attempted to get to the essence; it tried to look at movements, break them down through a process of lecture demonstrations, master classes and the imperatives of vocabulary. The second part looked at the codes of practice with an aim of arriving at the essences. He promises the people that they will see what Nii Yartey<sup>31</sup> and his concept of pillars put together.<sup>32</sup>

Patten is always seeking the root sources, the best reference points, in the development of his artistic skills and knowledge and many of the creative ideas which resulted from the Zimbabwe workshops are still percolating through his current day practices. For him, the practice must be guided by the core essences and values of traditional African cultural expression and not diluted to suit audiences in the West.

For Patten, choreography and stage presentations are guided by his spiritual beliefs, although he is keen to point out that it is not something embossed in programme notes or in any marketing promotions. As far as he is concerned

My work pieces generally come to me in 'visions' or through long, hard thinking processes and then in discussions with professional colleagues whom I know develop work from their own spirituality. The period in the Zimbabwe workshops enlightened me in many ways and I remember one dancer quite clearly stating that in African dance that is guided by spiritual beliefs, no one should put their name as choreographer. The

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<sup>29</sup> africa95 was the first six-month season of African arts and culture in England. Cultural practitioners from the UK and across the African continent met to share and exchange ideas and work through exhibitions, performances, films, workshops, seminars and conferences.

<sup>30</sup> africa95, 'International Dance Workshop', *Pan-Essent-Move africa 95*, report produced by africa95 in association with the British Council Zimbabwe, July 1995, p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Nii Yartey was one of the co-ordinators from Ghana. He is the Artistic Director of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, the National Dance Company of Ghana and of Noyam Contemporary Dance Company.

<sup>32</sup> africa95, 'International Dance Workshop', op. cit. p.20.



creators/the choreographers of those pieces are the ancestors and they should be credited. Since '95, I then began to become more analytical about my own work and especially about African Dance and film.<sup>33</sup>

Patten has become an internationally known artiste principally because he has searched out original sources in Africa and the Caribbean to nourish his own creativity. He has sought spiritual guidance through those connections and has anchored his belief systems and practices in black Africa. Patten is grounded in African and African Caribbean cultural traditions and uses those values to develop his work in England.

Between 1995 and 2002, he was involved in a range of international collaborations in Jamaica and Africa. For the Stella Maris Dance Company of Jamaica he choreographed *Dance Jallof* which won the Jamaican Gold Medal in addition to hosting the company when they visited the UK; in South Africa, he taught and choreographed with *Step Afrika! International Festival*, worked with the Manyanani Dancers on *Gumboot Ragga Hop* and collaborated with the late Jackie Semela and Lebogang Mashile on *City Without a River*, whilst hosting many South African dancers and musicians on their London visits.

Patten's 'beliefs, power, values and behaviour', his spirituality, has been guiding his life and his work. His children were all baptized in the traditional African manner and all were given African names, signifying publicly and privately a continuation of values and customs that came out of an African experience. He has developed a mode of practice which fuses and blends his African and African

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 December 2004.



Caribbean experiences and he no longer re-arranges traditional dance vocabulary but develops and creates new movement vocabulary. Recently, he extended his artistic interests beyond the visual and performance arts to include aspects of the media. Patten successfully completed a postgraduate degree in TV Documentary in 1999. This was a particularly productive period in his life, not least because

For the first time in many years, I was able to take time to reflect on the impact of ancestral spirits on my work. I also wanted to make a documentary film using African dancers. In *A big Step and a half* I worked with five dancers (two South Africans in South Africa and then in London, one from Ghana, another from Zimbabwe and another South African) and filmed in Swaziland, South Africa and in the UK. The work focussed on three areas. I wanted to see how they would interpret dances. I first used identical traditional costumes and asked them all to develop any dance sequence from their own cultural traditions; secondly, I repeated the process using contemporary costumes and I wanted them to interpret their first encounter with European life and those different demands in the West and then finally I asked them to perform naked, like African slaves, stripped, bare and exposed without anything but their memories and thought processes.

I wanted to try and capture the spiritual aspects of the dancers for camera. I think when the film was shown as part of my finals, there were many blacks who were embarrassed, especially by the imagery of the naked dancers but there were those who understood what I was trying to achieve in my work.<sup>34</sup>

In his 2002/03 productions he joined forces with Francis Nii Yartey's (Ghana) 'Noyam Dance Company' to co-choreograph *Elements*. He returned to the theme of addressing young blacks in Britain in movement and message and worked to create the narrative, combining "film footage to introduce signs and symbols from Africa and the Diaspora to UK audiences". According to Patten

For years black practitioners in Britain have been forced to struggle to define themselves, moving from the term 'black dance' to 'African people's dance' until reaching the point where no one word comfortably describes the work of independent or established companies.

*Elements* draws together the energies of Africa, the Caribbean and the Diaspora. It talks to the youth, marrying their movement language of

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 December 2004.



today with its traditional 'original' source, thus preventing the African and Caribbean dance idiom from stagnating and dying.<sup>35</sup>

For *Elements*, Francis Nii Yartey adds

African dance is beautiful, vibrant, spiritual and relevant, but we should not allow it to become a museum piece. In our efforts to preserve them we should at the same time explore new ways of presenting and creating them much in the same way as we explore our economy, information technology, transportation systems and so on.

In *Elements* 'H' Patten and I are looking at earth, wind, fire and water as important elements which affect humanity as a whole. We are looking at the subject through an African eye with an African sensitivity and sensibility....the Africa of yesterday and today.....and perhaps, the Africa of the future.<sup>36</sup>

These choreographers are committed to new choreography in African dance development and utilise their experiences and their spiritual beliefs to create work for the universal stage, whilst focussing on the deep values within African and Caribbean culture. Patten has completed work on a major project for the British Council in West Africa and the results of that dance collaboration between three African nations (Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) were showcased in December 2003 in Nigeria at the Meeting of the Commonwealth Head of States.

Currently Patten is the Artistic Director of Koromanti Arts and 'H' Patten Dance Theatre and shares his time between those personal pursuits and national educational workshops. Patten talks about African dance in England with mixed emotions. He values the experiences he gained from the programmes of the BDDT and the variety and depth of knowledge he learnt from other

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<sup>35</sup> *Elements* Programme notes. KoromantiArts, H. Patten, co-choreographer, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> *Elements* Programme notes. KoromantiArts, Francis Nii Yartey, co-choreographer, 2003.



choreographers but then he becomes more subdued in discussing the future of the form and the lack of vision and participation by young black people. He believes that the modernist approach to all dance forms in the West is a deliberate ploy by the funding system to only allow “those they want to see dance, dance”. He believes that venues, promoters and funders are continuously trying to determine the context and future for African dance in the UK and in his paper *Black Arts in British Society* poses questions rather than offers any answers, part of the dilemma for many African and Caribbean trained dancers in the UK.

Is ‘Contemporary African dance’, those dances from the continent, which are performed by contemporary African society? This would therefore include elements of traditional dance, themselves, continually changing with contemporary elements incorporated to keep them fresh and relative to their society. Is the South African gumboot dance traditional or contemporary? Does it refer to contemporary African forms such as the Pantsula, Di Gong, and Kwasa Kwasa? Or, does it mean that elements of Western contemporary dance have to be injected into the form, in order to make it acceptable or indeed palatable.<sup>37</sup>

In his latest project for 2005, *RITUAL – The Never Ending Journey*, Patten sums up his vision for the piece in his application to the Arts Council.

**Ritual**, will explore the use of multi-media as part of ‘ritual dance theatre’ and the exploration of spirituality as a mechanism for the acknowledgement, understanding and the ultimate acceptance of the ‘self’. **Ritual** will highlight that higher realm where spirituality transcends the boundaries of religion, where dance, possession and the unknown become one.

The invocation/salutation of the spirits, sanctify the space ‘opening the door’ for the pantheon. The distinctive dances of; Voodun, Tigari, Bata, Yanvalou, Revival etc, characterise the emergence of the individual deities. A Contemporary dance piece for today’s audiences, the deities are therefore re-interpreted stylistically across time and genres; e.g. traditional Bata, linked to anger, may be fused with the ‘fire-brand’ hard-hitting Jamaican dancehall DJ language and/or African hip-life, to create a new dance vocabulary.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> H. Patten, African Peoples Dance in Britain and the New Millennium, unpublished paper 29/6/1999, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> Koromanti Arts application to Arts Council England, London, February 2005.



Patten already has some potential funding partners on this new project but is conscious of the changing attitudes from the Arts Council in particular and is therefore somewhat reticent about the outcome of the application and the project as a whole. However, he is convinced that he will continue to create and choreograph work in England and abroad and be “guided by the ancestral spirits” regardless of any policy decision or lack of funding. To him, black artistic endeavour, African dance, is life!

Like most small performance companies, Patten has suffered from not having the financial means for his organisation to have adequate organisational, administrative and managerial support. Artistically, he has always been able to secure the services of highly skilled individuals to help shape and guide his work, but he himself has also been heavily involved in much of the administration and fundraising for his company. This multi-functioning has inevitably meant that some aspects of the company’s overall performance have suffered over the years, especially as administrative support secured by any means, have generally been short-term and ad hoc. In more recent times, Patten has been able to engage freelance administrators and ‘tour bookers’ to help market his work, although still remaining heavily involved in the day to day administration of his company.

Funding for Patten’s work has been on a ‘project by project’ basis and since 1992 has come from a variety of sources with Arts Council England and ACE, London being the major contributors in the past. His work is geared towards small to medium scale venues, although it has been mainly small scale venues over the past years, coupled with schools and local community centres for his education



programmes. Production costs generally were kept at a low level, especially through using fewer performers, although Patten argues that this was the result of the way the main funders viewed his work rather than his desire to minimise production costs. The table below provides an outline of the significant funding sources for his productions.

Media coverage for his work has been inconsistent and ‘patchy’, though Patten himself has usually been able to get interviews and broadcasts to discuss his productions. Audiences over the years tended to average around one hundred and fifty to two hundred per show and were drawn from the whole range of ages, genders and races. Black audiences tended to be greater in inner city areas around the country with larger white audiences mostly for performances in more urban and rural areas. Patten indicated that he would embellish his work with more symbols and rituals when his audience was predominantly black because of their greater understanding of his presentations. According to Patten, “there is normally a stronger and more positive vibe when the black audiences interact with what they see on stage and add their own experiences by “joining in” during the show, to what they are witnessing’.<sup>39</sup>

**TABLE 8**  
**Project Funding to H. Patten Dance Theatre/Koromanti Arts**

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PRODUCTION</u>	<u>SOURCES of FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT(£)</u>
1992	Ina De Wildanis	ACE	12,000

<sup>39</sup> Interview with H. Patten, London 17 December 2004.



		ACE, London	6,000
		Paul Hamlyn (Education)	1,500
		Earned Income (box office, advertising in brochure etc)	10,500
1994	Dis Ya Set Up	Lewisham Way Youth Centre	1,200
		Peckham Civic Hall	5,000
		Commissions from a range of schools in SE London boroughs	
		Earned income	7,500
1995	Open Yu Mouth Tory	Commissions: Arnolfini, Bristol	5,000
	Jump Out	RFH (Ballroom Blitz)	12,000
		Advertising	5,000
		ACE, Bristol	1,500
2002	Elements	ACE, London	2,631
		London Borough of Merton	7,000
		ACE, RALP (North West)	14,679
		Visiting Arts	2,600
		Cheshire County Council	6,000
		ACE, London RALP	21,816
		Earned income	13,200
		In Kind	3,024
		London Borough of Merton	4,030
2003	Elements	In Kind	2,214
		British Council (in kind support in	



		Ghana)	350
		Education	10,050
		Earned income	12,062
		ACE, Touring	78,202

Throughout his artistic journey, Patten confirms that he, like so many artistes generally, has had to exploit his personal resources, ‘in kind’ and financial, to get his productions on the road. Most of his work in England tends to ‘break even’ at the box office with some marginal gains being derived from international projects.

Perhaps Patten’s contribution to the continuity of African dance in England is best gauged not by his national and international reputation, or by his spirituality and connectivity to the traditional values of African religious practices, nor the works he has created but by some comments from the Head teacher of a school at which Patten was in residence for a week. It is not dated, it is simply titled H and signed by ‘Peter’ (a Head Teacher) who appeared to be over emotional in his comments.

I have spent a large part of this week in the company of a most extraordinary man....

H knows about struggle. He knows of the struggle of black people. He knows of the terrible struggles and sufferings of those millions of Africans, stolen from their homes, their place. He knows of their misery and sadness. He feels their suffering...He knows of the struggle of all those black slaves who withstood their misery and spilt their blood on the islands of the Caribbean. He knows of their longing for home. That too is part of him. It can not be part of me in the same way for it was not my people who suffered those terrible things. H knows about belonging and not belonging.....

H has stories to tell... About African people and their lives and culture. He has their songs to sing and their rhythms to impart...He can conjure



up images in the mind – almost visions – by using his voice, his face, his eyes and of course his body. It comes to life with H.<sup>40</sup>

The third phase of African dance development in the UK witnessed a change in terms of dance vocabulary, choreography and stage presentations and that was due to the contribution of dancers and choreographers from Nigeria and also from many of the Francophone countries. During this period there was a significant and noticeable shift away from Caribbean performers and artistic directors towards a new group of dancers and musicians from the continent of Africa. Foremost amongst the Nigerians was Peter Badejo, who established Badejo Arts in London in 1990.

## **(2) Peter Badejo: Yoruba Traditions and Dance Practice**

Peter Badejo was born in Ijebu-Ode in the south of Nigeria in 1947. He visited England as a lead dancer in many Nigerian dance theatre productions and taught at the BDDT's Summer Schools in the 1980s. His dance career however began in Nigeria as an accident rather than a deliberate plan.

I entered the University of Ife in 1967 to study Mechanical Engineering. I was distracted from this programme of study after seeing a theatre production by Professor Ola Rotimi at the Institute of African Studies, which changed my life.

I did not discuss anything with my family. I just saw theatre as a way to enjoy myself and at the same time say an avenue to say exactly what I wanted to say. I had never thought of it before. Anyway, I was always interested in the cinema and in Nigeria in those days, cinemas only showed two kinds of films -American cowboys and Indian films (not the American version of cowboys and Indians!). I loved the Indian films with the music and dancing and felt that I could do that with music and dance from Nigeria.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Peter, 'H', *Written feedback comments from the head teacher of a school*, 1992, p.1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 3 April 2002.

The fascination with Indian films is a common experience throughout English speaking Africa and on many occasions when I have attended these in Ghana with the Artistic Director of the Ghana National Dance Ensemble, I was always surprised at the degree of association that Africans had for these films, particularly the dance elements. Cinema though also provides a



Badejo joined the Institute of African Studies and benefited from the expertise of a diverse group of academics including Professors Ola Rotimi (theatre), Akin Euba (ethnomusicology), Sam Akpabot (music), Mosun Omibiyi (music), Irene Wangboje (visual arts), Agbo Folarin (sculpture) and Peggy Harper from England,<sup>42</sup> a Senior Research Fellow and lecturer in dance. Their input guided his inquisitiveness and introduced him to the use of traditional values in creating work for the theatre.

Badejo's move to the Institute of African Studies<sup>43</sup> seemed quite natural for him. Surrounded and directly involved in the theatre of life, he found an ideal outlet for self-expression and, to a large extent, a continuation of a way of life which embodied all the major aspects of his grounded religious practice. Drumming, singing, dancing, painting and acting – all the core elements of his Certificate programme at university - were already embodied in his lifestyle. Badejo's early life was steeped in traditional religion and religious practice, though he and other members of his family were practicing Christians.

I am a Catholic, the second in a family of nine and the eldest of the five boys. One of my younger brothers is a Rev. Father in the Catholic Church. Most of us in our family, excluding the Rev. Father, practice our traditional religion as well as the Catholic faith. There is no contradiction here. You see in our belief system, we have no quarrel with other gods, we just accept them as part of our own.

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momentary escape from reality and that may account for its international popularity and its role as a stimulant for artistes.

<sup>42</sup> Peggy Harper's early work on dance in Nigeria was very well received although in later years, many African academics felt that she always presented African Dance, its theory and practice from a European perspective, which did not necessarily accord to the African aesthetic. In discussions with Peggy Harper during the developmental stages of the BDDT, she talked about Nigerian dances in two categories, ethnic and theatrical. See article by Peggy Harper reproduced in the Report prepared by Bob Ramdhanie, 'West Midlands to West Africa', West Midlands Probation Service, 1983, p.27-32. It is that division which Nigerians are now not prepared to accept anymore. See Onuora Ossie Enekwe, *Theories of the Dance in Nigeria*, (Nsukka, Nigeria: Afa Press, 1991) in which he argues against Harper's approach to Nigerian dance.

<sup>43</sup> The Institute of African Studies, according to Badejo, "nurtured spirituality" as it 'housed' Religion, Philosophy and Traditional Medicine together "and we in the arts benefited greatly".



How can we forget the traditional religion of our fathers? These are the ways of my fathers, today my own world is mixed but I also stick strongly to the tradition. Our traditional religion is not written but because it is *practiced* in everything we do in our lives, it will be maintained wherever we are.

We have non-judgemental religious gods. Sango and Ogun co-exist in our religious belief system. The acceptance of a people starts from their spirituality. If you have ‘spiritual’ peace, you can transform evil into good.<sup>44</sup>

During his university programme, Badejo was able to tour internationally and recalls several instances of being introduced to new and exciting opportunities.

In 1969 we went to a Youth Festival in Nancy in France. I think there were productions from about seventy-two countries in the world and we won the first prize. It was some kind of a competition and we did a dance-drama ‘Alantagana’, an Australian ‘myth of creation’ which was choreographed by Peggy Harper. We then went to Paris where I met Robin Howard from the Place<sup>45</sup> in London. He had seen me perform and Peggy had spoken to him and the next thing I knew, I was offered a scholarship to go to London to study at ‘The Place’.

As we had won the competition, we were invited to perform for the Commonwealth Heads of State meeting, although I remember that the team of us were going to perform in Italy after France. However as I was now going to London, the whole team had to go back home because I was the lead dancer and they couldn’t do the production in Italy without me. I also met Wole Soyinka in Paris and happily, he endorsed our performance.<sup>46</sup>

At ‘The Place’ Badejo settled into a routine by ‘taking’ classes in contemporary dance and ‘giving’ classes in Nigerian dances. He attended a wide variety of classes, including ones given by the leading exponents of contemporary dance and ballet, Robert Cohan<sup>47</sup> and Dame Ninette de Valois, the latter introducing him to this classical form for the first time. His stay at ‘The Place’ was short-

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 3 April 2002.

<sup>45</sup> *The Place* is a well-established training and performance space dedicated to contemporary dance. It houses an archive, offers education and training at degree level and is the base for the London Contemporary Dance Theatre.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 3 April 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Cohan is a dancer, teacher and choreographer who trained in America with the Martha Graham Company. In 1967, he was appointed Artistic Director of The London Contemporary Dance Theatre.



lived however, as he was recalled to Nigeria to rehearse for the Ife Festival of Arts, which was taking place in Nigeria.

Badejo began to create his own productions and was setting a precedent in Nigeria. Historically, productions were normally by senior staff and researchers and his first dance-drama *Staff of Honour* rather unsettled some from 'the old school of thought'. Badejo produced, choreographed and danced in the production, which included Rufus Orisayomi – a filmmaker/theatre director, also living and working in London and with whom Badejo still continues dance collaborations. *Staff of Honour* was funded (£25) by Professor Abiola Irele from the Linguistics Department, creating another embarrassing position for other members of the staff from the Dance Department. The production was an instant success at the box office and was later filmed for television.

On completion of his Certificate, Badejo stayed on at the Ori Olokun (Goddess of the Sea) Performing Arts department at the University of Ife. Developments in this phase led to the establishment at the University of the Department of Theatre Arts, being distinct and now separate from the Institute of African Studies. A combination of musicals and theatre productions followed, normally being led by the key areas of research within the department at the time. *The Mad Music Maker* was written and performed by Badejo and included Rufus Orisayomi and one other dancer. By this time Badejo was already developing work from his 'inner' values and using Yoruba religious themes and mechanisms to make his work accessible to wider audiences.



During his formative years in Nigeria, Badejo was conscious of the role of the arts in society and much of his work reflected his own and his community's belief in justice and a communal sense of living and caring for each other. The traditional values of his Yoruba belief system percolated through his work and he was guided in creating projects, aware that his work had to present positive statements for his audiences. In 1972 he was invited to Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria to work towards establishing a Centre for Nigerian Cultural Studies.

I was appointed as a Senior Researcher in Performing Arts and there were Research Fellows and Professors from America, Trinidad, Australia and Nigeria. We had a Professor who astounded many people then as he was the only northern Muslim who was also a member of a Royal family and he would teach dance and practice with us 'outside in the open'.

My role was to recruit and teach new dancers and I should say that I still needed training myself at that time. Anyway, some of the best Nigerian dancers around the world today were trained there.<sup>48</sup>

Badejo's interactions with academics and practitioners from around the world introduced him to a broad range of productions ideas and issues. His production *Alashi Bamu Lafia*<sup>49</sup> was created in an effort to inform people that they should vote as their conscience directed them, regardless of religion, ethnicity, wealth or status in society. He continued to work on thematic issues which surrounded him and later left for a period of study at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Badejo found in Professor Albert M Opoku a person who was supportive and creative; a man who stimulated him and extended his ideas in traditional African music and dance. He researched and performed in Ghana between 1972 – 1976 and on the completion of his programme at the university, returned to Nigeria. After a short spell at his previous university he left to

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 3 April 2002.

<sup>49</sup> *Alashi Bamu Lafia* (Hausa language) meaning 'May there be peace' was presented during the election in Nigeria in the early 70s.



undertake his postgraduate programme at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Within that new environment his creativity flourished and Badejo began to explore with new techniques and ideas. In 1979 he created *Asa Ibile Yoruba* and

On April 23, 1980, Badejo staged it in UCLA's Royce Hall for a thousand junior high students. That same evening it was performed for a general audience that included His Honor, Mayor Tom Bradley, who presented Badejo with a certificate of appreciation for his work and for that of the African Studies Center, UCLA, in promoting the lively arts of Africa in Los Angeles.<sup>50</sup>

Badejo was constantly seeking inspiration for his work from his traditional belief and value systems and he choreographed these into his dance presentations.

Maintaining close and direct links with his audiences and fellow performers, he shared of the belief systems of the deities, he illustrated how reverence and respect should be expressed for elders in the community and he entertained by singing, dancing and drumming. Badejo was secure about the content and validity of his work and this is reflected in several discussions with him.

My spirituality is reflected in all my work. I am guided by those who went before me and my inspiration comes from sources that have existed for centuries. I have never left my traditional beliefs. To me African dance is about the position of the body, about the different muscles used in the body and how these are used. It is a deep understanding. You see when I am dancing, in my brain I am hearing the music in its total sense and I am aware of what my drummer will tell me and how I will move.<sup>51</sup>

Conscious of the adaptability of the African dance form to show relevance to today's society, Badejo was invited to England to work with the Pan Project in 1989; he created *Ebo Iye* for a national tour. That production was performed as part of CELEBRATION, one of the many showcases arranged by the BDDT to

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<sup>50</sup> Donald J. Cosentino, 'Asa Ibile Yoruba'. A review of the production from an unknown, undated, American source.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 24 April 2002.



highlight the work of African dancers in England. Badejo's spiritual development, professional training and exposition to a wide range of sources in Nigeria, Ghana and the USA shaped his attitude towards Western theatre and he was keen to ensure that his work operated on several levels.

In *Ebo Iye* what I was looking at is how people in different societies solve their problems. In the first half, the work centres on the Yoruba community and shows that when there is drought, lack of food etc people beseech their deities, because of their spiritual beliefs, asking them to provide thunder and rain, to make the crops grow and to give them the strength to sell the products, to improve their economic position. For example, they call upon *Sango*.

What I did then was to superimpose this belief system into a British setting, not using gods from afar, but creating their own gods in England. People would call upon the 'god of employment', because that god, like *Sango*, would be the god of opportunity (thunder), to help them get a job and also improve economically. *Ebo Iye* literally means we are all practicing the appeasement of survival.

In the production I was playing the deity of employment and written inside my jacket were a set of labels with what I knew were the problems the people wanted to solve. However every time they thought that they had satisfied a particular need, that label would be stripped off to reveal another label with other needs. In other words, you are never able to satisfy all your needs through 'employment' in the West, that's an illusion. You need to remember your gods and strengthen your own spiritual beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

#### According to Bill Harpe

The dancing and drumming are once again rooted in Nigeria, and the story of the first half is re-told. But the scene is now Britain – and the disaster is not disease, or famine, or draught, but homelessness, joblessness, inequality, loneliness, and drug addiction. The suffering figures are first drawn together by the charisma of a dancing politician, as they follow the slogans that are literally written on his coat tails. But this dance is a tease rather than a fulfilment – and, abandoned by the politician, the dancers finally unite with choral chants and infectious work dances to "climb the mountain", a journey which will both put them in touch with their past and ensure their survival in the future.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 18 January 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Bill Harpe, 'Ebo Iye (Ritual for Survival)', *The Guardian*, 10 May 1989, p.26.



The movements were based on a mixture of Yoruba and western forms and, through improvisation, were created for the production. In that same year he performed in *The Gods are not to Blame* with Talawa Theatre Company in London and in 1990, after several visits to the UK and a desire to work and support the BDDT, Badejo decided to return to reside in London. After an initial period of adjusting to the cultural situation in Britain, Badejo was being invited to present papers at numerous conferences and he began to widen the sphere of influence of African dance. He was aware of the limited variety of African dance forms in the UK and decided to establish a company to promote traditional Nigerian dance forms. He continued the thrust of some of the work of the BDDT and ensured that there were theoretical insights to the development of the forms in England. In his paper for a *Direction for Black Dance in England*, he wrote

Traditional dance in Africa is a way of life in that it represents a reflective warehouse of the sacred, religious, secular and artistic phenomena of the people. It permeates events in every community. In the traditional cultures of Nigeria, for example, dance plays a very important role in the socio-economic, religious and political events, of the society. ..In religious dances in Nigeria the medium uses dance to communicate between the gods and the worshippers. Performing the dance of SANGO (YORUBA), the medium uses creative movements to exhibit the characteristics of the deity of thunder and lightning. In performing this dance the medium carefully creates out of the fierce and irrational personality of the deity. Fast, rigorous and jerky movements are used to enact the story of the deity. It is thus creative rather than repetitive dance.<sup>54</sup>

This theme of communicating with the gods is a recurrent theme for many African choreographers, particularly in the New World. It presents them with the challenges of allowing their audiences a point of entry to gain some level of understanding of what they are observing whilst at the same time meeting their

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Badejo, 'A Direction for Black Dance in Britain', unpublished paper, 1991, p.1.



anticipated expectations of being entertained. Religious systems become the focal point of these cultural exchanges.

An articulate, highly trained performer, Badejo quickly established a pattern for Badejo Arts and *Ebo Iye* was re-rehearsed and re-represented 1992/93. He was lecturing and conducting workshops nationally and internationally and was directing and choreographing work for other dance companies in the UK. In 1992 he choreographed *The History of the Drum* and in 1993 he directed *The Awakening* for Kokuma Dance Theatre and in that same year, he also choreographed *Agbara* for IRIE! Dance Theatre. In addition to his annual productions, by 1993, he had established his *Bamijo* Summer School programmes.

For his 1994/95 season he choreographed and directed *Living Circle*.

A “traditional” society, in tune with the forces of nature, plays games and conducts an initiation ceremony – there is music, chanting and dance. There is a powerful sense of mystery and of the strength of the group as a whole, forming a circle to perform their rite. But not everyone sees the ceremony as good. Those who do not understand condemn. One society’s religion is another’s witchcraft. The ignorant outsiders – those in authority instigate a witch-hunt, the leader of the ceremony is surrounded and captured.

A hanging is being prepared.<sup>55</sup>

Badejo’s productions introduced audiences as well as artistes to several aspects of traditional religious practice amongst the Yoruba communities and to that extent, challenged the ways they judged or perceived African cultural traditions. In *Living Circle* it was the Egungun Festival.

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<sup>55</sup> Badejo Arts, ‘Living Circle’, *Programme Notes*, August 1994.



It is the Egungun Festival; people are singing and dancing in excited anticipation of the arrival of the Egungun, an enigmatic masked figure representing the spirit of the ancestors who visits the land of the living occasionally to solve disputes and so on and bring blessings and curses on the living. The Hangman is also one of the revellers, but he is not recognised by the crowd. Finally, to great cheers, the Egungun arrives.<sup>56</sup>

In Yoruba culture, “Egungun are diverse spirits (ara orun) who manifest themselves either as voices in the midnight or as masqueraders that honor the ancestors”.<sup>57</sup> Muller and Muller reports that

Egungun is centred around ancestor worship, so that the principal duty of its members and mask bearers is attendance at funeral rituals. A mask-bearer, for instance, becomes possessed by the spirit of the deceased, which uses him as a means of consoling the bereaved family and to decide issues of dispute.<sup>58</sup>

For Badejo, creating *Living Circle* was one way of trying to address issues about social relationships in Western communities.

I use the traditional religious masquerade dances to develop the story of how people live in their communities in England. In Africa, our ‘community spirit’ is strong and people care for each other because it makes for a strong community. But I believe here, no one really cares about each other. *Living Circle*, is exactly that, life moves around in a circle and there is a kind of spirituality that guides this sense of community and lifestyle. The dancer offers praises to honour the forces of the universe and then creates movements from the particular masquerade society.<sup>59</sup>

Badejo felt that the messages in *Living Circle* were not really understood and decided to explore the theme further with his next production.

After *Living Circle* I choreographed *Agbo Iye, Circle of Life* as I did not think that people understood what I was saying in *Living Circle*. The emphasis was again on community living because it seems to me that life here is quite linear. Your God lives in Heaven above and you live on earth below and there is a straight-line relationship. I used the masquerade because in Yoruba culture, the masquerade is the link between man and his deities and is totally respected. No one knows who

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<sup>56</sup> Badejo Arts, ‘Living Circle’, *Programme Notes*, August 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry John Drewal, *More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun*, unpublished article, p.28.

<sup>58</sup> Klaus E Muller and Ute Ritz-Muller, ‘Soul of Africa’ op. cit. p.360.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 14 September 2004.



the masked dancer is. In *Circle of Life* however, the mask is removed, signifying the de-spiritualization of living in the West. Once the mask is removed, people then start to search for other ways of 'being' and in the production, it is through seeking magic in gambling and money.<sup>60</sup>

His belief in "what went before must guide what is to come" is evidenced in his choice of material and choreographic presentations. In an interview with *The Independent*, his focus was largely about the pressures facing the creative artiste rather than about his latest production itself.

There are nine of us in the company: six dancers and three musicians. In the culture I come from, nine is a small number, but in this country three is a crowd. You need a lot of money to tour and there is very little funding these days, so I have to scale it accordingly. I only had four weeks to choreograph the show and African dance is not too common to dancers here.<sup>61</sup>

Badejo was reflecting on how African dance was on the margins of mainstream cultural activities and indirectly about the demise of the BDDT's programmes in the sense that African dancers were not having regular training opportunities, through the work of a designated organisation, to take the form forward. In spite of this, Badejo's work was beginning to attract the attention of the media and the *Daily Post* (Liverpool) reported

Badejo, who settled in Britain five years ago, had since made a big impact on the British arts scene with both his own company productions and personal appearances in other people's shows.

His dance company Badejo Arts has been in the city since Wednesday running dance workshops and holding public rehearsals for his latest work *Living Circle*.

The piece which he unveiled at the Blackie last night and which will be repeated tonight, uses African rhythms to conjure up a world in which spirits and human emotions wrestle together.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 14 September 2004

<sup>61</sup> 'On Tour: Peter Badejo', *The Independent*, 27 September 1994, p.26.

<sup>62</sup> Phillip Key, 'Badejo back at The Blackie', *Daily Post*, 21 January 1995, p.10.



Badejo's work, though steeped in traditional religious practices and myths, was essentially contemporary in its presentations and resonated with the diverse sections of society. He was, as Nketia had earlier expressed, using traditional African dance values to guide and develop his contemporary forms in the West. He explained his visions about his work in a newspaper interview about his next touring production in 1995.

With this production, we are trying to make clearer to a Western audience what African art is to Africans and black people in the diaspora. This work is more than a dance. We are trying to challenge the idea that African dance is something of the past. Africa is not static, so there is no reason why our dance should be static. We have contemporary means of expression.<sup>63</sup>

*Sisi Agbe Aye* was an international collaboration with another of Africa's international contemporary dancer and choreographer, Koffi Koko.

Both Koffi, who now resides in France, and Peter have had opportunities to work extensively in Europe, not only with dancers from Africa, but also with many other nationalities who are seeking greater knowledge and training in traditional African dance.<sup>64</sup>

In an interview with Koffi Koko, he spoke about his approach to African dance over the past twenty years.

Since I started dancing, I have always danced African dance. Many of the young black dancers in Paris take 'some of this and some of that' and put it together and call it African Dance but there was no spirit in their work. After a few years, it just fizzled out. I have continued with my art and when people see it they say but it is contemporary and I inform them that it is African dance that I have been doing for years.<sup>65</sup>

*Sisi Agbe*, (Opening the Gourd) was created using metaphors; "whatever you do in society, you are never sure of what the end result will be". The dance uses a combination of African and Western dance styles, the rippling torso interpreting

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<sup>63</sup> Dianne Regisford, 'Badejo Arts: Sisi Agbe Aye – Opening the Gourd of Life', *The Weekly Journal*, 19 October 1995.

<sup>64</sup> Sharon Atkin, 'Keeping African dance alive in the diaspora', unknown source 1995.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Koffi Koko, Abuja, Nigeria 5 October 2003.



the rhythms of the drums and xylophone and the arms and shoulders incorporating Bata movements. The six dancers changed between bent bodies to the more Western straight figure and moved from circles into straight lines, incorporating a series of contemporary floor patterns. According to Badejo

It's fascinating the way the work developed because Koffi brought new interpretations from his Voodoo background and I was drawing on all my Yoruba vocabulary. When we got on stage every night there was a new kind of improvisation where we both presented from our own spiritual backgrounds and then just brought the two different experiences together. It was exciting. The work was addressing the 'location' of people in society and exploring themes about how they arrived at that particular point. With the gourd, you cannot see inside and you don't know what it is until you open it. That's the same with life! <sup>66</sup>

During 1996 and 2003, Badejo created and toured with much success, *Agbo Iye* (1996), *The Pain of Aspirations* (1998/99), *Emi Ijo* (2000) and *Elemental Passions* (2003). Between that hectic schedule he participated in a series of choreographic labs with Akademi, an agency promoting South Asian Dance in London. In a group discussion with the Asian dancers in the workshop, he talked about how he thought and created his work.

In African dance, function comes first and aesthetics second. A lot of the dance here has been de-functionalised. Dance is not reserved for a certain age or certain size, that's because *dance to us starts from inside and not outside* (My italics). African dance is about how you feel whereas here it seems to me to be about how you look. <sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 14 September 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo at a workshop with Asian dancers at the Hothouse, South Bank Centre, London 12 August 1999.





Peter Badejo in Living Circle (1997)





Peter Badejo and Koffi Koko in Sisi Agbe Aye (1997) Badejo Arts



In developing his choreography and his work in general, he spoke about the influences of his Yoruba culture in determining how he approached specific themes.

For me there are two approaches to choreography. The traditional and the contemporary approaches. My work is heavily influenced by my Yoruba culture but I will never say that my choreography is traditional. My own work is not abstract but more real. I am identity crazy and as much as I want to contribute to the universal development of dance, I do not want my work so watered down that no one knows where its from.<sup>68</sup>

Of his recent productions, *Emi Ijo* was a new challenge for Badejo Arts and for Badejo himself. The production began on a boat at Greenwich pier with music, dancing and drumming greeting the audience as they boarded for 'the journey'<sup>69</sup> (towards the South Bank Centre, SBC). As the boat departed, Badejo began 'the story', reflecting on the dreams and aspirations that travelled with black people as they migrated to England. The story line is accentuated with music and movement, singing and choreographed pieces, using and fusing vocabulary from Caribbean and African dance forms. The griot, the historian in African culture, playing the Kora, adds to the storyline as dancers 'inch' themselves around in a circle in the religious dance the *Kumina*. Dancers and musicians talk about the arrival and treatment of their parents in the UK years ago and see the production as not only a reminder of the past, but of the contribution to British culture by a wide range of immigrant groups. The journey is filled with rhythms, dreams and visions of immigrants, singing and storytelling and, on arrival at their destination, the theme of immigrant into host community, is danced on the rooftop of the SBC. Asian and Irish dancers greeted the 'new immigrants' and very quickly the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo at a workshop with Asian dancers at the Hothouse, South Bank Centre, London 12 August 1999.

<sup>69</sup> The 'journey' in this production refers to those when black people came from the Caribbean and Africa to England in the 50s, 60s and 70s.



black community made its own contribution with a senior citizen's group gently performing the quadrille (a mutation between African and British/French dance vocabulary found in the Caribbean).

The emphasis of the production then shifted from *dance as entertainment to dance with attitude*, highlighting the poverty, loneliness and marginalisation that the black communities suffered in their early years in the UK. The road sweepers with their broken spirits, bent bodies and 'yard' brooms then began to create a new form of communication, with dance movements evolving out of the traditional and the folk forms, into strong, modern and confident steps, signifying the 'here to stay' attitude of Britain's black communities. The brooms became an extension of life and instead of 'locating' the black communities to the lowest level of the employment ladder, with bodies becoming even more bent with disappointment and pain, the brooms are now powerful weapons in their hands, weapons to defend themselves. There is a new approach, a new dynamics and the movements are energetic, circular and outwards and dancers improvise as the programme draws to a close in a 'carnival type' celebration.

In the programme notes, it states that

Emi Ijo (the "Heart of Dance") reverses the plot of Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". Rather than the picaresque pillaging of Ivory from the Congo, Emi Ijo explores the cultural gift migrating Africans and Caribbeans have brought to British culture. A bittersweet narrative of encounters across cultural divides, Emi Ijo asks us to acknowledge and celebrate the hybrid nature of recent British experience.<sup>70</sup>

This first multiple, site-specific production saw Badejo deviating from his usual studio theatre productions whilst retaining all the core values of African dance

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<sup>70</sup> Badejo Arts, 'EMI IJO (Heart of Dance)', *Programme Notes*, December 1999.



and reflecting on current issues in contemporary British society. In an unpublished extract about the production, it was stated that

Conceptually Emi Ijo – the Heart of Dance was unlike any previous Badejo Arts’ production. It was not, for instance, a “straightforward” studio show. It was conceived as a multi-faceted project which would serve as a community resource, educational tool and an opportunity for community dancers and musicians to perform alongside professionals. The outreach work would feed directly into the production itself as research material. Also, unlike previous Badejo Arts’ productions, the performances were site specific, taking place outdoors on the River (Thames) and beside it. For the first time Badejo Arts worked alongside other performing companies working in different traditions – Asian, Irish and the Caribbean.<sup>71</sup>

The logistics for this programme was enormous but were overcome and the production was very well received by the audiences along its journey and at the finale at the South Bank Centre in London.

Emi Ijo combines the pulsating power of Yoruba Bata with the intricate rhythms of Jamaican Kumina, creating a unique dance production that is both sensual and forceful. Vital entertainment for all the family, the production shows how recent black history is now part of our common cultural heritage. From the initial hostility of “No dogs, no Irish, no blacks”, the story depicts the strength, grace and humour of black migrants, *creating a new means of spiritual expression* that we can all celebrate today.<sup>72</sup> [My italics]

As Badejo himself explained

What I try to explore in this production is how far we have come in this country and to symbolise that in movement and story telling. I wanted to situate memory at the core of our identity and to remind the next generation never to forget – even if remembering sometimes hurt. I wanted to tell this story about a people and the dance of a people in a way that penetrates deeply into the soul of the viewer.<sup>73</sup>

Badejo’s credibility, creative talents, scholarship and his vision for African dance in England were rewarded in 2001 when he was awarded the OBE for his contribution to dance. Throughout, Badejo uses the value systems of the Yoruba tradition to inform his work and he encourages practitioners, especially in the

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<sup>71</sup> Unknown author, unpublished notes from Emi Ijo (Heart of Dance), 9 June 2002, p.2.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p.3.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 10 July 2002.



diaspora, to engage with 'the source'. On several occasions to different countries in Africa, Badejo took many of his young dancers and musicians and introduced them firsthand to the values of traditional African music and dance.

In 2003 Badejo's production returned to the deities of Yorubaland and particularly to the god of thunder and lighting, *Sango*. The shift away from Caribbean trained musicians and dancers was noticeable in this production as almost all of the small group of performers were invited directly from Nigeria. Badejo was developing his work within restricted resources and believed that

It will be much easier for me to invite dancers and musicians from Nigeria because the piece is about *Sango* and the *Bata* techniques. I haven't got the time to train performers here from scratch for that and therefore it's easier to get them from home. They will already know what I am looking for and we would work much faster in the limited time-scale I have.<sup>74</sup>

Badejo's decision was the correct one, though that chosen route cannot be necessarily positive for African dance development in England. Badejo is conscious of that aspect and believes that with the establishment of DanceAfrica, these issues about training and cultural exchanges will be resolved. Badejo is deeply concerned that there is a lack of codification and hence a poor sense of history and longevity of African dance in England. He believes that through a process of codification for the *Batabade* (Bata and Badejo), he can begin to introduce young dancers into a practical and spiritual way to approach *specific* dances from the continent and therefore have a trained pool of dancers here in England.

The *Programme Notes* for *Elemental Passions* points out that

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 9 April 2003.



Elemental Passions takes you on an extraordinary journey, exploring the labyrinth of Sango's soul, exposing a subterranean force that resonates beneath many contemporary black cultures.

Sango, pronounced Shango, the Yoruba deity of thunder and lightning, is a spiritual paradox – mortal yet immortal, historical yet mythical, masculine yet feminine – but whose message touches all. Above all, Sango is an elemental force of passion. Sango is like fire, his colour is red and his dance restless, fiery and wild like a bushfire.<sup>75</sup>

The shoulder movements in the Bata are critical as *Sango*, the god of thunder and lightning, transcends into the human body. The upper movements are powerful and strong and the shoulders are used as a conduit to symbolise the passage of electricity; there is a distortion of the shoulder with powerful twists across the body and then downwards. The legs are slightly bent as *Sango* dances. However *Sango* is not all fury and passion and has a dual personality, as is revealed in the production, when Oya's rippling body movements circle around him to charm his fiery passion. *Elemental Passions*, as far as Badejo is concerned, "was not only about *Sango*, his personalities and his effect on everyday life but also about the start of a new phase of work- Bata - which I want to explore for the next few years".<sup>76</sup>

The production reached new audiences and excited dance lovers and newcomers to dance nationally, receiving positive media coverage and requests for a further tour. At the Place in London, Katie Phillips wrote

The pinnacle of the performance came with the bows – and not because the show was over. The atmosphere had become electric – the setting was intimate enough for audience members to sing along to the well known African songs, jive in their seats, chant, and egg the dancers on. Elemental passions were certainly roused by the sheer enjoyment of colour, vigorous dancing, loud music, and live percussion...The dancers

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<sup>75</sup> 'Elemental passions Dance to the clamorous thunder of Bata', *Programme Notes*, April/May 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 12 June 2003.



were both praised and envied – if the aisles had been wider, people would definitely been dancing in them.<sup>77</sup>

Elsewhere, the reviews to this new phase of work were equally positive. The reporter for the *Voice Newspaper* commented how “the combination of colourful costumes, awesome physiques, innovative choreography and some incredible drumming, created an exciting atmosphere that led to an extended encore with all the artists improvising solos”.<sup>78</sup> At St. Bride’s Centre, his work received a four-star rating from Erin McEihinney of the *Evening News*.

Telling the story of Sango, the Yoruba (a tribal area of Nigeria) deity of thunder and lighting, the group performed on an almost empty set, with only a cleverly designed sculpture from artist Sokari Douglas-Camp to represent the anthill from which the god is born. Three musicians, including Badejo himself, provided the accompaniment on several different instruments, including the Bata drums, but very much acted as part of the performance, even changing costumes to fit in with the different stages of the story.<sup>79</sup>

Following the London performance of *Elemental Passions*, I was fortunate to have a discussion with Wole Soyinka who had purposely travelled to London to attend the performance. He was impressed by the idea and quality of the production and the manner in which the audience at ‘The Place’ received it. Soyinka was directly involved in the artistic plans for 8<sup>th</sup> All Africa Games in Abuja, Nigeria<sup>80</sup> and Badejo was appointed as the Artistic Director for the Opening and Closing ceremonies. The concept of the anthill and the process of the birth of something new was the chosen theme for the opening ceremony and it included, amongst the eighteen thousand performers, the dancers and musicians who had worked with Badejo in his last production. The Programme

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<sup>77</sup> Katie Phillips, ‘Badejo Arts Elemental Passions’, *London dance.com*, 16 May 2003, p.2.

<sup>78</sup> Jemima Bukari, ‘Elemental Passions’, *The Voice*, 2 June 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Erin McEihinney, ‘Badejo even Bata that the real thing’, *Evening News*, 12 May 2003.

<sup>80</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> All Africa Games took place in Abuja, Nigeria between 4 – 18 October 2003. Wole Soyinka outlined the artistic ideas for the Opening and Closing ceremonies. I was invited to rehearsals and the opening ceremony, sections of which Badejo had choreographed. The opening event included over 18,000 people, including dancers and 100 horses.



for the Opening Ceremony read *Spirit of the Masks* is the grand opening ceremony performance. It is the story of Africa's birth, rites of passage, death of the soul and rebirth".<sup>81</sup> Of the anthill it stated,

At such times, the ancestors of the clan who had been committed to Mother Earth emerge again as *egwugwu* through tiny ant-holes.

The Guardian spirit plants a seed in the sacred womb of the anthill. Anthill, the concrete metaphor for the womb, which carries the creative and procreative energy and will, under the custody of the ancestral spirits. Anthill, the symbol of persistence, resilience and strength in unity.<sup>82</sup>

Badejo is currently working with colleagues in Nigeria and the UK in terms of codifying his work on the Bata-Bade dance technique and intends to focus his energies over the next few years on developing specific issues around Bata. In a recent discussion paper he wrote of the BATA dance form.

Originating in Nigeria, Bata has become one of the most powerful and significant cultural forces in the African diaspora and beyond. Bata has a history of flexibility and hybridity – since the slave trade it has been adopted and adapted by different diasporic Africans – in Cuba, Trinidad and Brazil. Bata's mutability is therefore ideally suited to shaping new forms of dance expression in multicultural societies such as Britain in a sustained and rigorous fashion.<sup>83</sup>

The ultimate aim as Badejo sees it is to codify and present new forms of African contemporary dances in the West whilst introducing audiences to religious and cultural experiences that should alter their perceptions of African dance. Overall his ambitions are to create interesting and challenging work, using traditional religious values to confront the misconceptions and misinformation that the British and other Europeans had so successfully dispersed around the white world about African people and their cultural traditions. He is convinced that although 'religion' is independent within particular cultures, spirituality is

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<sup>81</sup> '8<sup>th</sup> All Africa Games, Opening Ceremony', *Programme*, 4 – 18 October 2003, p.32.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* p.33.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Badejo, 'Bata-Bade-Dance Technique', unpublished paper 2003, p.1.



universal and thus he will continue to use his spirituality to create work that will inform, challenge and educate dance audiences around the world.

Since Badejo began creating and touring work in the UK, his audiences have been growing and his techniques and skills have been shared within educational institutions and with professional companies. Producing work, like Patten, for small to medium scale venues, audiences have stabilised at between two hundred to two hundred and fifty per performance, although in Nigeria and the USA, audiences are very much greater. Badejo's work particularly attracts young dancers of all colours and ages and many are able to identify with the 'spirit' with which he works.

Francis Angol has been the assistant choreographer and assistant director with Badejo Arts for several years and has danced in all but one of Badejo Arts' productions since 1992. Having recently established his own *Movement Angol Contemporary African Dance Company*, he believes that

Spirituality has, is and will always continue to be an integral part of Peter Badejo's work. Given the opportunity to work closely with Peter, it is evident that spirituality is but a way of life for Peter the artist! It is that way of life that he clearly explores and articulates within his work. A way of life that is buffered by deep spiritual beliefs and values that has a strong association with a traditional way of life that draws from a kaleidoscope of cultural influences natured from the time of birth to present day.

One would say that Peter exercises spirituality in his work on a physical and 'consciousness' level. On the physical level this is experienced and demonstrated through the use of various items such as narrative themes, musical scores, costumes and props. On a 'consciousness' level Peter's work has the ability and power to connect with the individual on a deep conscious plane. His work has a profound impact on people's lives by reaching into the inner most corners of one's soul and connecting with that inner consciousness.

His work connects and engages with people's emotions influencing change within the individual, which for me, is a profound spiritual



experience transferred from one individual to another. The ability to formulate deep emotional feelings that connects with the inner self is spirituality at work and it is this same unique way of working that totally influences my own way of working.<sup>84</sup>

(i) **Badejo Arts: Annual Programmes**

With the closure of the BDDT and in attempting to continue the cohesion amongst the African dance sector of the 80s and early 90s, Badejo Arts introduced two independent programmes to extend the work of his organisation. An annual Summer School programme, *Bami jo* (dance with me) in the Yoruba language was introduced in 1993 and *Tilewa* (source of life), a platform for new young black choreographers began in 2001. Both programmes were designed to cater for the needs of African dancers as well as other interested enthusiasts.

The response to the first *Bami jo* programme by black African dancers themselves was not particularly encouraging and in 1994 it was decided to develop the event as a travelling School and take elements of the programme to regions out of London. The idea was to conduct classes for two weeks in London, one week in the regions and then return to London for the final week. Due to lack of attendance over the years, programmes have been designed to accommodate non-African dancers and special programmes, for example, were offered to the Jiving Lindy Hoppers and Union Dance Company, the latter a mixed, contemporary-trained, modern dance company. In the regions there was more success and according to Badejo,

In Liverpool the work was quite different to the sessions in London. Students from the John Moores University attended. They were mixed in terms of gender and nationalities but genuinely interested in what was being taught.

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<sup>84</sup> Francis Angol, London 2 March 2005.



In Birmingham many of the dancers from Kokuma attended and we also offered classes for children. This was very different to Liverpool because here we were working with a professional performance company. The DanceXchange in Birmingham were very supportive.<sup>85</sup>

Over the years the Schools have attracted people but in London the attendees have generally been mostly white people who enjoyed participating in dance movements rather than being skilled dancers and a minority of black dancers whose specialism were in other areas of contemporary dance forms. The format has been revised in recent years to include a final day conference and finale 'showing' by tutors, although that has not altered or affected attendance significantly.

The international tutors at *Bami jo* have been drawn from several countries around the world and in the past have included Silvina Fabars Gilart (Cuba), Oddebi Garcia Fabars (Cuba), Isioma Williams (Nigeria), Koffi Koko (Benin/France), Georges Momboye (Ivory Coast/France), Zab Maboungou (Congo/Canada), Flora Thefaine (Togo/France), Alabi Sikiru Ayangunie (Nigeria) and Ariry Andriamoratsiresy (Madagascar). In discussions with some of the tutors, Richard Tsevende from Nigeria spoke to me about his experience at *Bami jo*.

Dance is part of the existence of the people of Africa. During the Summer School what I found interesting was that the participants found it difficult to appreciate the danceable notes and the rest of the music. They were just moving without listening. Dance and music is integrated. Coming to a Summer School of African dance people find it strange that we spend a great amount of time learning songs and drumming patterns. That makes you understand African Dance much better.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Peter Badejo, London 17 August 1997.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Richard Tsevende, London 18 July 1995.



Ian Parmel, a Caribbean and African traditional drummer based in England who has travelled with Badejo in Africa, spoke of his experiences from the Summer School.

It was the first time I was working together with the musicians from Africa. Even though I have been drumming for a long time, we from the Caribbean have forgotten the old African ways and now have to relearn them. The Africans found my music 'out of this world' and I thought theirs was. We both had quite a lot to learn from each other.<sup>87</sup>

Ten years after its introduction, *Bami jo* still struggles to attract the numbers or calibre of black African dancers and Badejo is revisiting the original idea of the Summer School with a view to re-programming the activity nationally. Badejo remains an optimist, although like Patten, he believes that there are many who wish to control dance development in the UK to suit their narrow perceptions and distortions of Africa. He sees value in codifying African dance forms and is now working with a small group to begin that process. Although attempts in this area present their own unique problems, codification is valuable and necessary as it will ensure longevity, promote standards and quality and enable young people to have new insights to African dance.

In *Bami jo* 2001 and 2002, Badejo continued with the theme of codification and the use of the Bata techniques as a starting point. The topic of discussion for the final conference in 2001 asked, 'Is codification necessary to the continuity of African dance?' Funmi Adewole presented a paper to begin the debate and the panellists included Zab Maboungou (Canada), Flora Théfaine (France) and Ariry Andriamoratsiresy (Madagascar). The discussion was wide-ranging, heated and informative and emanating from the debate were many complex issues. For

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Ian Parmel, London 18 July 1995.



example, how should the codification of sacred dances used on stage be addressed and should anyone perform these sacred dances? Can codification ‘transmit’ spiritual and other core essences of African dance practice? Is codification about the transmission of culture, documentation or about dance replication in Africa and in the African diaspora? Understandably there were no conclusions but Badejo is aware of these and many of the other issues.

Nonetheless he sees the Bata technique as a valid starting point. For *Bami jo* 2002, he stated

The focus of this year’s programme is the Bata music and dance tradition, which originated in Nigeria but is now present in many forms across the world. Bata is an extraordinarily flexible and effective form. It articulates and explores the body as a complex medium of self-expression and communication, using rhythmic interpretation transmitted through movement and dance.<sup>88</sup>

*Bami jo* Programme 2003 is attached as Appendix 5. Badejo Arts is striving to cover the many obvious gaps within the African dance sector and with *Bami jo* focussing on training and professional development *Tilewa* was established to promote young choreographers. For *Tilewa* ’01, Badejo noted that

Prior to *Tilewa*, young choreographers working within African expressive cultures had no platform to experiment and showcase their work. *Tilewa* was established to fill this lacuna and in doing so, encourage and celebrate the diverse ways these choreographers use African dance aesthetics to interpret contemporary cultural experiences. The aim of the platform is to provide choreographers with the opportunity to publicly showcase work of high artistic quality and to engage in critical dialogue with other artists and the wider cultural field.<sup>89</sup>

Over the years, amongst many others, *Tilewa* has showcased the choreographic works of Francis Angol, Adura Onashile, Olu Taiwo, Gail Parmel and Henry

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<sup>88</sup> Programme notes *Bami jo* 2002.

<sup>89</sup> Notes from Peter Badejo for *Tilewa* ’01.



Daniel. These dancers are still actively creating work today and many of their creations reflect the influences that Badejo has had on their development.

The dance organisations, Badejo Arts and 'H' Patten Dance Theatre, have both benefited significantly from the creative inputs of their two artistic directors, but both organisations, for various reasons, have never been able to cement their organisational development. Badejo Arts has repeatedly failed to attract the calibre of staff necessary to underpin the administrative progression of the organisation and has seen a number of part-time staff and ACE supported consultants, providing a variable degree of support. This inconsistent administrative support has resulted in a destabilisation of the company over the last few years.

Financial support for Badejo Arts has largely been via ACE. The figures presented here are gleaned from available ACE annual reports and Badejo Arts audited accounts and though somewhat patchy, give an overall picture of their most recent level of support (it was pointed out that previous accounts are in storage due to lack of space in the current office). Badejo Arts was recognised for its contribution to African dance development in England and this was reflected in the manner in which the public funding agencies supported the organisation. The company's funding which began in 1991 as *project funding*, then became slightly more secure when the organisation was supported as a *fixed-term client*; in the recent past, the agencies have supported the company as an *annual revenue client*. Overall, income generation by the company is comparable to similar types of arts organisations and varies between 16 – 20%.



**TABLE 9****Badejo Arts Funding Sources**

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>SOURCES OF FUNDING</u></b>	<b><u>AMOUNT (£)</u></b>
1990/91 (Ebo Iye)	ACE	28,000
1997/98	ACE, London  ACE	8,000  65,000
1999/2000	ACE, London  ACE  London Dance Network  Generated income	10,288  90,000  8,650  13,655
2000/2001	ACE, London  London Dance Network  ACE, London (Dance Fund & Strategic Relations)  ACE (main, Training and APD)  Millennium Commission Grant  Generated income	11,000  8,151  10,550  101,450  32,300  27,029
2001/2002	ACE  Generated income	105,500  15,889



## **CONCLUSION**

African dance development, in common with developments in classical and modern ballet in the UK, owes much to the commitment and vision of a handful of practitioners and enthusiasts. In spite of initial difficult periods for all the genres, theatrical forms still find expression today. However, there is a marked difference in attempting to research these forms, for where Europeans have developed systems to codify and notate Western dance techniques, Africans have used the 'oral tradition' and 'practice' for its continuity in the West. That African dance exists at all, is a testament to the religious and spiritual foundation of 'the dance'. That cultural difference however, coupled with historical inaccuracies, has resulted in African dance occupying a lowly position in the arts, and from the very outset, the challenges in approaching this thesis were enormous.

In the UK today, there is a lack of scholarship pertaining to this subject area and secondly, the literature penned by British and other European writers from the 17<sup>th</sup> century about African people and African Dance was overwhelmingly negative and misleading. This paucity of written material means that the resources available to study and develop the forms remain in 'the heads' of cultural observers and activists though often and understandable, these are anecdotal and personal rather than systematically archived. The thesis nevertheless teased out tangible material and evidence to cogently argue that African dance in England found expression as theatrical dance, through the activities of Caribbean black people in the churches and later in political and social events as 'dance with attitude'. The forms are continuing today, through a new network of practitioners, primarily from the continent itself and through



increasing practice of traditional African religious belief systems and black spirituality.

Given the brutality of African slavery and the de-humanisation process which occurred, the thesis quite clearly highlighted that Africans continued their cultural practices, although the prevailing conditions at that time seemed more appropriate and conducive for them to accept the religious and societal values of the 'other' in preference to their own. In a practical manner at least, that could have resulted in them being treated physically better, yet many of the enslaved, surreptitiously or otherwise, retained and practiced their traditional customs.

The detailed Introduction satisfied two distinct purposes. Firstly, it provided a necessary foundation, a backdrop, to assist in the exploration of the subject under consideration whilst simultaneously providing some suggestions towards increasing the understanding of African dance in England. The issues outlined showed that there remains within the dance sector a nebulous approach towards accepting culture-specific African dance forms, the preference being to continuously change 'labels' rather than engaging with practitioners to develop an appropriate strategy for dance development in multi-cultural Britain. As highlighted, the propensity to use broad-based, ambivalent labels adds to the confusion in the dance sector and impedes the development of African dance. The introduction of yet another label, 'dance of black origin', appears a retrograde step. The survival of the form, as clearly illustrated, has been through practice and thus development of systems to assist in the *harmonisation of practice* would yield more profitable results than a system of labels.



African dance as defined in the Introduction is about a specific form of *professional practice*. In many respects these forms are similar to ‘classical’ dance forms but due to the African’s oral traditions and a lack of codification and notation in Africa and throughout the diaspora, the forms have been misrepresented and have largely been misunderstood. In an effort to promote a better understanding of African dance, the thesis has offered some suggestions both in terms of defining what is meant by African dance, thereby avoiding the usage of the popular APD label and re-viewing the forms in the diaspora without prejudice. Within the definitions offered, African dance in the New World is classified as African Dance in the Diaspora (ADD) with performances and presentations in the UK being either Traditional African Dance (TAD) or Contemporary African Dance (CAD). African dance, as is popularly perceived, is not an ill-defined activity to the accompaniment of drums but is essentially a mode of communication, with specific meaning for dancers, musicians and audiences and satisfying a wide range of emotional needs. The forms integrate symbols and gestures that allow practitioners to re-connect directly and meaningfully with their inner souls, their deities and their ancestors. It is as Alphonse Tiérou stated “a perfect manifestation which comes from the intimate union of *cou* and *zou*”.<sup>1</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the British and other European nations were entrepreneurial and were all involved in New World explorations. That exploratory spirit led to new discoveries, to occupation and to slavery and colonisation of Africans on the continent and in the New World. As Africans communicated orally and were less

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<sup>1</sup> op. cit.p.13.



technologically advanced, they were widely believed to be and treated as savages without cultural traditions.

Chapters One and Two reassessed the literature which British and European writers penned about the continent, its people and their religious and dance practices. It re-interpreted, through a process of de-codification, the views about African dance and religious practices by providing alternative and informed analyses from the African perspective, something that was not considered during the periods of slavery and subsequent colonisation. Chapter One focused on the African continent. It presented an alternative perspective to those held by the British in the sense that Africa, by the time the British and other Europeans arrived, had already enjoyed the benefits of an advanced civilisation with effective systems of governance, organised cultural traditions and highly developed skills in the visual and performing arts. This chapter reviewed the early literature of the Europeans which was used to create their image of Africa. It juxtaposed those perceptions with those by African themselves, analysing similar activities and events but interpreting and presenting them in different ways. It showed that in spite of the efforts by the dominant powers, Africans offered significant resistance against the 'outsiders' and continued their practice of traditional religions. The chapter ended with an introduction to the Yoruba form of worship, given the growing significance of this particular belief system in the West and its influence on African dance development.

Through enslavement, Africans were dispersed around the world in a period of history lasting to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to maintain their



barbaric treatment, the imagery conjured up by the nations involved in slavery continued in the New World. As cargo, Africans were packaged, despatched and maltreated yet even on the slave ships, though forced, were able to dance and to communicate with each other. 'Dancing on the slave ships' enabled slaves to maintain practice of traditional forms but more importantly retain spiritual contact with their ancestors and gods.

Consistent with the actions of the dominant powers, African cultural traditions were once again ridiculed throughout the New World and legislation aimed at eliminating traditional religious practice, including dance, was frequent. Regardless, African dance forms were firmly planted on Caribbean soil, accommodating and adapting to suit the new environment but retaining all the core essences and values of traditional African cultural traditions. Chapter Two focused on the plight of the Africans in the New World and looked at religious and dance practice specifically in Jamaica and in Trinidad and Tobago. It highlighted how sacred dance forms were transformed into the secular forms yet maintaining the core essences and values of African Dance in the Diaspora. The chapter detailed dance practice in the Caribbean pre- and post- emancipation and clearly showed the direct connections to Africa and African religious practice. The re-emergence and adaptation of the dance forms in the Caribbean later found a direct outlet in the UK through Christian fellowship. Religious, funerary and social dances that came out of Africa and surfaced in the Caribbean emerged as theatrical dance in London. Indeed, the pioneers of African dance in the UK were steeped in traditional practice in the Caribbean, later using their skills and knowledge to entertain British audiences.



Where chapters One and Two focused on religious practice and dance development on the continent and in the New World, chapters Three, Four and Five focused on African dance development in England, adding a new dimension to the history of dance development. Chapter Three detailed the black presence in the UK and showed that the growth of the black churches and the dynamo of the 'black power' movement in the USA galvanised African dance into a new phase in England. It presented new insights and detailed accounts of African and Caribbean Dance development in the UK since the 1940s and provided, for the first time, a framework to assess the development of the dance forms. It presented an original classification for African and Caribbean Dance practice and introduced a logical method for identifying dance development. Through this completely new approach of defining specific phases of black dance development in the UK the thesis has presented new opportunities for further research in this neglected area of dance development. Interestingly, through this segmentation and phasing process, the shift in African dance development away from a majority of Caribbean practitioners became apparent.

Chapter Four provided an overview of two key organisations in the development of African dance in the UK and suggested that the experiences gained through those organisations could be usefully employed in developing a specific Institute (DanceAfrica) to strategically guide the development of African dance in its fourth phase of development. The chapter detailed the growth of Kokuma Dance Company and assessed the contribution the company made to the cultural life of Birmingham and the UK generally. It clearly illustrated how African dance practice is embedded in a different set of values to Western dance practice and



through misunderstanding these, actions intended to support, often lead to destruction rather than progression. It suggested that the demise of Kokuma was more about spiritual misunderstanding than loss of artistic vision.

This chapter outlined a context for the operations of the now defunct Black Dance Development Trust. As with Kokuma, it showed that practitioners and ‘funders’ do not necessarily share the same visions, although both are professing to achieve the same objectives. The chapter concluded with an outline for the establishment of DanceAfrica, a necessary Institute if African dance is to survive in the UK.

In Chapter Five, spirituality, religious beliefs and Caribbean and African dance practice gelled to provide a foundation for the professional existence of the forms in England. The emphasis in this final chapter was on the work of prominent dancers and choreographers H. Patten and Peter Badejo. In analysing their work and indeed their own lifestyles, it became apparent that their spirituality i.e. ‘their beliefs, powers, values and behaviours’ has been informing and guiding their dance practice. These choreographers are committed to and steeped in values and cultural traditions that have been marginalised by British writers for centuries yet they have used the strengths and the core values of African and Caribbean culture to create new and dynamic opportunities in dance practice in the West. They have avoided the seduction of the commercial sector to concentrate on producing Contemporary African Dance to challenge and educate practitioners and British and other audiences. Through specific dance presentations, it was



clearly shown how their individual practices are governed by their religious and spiritual beliefs and how that affects audiences and other performers.

Overall, the thesis illustrated that the emergence and continuity of African dance in England owes much to the spirituality and religious beliefs of Africans in the diaspora. It assessed the critical phases that led to the enslavement of Africans and showed how those were directly responsible for the African's presence in England today. It examined how the British and their European colleagues created a particular view of Africans and then used that view to locate Africans and their cultural traditions at the lowest level of civilisation. Against that European defined imagery, the Africans on the continent and in the New World had to negotiate and surreptitiously created cultural patterns of behaviour to ensure survival. Survival was secured through cultural accommodations and rituals, through music and dance and religious practice. Through the processes of accommodation, Africans offered cultural resistance whilst at the same time rejuvenated themselves through practicing their traditional African religions, using the belief systems of the latter to mentally cope with the new environments and to nurture a distinct form of spirituality.

In conclusion, although the purpose of this research was to analyse African dance development in England from a specific viewpoint, it revealed several other avenues worthy of further research. Hopefully, this thesis will encourage others to explore some of those specific areas. In terms of African dance development in England, it would be useful to have more detailed analyses of the precise forms practiced by the Caribbean and African communities, thus enabling one to



assess, say, the theoretical insights that led to the practical presentations between the different communities. As an example, how does the thunder God (Sango of the Yoruba community), (So of the Ewe communities of Ghana) and (Shango from Trinidad and Tobago) manifest himself through performances? What are the differences and similarities between the approach of the choreographers from the Caribbean and those from Africa in addressing the same deity but from different perspectives and how does symbolism and rituals continue in a rapidly developing technological world?

Of necessity, African dance that is being practiced more and more universally has to be codified and notated, not simply in imitation of Western practice, but through the creation of appropriate notation methodology that will strategically lead to universal standards and to a greater understanding and acceptance of the forms. Indeed this process could see a new classification in the dance forms as 'classical' African dance techniques emerge. Codification of the dances of the continent would add immense benefit to practitioners in England, minimising the use of generic labels by focussing on specific dances and their techniques rather than the generalities of Africa Peoples' Dance. These areas of research will extend African dance development in the UK and will create more opportunities for young and old, professional and amateur, black and white to participate and enjoy a dynamic dance practice.



### **Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**

Following the 'Time for Change' report commissioned by the Arts Council of England, London Arts Board (LAB) is keen to implement some of the recommendations. However, LAB wishes to widely consult with the black dance profession, especially for the development of a centre for black dance in London.

This questionnaire will take no more than 15 minutes for you to complete. Your response is critical to the debate in black dance and we would appreciate it if you could return your completed form as soon as possible to Bob Ramdhanie, c/o London Arts Board in the SAE provided.

Forms can also be emailed to [jonaki.sarkar@lonab.co.uk](mailto:jonaki.sarkar@lonab.co.uk) or faxed to 202 7340 1090 by 31 August 2000.

If there is anyone you feel should contribute this process, please do not hesitate to copy this form or request additional forms by telephoning the dance unit on 020 7670 2463.

**With thanks in advance and please note that your response will be treated in absolute confidence.**

**1 Do you think there is a need for a black dance centre?**

YES ☐ NO ☐

If yes please go to Q2

If no, please state your reasons, complete the final page of the questionnaire and return in the SAE provided.

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### **Personal Information**

- 2 Please state your age group:**
- |                                |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 15-20 <input type="checkbox"/> | 21-25 <input type="checkbox"/> | 26-30 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31-35 <input type="checkbox"/> | 36-40 <input type="checkbox"/> | 41-45 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 46-50 <input type="checkbox"/> | 51 + <input type="checkbox"/>  |                                |
- 3 Are you:**
- |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Male <input type="checkbox"/> | Female <input type="checkbox"/> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|



**4      How do you describe your ethnic background?**

African ☐      African Caribbean ☐      Black British ☐  
British ☐      Caribbean ☐      Dual/Mixed Heritage ☐  
Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Dance Background**

**5      How many years have you been involved in dance?**

0-1 ☐      1-5 ☐      5-10 ☐      10-15 ☐      15+ ☐

**6      In which of the following areas are you mainly involved? (Maximum 3 areas only)**

Teacher ☐      Performer ☐      Student ☐      Researcher ☐  
Historian ☐      Manager ☐      Critic ☐      Choreographer ☐  
Funder ☐      Musician ☐      Photographer ☐      Administrator ☐

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**7      Please state how you work (tick as many boxes as are applicable)**

Solo/independent artist ☐      With a company (permanent) ☐  
With several companies (freelance) ☐      Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**8      Please list your professional training/qualifications in dance. Please specify the institution, numbers of years trained and country trained (if outside the UK)**

Professional Training/Qualification	Institution & Country
_____	_____
_____	_____

If you are not professionally trained, where did you learn the form you currently practice? Please specify the institution, numbers of years trained and country trained in (if outside the UK)



**Community/Other Awards in Dance (please specify)**

**Training/Qualification**

**Institution & Country**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 9 How would you describe the form of dance you work in? Please define the form exactly, avoiding the use of general, short-hand terms like: African, street, black, contemporary, etc.)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your Current Practice**

- 10 Do you currently attend any of the following?**

Classes ☐ Workshops ☐ Performances ☐ Lectures ☐

Seminars ☐ Conferences ☐ Informal Discussions ☐ Dance Films ☐

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

- 11 Which venues do you attend most frequently for the above activities? Please state borough or postcode.**

Dance institution (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Private tuition \_\_\_\_\_

Local authority programmes \_\_\_\_\_

In-house training \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**A New Centre for Black Dance: Location**

- 13 Where do you think the centre should be based?**

Central London ☐ North London ☐ South London ☐

East London ☐ West London ☐



**14 How long are you prepared to travel to the centre?**

0-30 minutes ☐ 30-60 minutes ☐  
60-90 minutes ☐ 90 + minutes ☐

**15 Should the centre be independent?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

**16 Should the centre be part of another dance organisation/arts complex?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please give a reason for your answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**17 If the Laban Centre for Movement & Dance (Lewisham) becomes available would that be a potential venue?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

**A New Centre for Black Dance: Facilities & Services**

**18 What facilities would you like to see at the centre?**

Dance Studio (how many?) <input type="checkbox"/>	Performance space <input type="checkbox"/>	Café <input type="checkbox"/>
Recording studio <input type="checkbox"/>	Communal office <input type="checkbox"/>	Bar <input type="checkbox"/>
Music studio <input type="checkbox"/>	Film editing suite <input type="checkbox"/>	Library <input type="checkbox"/>
Technical studio <input type="checkbox"/>	Green Room <input type="checkbox"/>	Archives <input type="checkbox"/>
Shower/changing facilities <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodation (for visiting tutors) <input type="checkbox"/>		

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**19 What services would you like to see the centre offer?**

Dance workshops <input type="checkbox"/>	Music workshops <input type="checkbox"/>	Films <input type="checkbox"/>
Management services <input type="checkbox"/>	Performances <input type="checkbox"/>	Lectures <input type="checkbox"/>
Administration support <input type="checkbox"/>	Seminars/Conferences <input type="checkbox"/>	

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



**20      Should the centre offer general arts training programmes in, for example**

Arts Management    ☐      Stage Management    ☐      Marketing    ☐

Entertainment Law    ☐      Sound/Lighting    ☐      PR    ☐

Information Technology ☐    Touring

Human Resource Management    ☐

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**21      Are you prepared to pay for**

Membership fees    ☐    Daily use fees    ☐    Individual services/activities    ☐

**22      How frequently would you attend the centre?**

Daily    ☐      Weekly    ☐      Fortnightly    ☐      Monthly    ☐

Bi-monthly    ☐    Quarterly    ☐      Six-monthly    ☐      Annually    ☐

**23      Are you prepared to support the centre by attending**

Dance workshops    ☐      Music workshops    ☐      Films    ☐

Dance training    ☐      Performances    ☐      Lectures    ☐

Administration support    ☐      Seminars/Conferences    ☐      The café    ☐

Complementary training    ☐      The bar    ☐

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**24      Should companies/artists be resident/based at the centre?**

Yes    ☐      No    ☐      Maybe    ☐      Don't know    ☐

**25      Please state your preferred opening times for the centre.**

Mon-Fri 10am-10pm    ☐      Saturday 10am-10pm    ☐

Sunday 11am-10pm    ☐      Other times \_\_\_\_\_



**26 Would you be prepared to serve on any of the following?**

Board of Directors ☐ Management Committee ☐  
Advisory Boards ☐ External Arts Committees ☐ None ☐

**27 What skills could you provide to help establish the centre?**

Business Planning ☐ Financial Management ☐ Fundraising ☐  
Project Management ☐ Capital Re-development ☐

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you very much for your time in completing this questionnaire. We really appreciate your views. The aim is to provide an overview of your responses in the early autumn.**

**Please return the questionnaire in the SAE provided by 31 August 2000. You can also fax or email the completed questionnaire to Jonaki Sarkar in the dance unit on 020 7340 1090 or at [jonaki.sarkar@lonab.co.uk](mailto:jonaki.sarkar@lonab.co.uk)**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**COMPANY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TELEPHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ANY OTHER COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





# **DOES LONDON NEED A CENTRE FOR BLACK DANCE?**

*A report on the findings of a questionnaire survey - Autumn 2000.  
Commissioned by London Arts*

Prepared by:

Bob Ramdhanie  
BRAMS Arts & Management Services  
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Catlin Street  
London SE16 3JA



## Executive Summary

It has to be borne in mind, from the very outset, that the question posed in this survey, may be perceived as 'threatening' by many within and out of the dance sector, as it can imply a separation rather than a coming together, of dance and dancers. Equally, it should not be taken for granted that there is a 'unified black dance voice' on this question, for the black dance community is diverse and cosmopolitan as London itself. This executive summary therefore, whilst reflecting on the key issues arising out of the survey itself, provides a broader picture against which the work undertaken can be contextualised. A preamble is added to the report to place in within a specific context and to provide some kind of a historical overview of African People's dance in London.

In the most direct manner yet, the survey is quite pointed, Does London need a Centre for Black Dance? and secondly, if the 'old' Laban Centre became available, would that be an appropriate venue for such a Centre? The additional information collected provides essential information about a Centre and about black dancers in London, these being imperative in the longer-term development of dance in London.

As far as the first question is concerned, 'Does London need a Centre for Black Dance?' the respondents were quite unanimous in their responses, Yes. This collective voice suggested a strong preference for a Centre to be in Central London with a minority also suggesting that one in either the north, south or west of London would also be acceptable.

Secondly, given the physical changes at the 'old' Laban Centre in New Cross, would that be acceptable as a potential Centre for Black Dance. Here, the responses were quite mixed, with a small majority indicating that east London would not be seen as an ideal location.

As an interesting aside, it is worth noting that most people involved in African People's dance has been so for ten years or more and most are over the age of thirty.

The appendices provide a very comprehensive collation and statistical analyses of most of the questionnaire results, the body of the text simply referring to the more salient points and offering some general analysis as appropriate.



## Does London Need A Centre for Black Dance?

### Preamble

Pose this question to 'black dancers' anywhere in the UK and it would be reasonable to assume that the answer would be in the affirmative. Details of why, where should it be, what should it offer etc would vary, depending on individual and group needs, but that a Centre for black dance is needed would be unequivocal. As there is currently no organised 'body' or institution representing African People's dance, occupying a Centre will almost immediately, establish a new phase in black dance development in the UK. Arts buildings, to some extent give stability and visibility. They nurture ideas and visions; they act as a focal point and provide challenging opportunities.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, shouldn't the question of whether London needs a dedicated space for black dance be irrelevant? Yet this question and its relevance, appear to be pertinent as it has been for several years. If this question is taken in isolation and divorced from other issues in society as a whole, then amongst dance practitioners, the question might be of little significance as the consensus and focus of discussion might be on dance and the acquisition of spaces for dance in London. No single form would be singled out for special consideration in terms of having a dedicated space, though the specific requirements of the various forms would vary.

However, the wider issues of, for example, race and disadvantage, colour and nationality, language and 'belonging' are constantly aired in the media and these, to a very large extent, therefore impinge on and influence artistic endeavour in London. The question of identity remains and it helps to determine practice, whether in folkloric/traditional, experimental or contemporary dance. Identity and cultural expression are entwined and these produce a rich, complex and interesting cultural mosaic in London. Of course, linked to these other issues is the core question of whether Britain is a multi-racial and multi-cultural society, for these also influence how work is produced and perceived within 'mainstream' society. If groups of dancers in London are identified and treated in a specific manner due to their colour, irrespective of their own heritage and 'roots', then this question will remain on the horizon for a very long time.

With an impending general election, questions of 'Britishness' will again be brought to the fore, as potentials seek to win political favours. 'Of the cuff' political remarks about the negatives of multi-racial Britain will gain maximum media attention, highlighting the fact, that there is a kind of uneasy ambivalence towards 'those significant others' (blacks and minority communities) ensconced in British society. The message is clear. Policy makers in arts development, at all levels, have to take into consideration a whole range of dynamic issues, in trying to find suitable approaches to dance in London. Arts funding institutions have to give clear signals about their intentions and projections regarding multi-racial and multi-cultural arts and must equally be prepared to state clearly their policies and funding mechanisms for the advancement of a truly multi-cultural and multi-racial society, in which African People's dance is an integral element. The arts and the needs of its practitioners cannot be separated from other societal issues and treated in isolation. For London as a whole, with its cosmopolitan population, a variety of needs and aspirations for all Londoners will have to be addressed. This piece of research provides London Arts with a focussed perspective of the aspirations of primarily, black dancers based in London.



However defined, it cannot be denied that there has been a black presence in the UK since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Shyllon<sup>1</sup> points out that even then they practised their arts, music and dance. With more and more African slaves and free blacks coming into London, the arts of Africa, in comparative terms, flourished. That trend has continued up to today.

London has a sizeable black population, estimated soon to be around 25% of the population in the capital and within that population, there is a sizeable group of African ancestry'. The question of whether a Centre for Black Dance is needed in London therefore seems an appropriate and valuable area of research.

For many years the term black dance has been banded about in British society, without any clear definition about what is meant by 'black dance'. Currently replaced by the term, African People's Dance, this survey is not about adding to that debate either. The focus here is to capture the essences of 'thoughts and feelings' for a Centre that would be led by black dancers practising a range of dance forms.

It may seem rather ambitious to test the sector about their desire for a centre without actually defining whom the centre will serve or what the centre will be about, but that debate is yet to come. For the purposes of this questionnaire, black dance relates to the dances of Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean and their derivatives, wherever and however they are practised in London. It is not about labelling black dance but about seeking, from the responses to this questionnaire, some guidance about a centre for black dance and whether it is considered relevant within the dance sector as a whole in London. The questions posed are very broad based and are intended to provide some kind of an overview around the issues of black dance generally.

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<sup>1</sup> See F. Shyllon – Black People in Britain 1555-1833 (1977) & Black Slaves in Britain (1974)



### Background to the research

Hermin McIntosh was commissioned by the Arts Council of England in 1998 to 'carry out a strategic review of African People's Dance with a view to formulating a strategy for the future consolidation and development of this area of work'. The report 'Time for Change' was produced in 1999 followed by a series of presentations and open public debates on the report and its recommendations. In particular, there were numerous discussions on ways to take the report's recommendations forward and one of the outcomes from these deliberations, was the establishment of a small Steering Group and the informal formation of a much larger, 'open to all' HUB - African Peoples Dance forum.

McIntosh's report was not the first report to address this specific area of dance. According to McIntosh, there have been over fifty-seven reports in England of one form or another on black arts, including dance. Some of these have 'guided' this research programme and among these have been the works on African- Caribbean dance, by the following.

- McIntosh's 'A Report on Asian and Afro-Caribbean Dance in the East Midlands' (1983)
- Sue Harrison and Derrick Anderson's 'African and Caribbean Dancing and Drumming' (1986)
- Anne Millman's research findings on: African People's Dance: The State Of The Art (1987)
- Graham Devlin's 'Stepping Forward', (1989)
- 'What is Black Dance in Britain?' a report from the Blackie in Liverpool and the Nia Centre in Manchester (1993)
- David Bryan's research for the Arts Council of England, reporting under the title, 'Advancing Black Dance', (1993)
- McCann Matthews Millman's, 'Developing Audiences for African and Caribbean Dance, (1994).

What is clear from several of these reports is that there are several consistent themes running through. Firstly many labels (African People's Dance, African Dance, Afro-Caribbean Dance, Black Dance, African-Caribbean Dance and African and Caribbean Dance) are used interchangeably. Under some of the broad terms above, one often hears of the connections between African dance and that of street, hip-hop, Lindy Hop, Jazz, urban classicism, modern and the list goes on. The time has come within post-modern dance development for some clear and meaningful categories and definitions of styles of – African People's or black – if it is to successfully develop alongside mainstream dance forms in England and receive the best support and assistance to allow them to flourish.

Secondly, if we accept that there is a need to categorise and define the black dance sector throughout England generally, there will have to be some precise definitions which will guide the process. Black dance is as diverse and diffuse as any of the other arts sectors in contemporary Britain. Finding appropriate spaces for their work – creation, production, performing and touring-remains a major issue hampering the development of this sector.

Thirdly, that dance as an artform, at least in western societies, still occupies a secondary position to the 'written and spoken word' and classical music. Clearly, the needs of dance and dancers overall occupy the lower echelons of the artistic hierarchy in terms of funding and profile. In order for this shift to be achieved there needs to be radical thinking and significant additional resources made available for the form in general terms but with close regard to this sector of dance.



### The Survey

The ACE commissioned report, 'Time for Change' galvanised several Regional Arts Boards into a range of activities to develop African People's Dance in their respective regions. The Head of London Arts produced a strategy paper for the development of African People's Dance for London. This paper acted as a catalyst for London Arts to initiate a series of events as part of their strategic approach towards meeting some of the recommendations in the ACE Report. Informal and formal meetings within the funding system and externally began, all with the aim of developing some cohesive plan for the development of African People's Dance for the future. Following several discussions, the idea of consulting with the black dance constituency arose about the need for a building to house dance activities.

In the summer of 2000, London Arts commissioned BRAMS to undertake a 'straw poll' with regards to the above question. It was agreed to seek responses via a questionnaire and to conduct some 'one-to-one' interviews with key players in the sector. The primary targets were black dancers based in London. It was also agreed that some questionnaires would be sent to 'others' in the dance profession as well as dance administrators both in and outside of London. It was never envisaged that the sample group would be enormous, given that London Arts was interested in the views of black practitioners themselves and many of them belong to a small number of companies, with a few individuals and freelance performers.

No definition of black dance was offered or was to be debated via this research and information was being solicited in three broad areas namely: Personal information & dance background, Location for a Centre for Black dance and Facilities & Services from a Centre of Black dance

In tandem with the development and agreement of this project, many of those involved in shaping the research were aware of the 'new' Laban Dance Centre and it was, as a secondary thought, that a question on the suitability of the 'old' Laban Dance Centre was added to the questionnaire. The responses to this question will be detailed later on.

Mailing lists from the Dance Department of the Arts Council and London Arts were mainly used to target dancers, although these were supplemented by lists and names provided by BRAMS and other professional dancers. Not totally unexpected, the target group (black dancers in London) was relatively small.

The major part of the research was conducted between July and November 2000. Approximately one hundred and twenty questionnaires, with pre-paid return envelopes, were circulated from London Arts.

There was a response rate in excess of 35% and to encourage dancers to respond, several face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted. Not surprisingly most of those artists targeted earn most of their income<sup>358</sup> from sources other than dance and their feedback for not responding was that it was not considered a priority! In the case of organised companies, artistic directors or administrators collated and presented the views of companies, rather than individual company members completing their own questionnaires. Thus completed, it can be easily inferred that although the amount of the



questionnaires returned were not very large, the views expressed represent the thoughts of most of the black dancers in London.

During the autumn of 2000, The Arts Council of England issued a preliminary notice for capital bids to Capital Arts Programme 2. There would be a minimum of £20 million ring fenced for Black, Asian and Chinese arts projects. As the feedback from this survey strongly indicated that a Centre for Black Dance was necessary, the emphasis of the report shifted.

Much of the analysis from this research was already prepared and informally presented to the Head of Dance at LA and thus formed the basis for this additional second element of work. In a sense, an action oriented research project had led directly into a practical project, certainly identified as a major cornerstone to advance the cause of African People's Dance. The formal reporting of this specific project was thus postponed.



The Results

The feedback from the questionnaires is grouped into three sections, namely respondents – London; respondents - out of London and then all respondents. Detailed graphs and % analyses are attached as appendices to this report.

London Respondents

As expected, there were more responses from the dance sector in London. Of the 34 responses, 29 (85 %) clearly identified the need for a Centre for Black Dance with 2 (6%) respondents indicating no preference and 3 (9%) stating that there was no need for such a Centre.

Background and dance experiences

Of the 31 who indicated their age groupings, all were aged 26+, with most of the 31, between the 26-50 age group. Just over 50% (16) were female and of the total, 9 described themselves as African, 3 as British, 6 as African Caribbean, 4 as Caribbean, 5 as Black British and 3 as dual heritage.

Interestingly, 65% of the above group has been dancing for over twenty years and 23% for over seven years, reinforcing the depth and quality which exists in the form in the UK today. Most (94%) have dance experiences over five years or more.

As highlighted in the preamble, the necessity for establishing some kind of a framework to categorise the different forms of African People’s dance remains important. In order to move plans forward i.e. the persons who defined themselves as Black British may need support, advice and resources which could be quite different to those who define themselves as say, African. Indeed, future development in this area of work, would have to also identify and explore the specific needs of the under 25’s within the profession.

The ‘occupations’ of dance practitioners were wide and varied with the majority responding in the following manner:

Involvement in Dance	Numbers
Teaching dance	20
Performing	22
Managing groups/themselves	8
Musicians	6
Students of dance	5
Researchers	8
Choreographers	15
Administrators	7
Historians	3

As far as their current dance practice was concerned, the vast majority fell within three broad categories. Independent/solo practitioners numbered 13, freelance artists were 12 and 12 respondents were from established companies.



Location and Independence

As far as the location of a Centre is concerned, 63% wished the Centre to be in Central London, with more or less even views (8-10%) for north, west and south London. As far as the acquisition of the 'old' Laban Centre is concerned the feelings expressed are quite mixed with 49% clearly stating that the Laban site was not acceptable whilst 45% expressed a positive attitude to this potential base. The remaining 6% were an equal mix of no responses and a definite no.

The negative view of the 'old' Laban Centre as a potential Centre for Black Dance is directly attributed not necessarily to the Laban Centre itself, but largely due to its location in the east of London. All respondents viewed east London as less favourable than any of the other three geographical regions. This was also reinforced by 'face-to-face' interviews, except by those who lived and worked in east London.

(As a slight deviation, it is worth noting that New Cross and Lewisham are having major capital investment and urban regeneration programmes currently, and the 'old' and new Laban Centres will be situated in designated cultural areas with the benefits of all that brings)

Asked whether the Centre should be independent or a part of another organisation/complex, the responses were as follows:

Independent	Yes	74%
	No	16%
	No response	10%
Part of another complex	Yes	35%
	No	49%
	Not sure	13%
	No response	3%

Most respondents, in and out of London, indicated a strong preference for the Centre to be based in Central London. Thus when asked about travel time to the Centre, it was not unexpected to see that over 94 % of London respondents were prepared to travel up to 60 minutes but 42% within those responses, with a travel time maximum of 30 minutes only. Above one hours travel time, the figures dropped to 3%.



### Facilities and Services in the Centre itself

Almost everyone opted for a Centre that offered a wide range of facilities and services. This common view captures the desperate need of the black dance community for professional resources as a whole but equally importantly is the 'holistic' approach of black dancers. Life is a whole and not segments in little boxes, i.e. African People's dance is about a total package of music, dance, technology and social and spiritual enlightenment - thus a Centre which would cater for all collective needs.

- Studios – dance, music, recording
- Technical – film edit suites, archive, library
- Communal spaces – Green room, café, bar, offices, accommodation (for visiting tutors)
- Performance spaces

As far as the services were concerned, the range was as wide as the facilities themselves but emphasised the following key services as being of paramount importance to the Centre:

- Workshops in dance
- Management Services
- Administrative support
- Music workshops
- Performances
- Films
- Seminars and conferences
- Lectures

The latter two items of the above list acknowledging that though most practitioners may feel that they are using their skills in performance, many feel that they do not get enough theoretical input or other challenging insights as to the development and practice of the form nationally and internationally. This is some way directly alludes to the high response in relation to having accommodation facilities in the Centre to cater for visiting tutors etc.

In a further question to identify more exactly what the training needs of the sector might be, the list was diverse and extensive covering aspects of Arts Management, Law, Information Technology, Human Resource Management, Stage Management, Sound and Light engineering, Marketing and Touring.

Most respondents indicated that they were prepared to pay for the services through a mixed package of membership or 'activity based' charges and also indicated, in high numbers, that they would support the Centre weekly. Overall the response regarding personal support for the Centre was quite positive with over 75% indicating that they would certainly attend the Centre on a daily basis to, at least, a regular weekly basis. Most want to see the Centre opening between the hours of 10.00am-10.00pm on Mondays to Saturdays with over 50% wanting to see Sunday opening during those same times.



**Out of London respondents**

A small, random sample of questionnaires (12) were sent to colleagues who have been involved in African People’s Dance for some time but who were based out of London. 8 (67%) responded and of those, 88% agreed that there should be a Centre for Black Dance.

**Background and dance experiences**

In common with London practitioners, all respondents were aged between 26 and 50, though unlike London most respondents were female performers (86%). Their ethnic backgrounds were as varied as Londoners, falling into the following categories:

African	1
British	1
African Caribbean	2
Black British	2
Dual heritage	1

**Involvement in dance**

All respondents indicated that they were dancing for over ten years with the majority (86%) with dance experiences stretching over fifteen years. Their experiences were generally gained as teachers, performers, managers, researchers, choreographers and administrators. Most operated as freelancers/solo artists with 2 (29%) belonging to permanent companies.

**Location and Independence**

The question of location was not seen as being too critical although 43% suggested central London as being most appropriate for such a Centre whilst another 43% gave no response at all.

In common with the views of London based dancers, 57% agreed that the Centre should be independent whilst 43% also felt that there could be mileage by being a part of another complex. As would be expected, the responses to the question on travel time varied significantly from Londoners with 71% prepared to travel over one and a half hours to get to the Centre.

As far as the ‘old’ Laban Centre was concerned, there was the same degree of ambivalence to the position in east London, with an even number of 43% each agreeing and disagreeing with that particular location.



### Facilities and Services in the Centre itself

There responses in these areas reflected very much that of the London respondents and there were no significant deviations in either the facilities or the services. There was a much higher level of agreement in respect of allegiance to a Centre for Black Dance with over 71% indicating a preference for membership fees. I suspect out of London respondents seeing membership as having some particular incentive attached to it, thus the 'added value' for them, when they visit London on business to therefore attend the Centre. Their frequency of visits would be far less than their London based colleagues though, like Londoners, they expressed agreement in seeing the Centre open on seven days of the week.

### All Respondents

As indicated earlier on, the survey was chiselled to establish two points. Firstly was there a need for a Centre for Black Dance and secondly, if the Laban Centre became available, would that be considered a potential base for the Centre?

Of the 42 questionnaires returned, **there was overwhelming support for a Centre for Black dance with 85% agreeing to that specific need.** 10% were ambivalent in their responses and 5% indicated there was no need for it.

Secondly, 60% expressed a clear preference for the Centre to be based in Central London with equal responses (9% each) indicating that a centre in north, south or west London would be acceptable. 9% did not respond to this question. **As far as the 'old' Laban Centre was concerned, 42% expressed a positive response to this as a potential base.**

The face-to-face and telephone interviews echoed the written responses, though these gave respondents (some of whom had also completed questionnaires) the opportunity to amplify and clarify some of their written responses. In particular, the whole discussion about the Laban Centre revolved around its location in east London and the kind of image many felt that that would give to African People's Dance. They felt, as most written responses indicated, that central London would make the 'right' statement, taking African People's dance out of the 'margins and into the mainstream'. This was the most debated issue, though when pressed, most were prepared in the absence of any other suitable alternative, to accept that the Laban Centre could be a viable first opportunity for the establishment of a Centre for Black Dance in London.



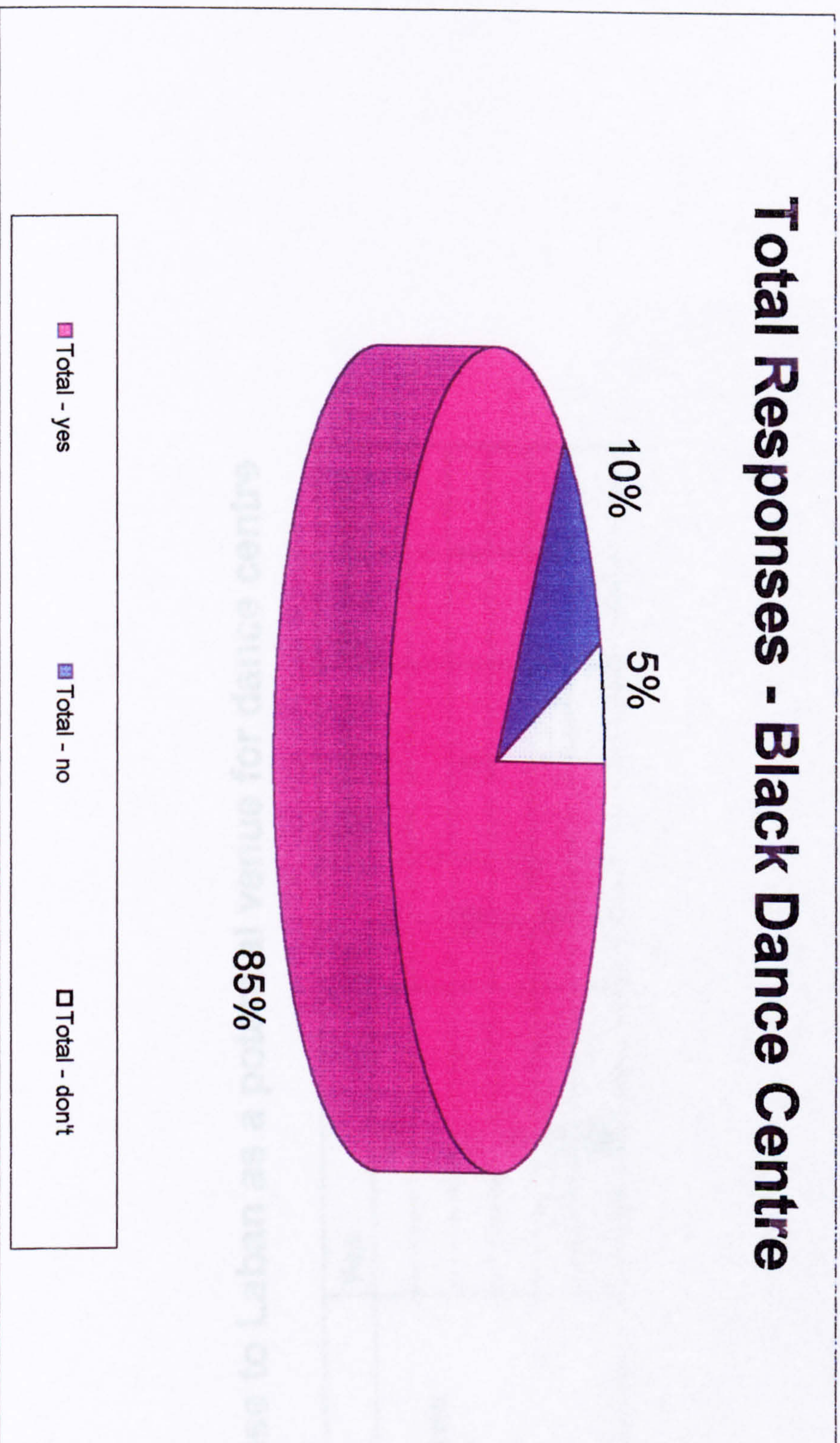
**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(All respondents)**

**Total Responses**

<b><i>Does London need a centre for Black Dance?</i></b>	
<b>Number of respondents in London</b>	
Yes - Black Dance Centre (London)	29
No - Black Dance Centre (London)	3
<b>Number of respondents out of London</b>	
Yes - Black Dance Centre (out of London)	7
No - Black Dance Centre (out of London)	1
<b>Number of respondents</b>	
Don't know - Black Dance Centre	2
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<div><div>42</div></div>
<b>Total - yes</b>	
36	
<b>Total - no</b>	
4	
<b>Total - don't</b>	
2	



**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
(All respondents)**





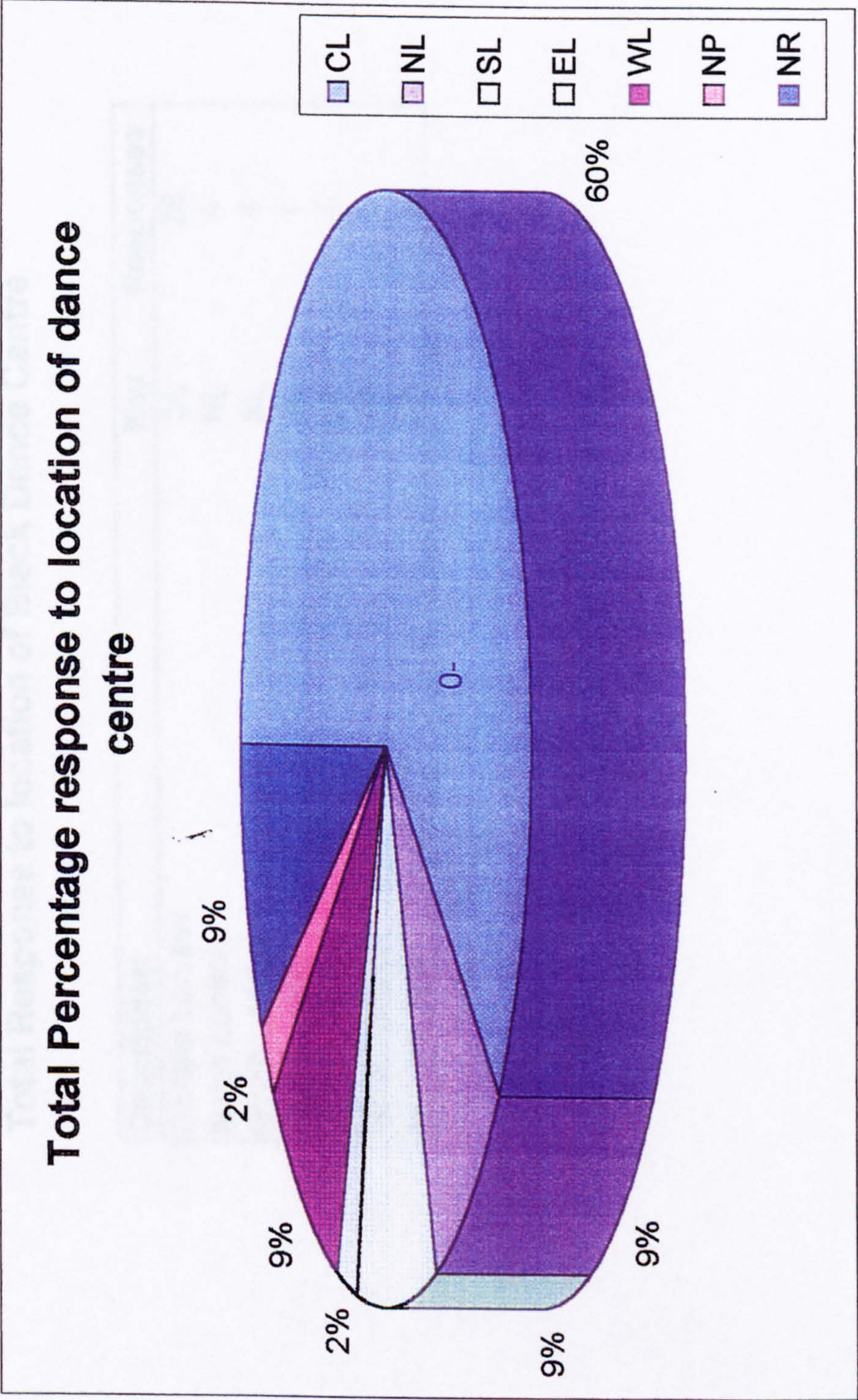
Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
(All respondents)

Total Response to Laban as a potential venue for dance centre

	Yes	No	Don't know	No response
London - Yes	13	14	1	1
London - Don't know		1		1
London total	13	15	1	2
Out of London	3	3		1
Sub-total	16	18	1	3
Total	38			



**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(All respondents)**





**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(All respondents)**

**Total Response to location of Black Dance Centre**

Description	Key	Responses
Central London	CL	28
North London	NL	4
South London	SL	4
East London	EL	1
West London	WL	4
No preference	NP	1
No response	NR	4

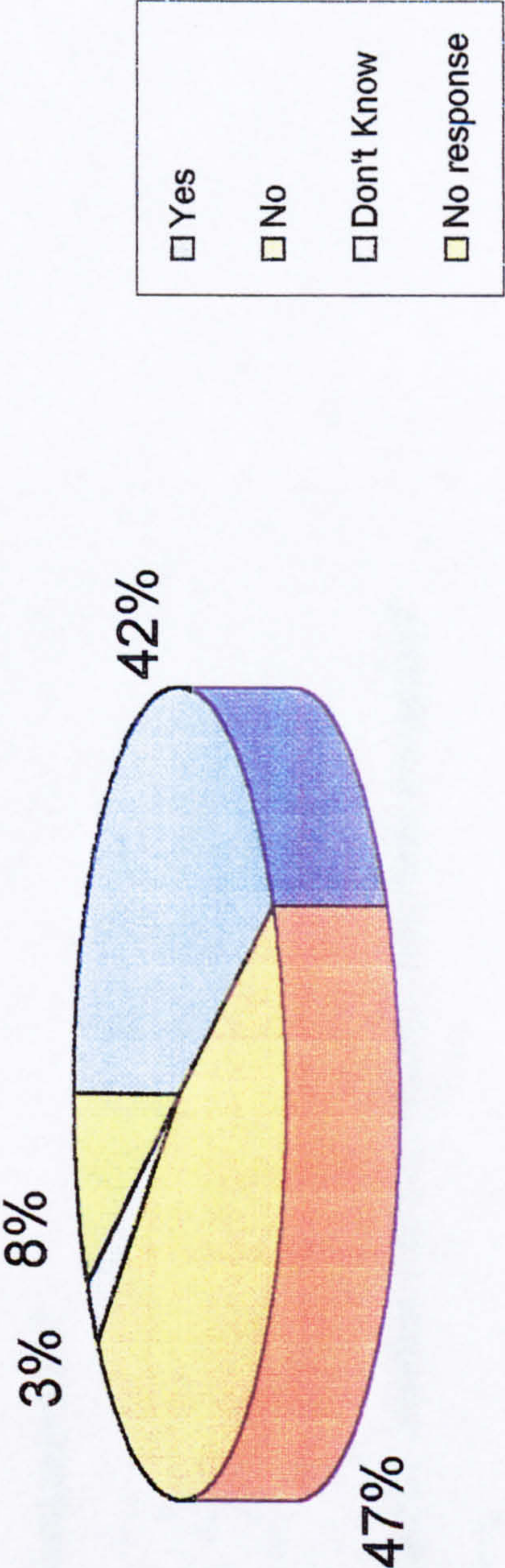


**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(All respondents)**

**Total Response to Laban as a potential venue for dance centre**

Yes	No	Don't Know	No response	Total Responses
16	18	1	3	38

**Total Percentage Agree/Disagree with Laban as Centre**





**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

**A new Centre for Black Dance: Location**

*Location in London*

Description	Key	Responses
Central London	CL	25
North London	NL	4
South London	SL	4
East London	EL	1
West London	WL	3
No preference	NP	1
No response	NR	1

*Time prepared to travel to the centre*

Time	Responses
0-30 minutes	16
30-60 minutes	13
60-90 minutes	1
90 + minutes	0
No response	1

*Should the centre be independent?*

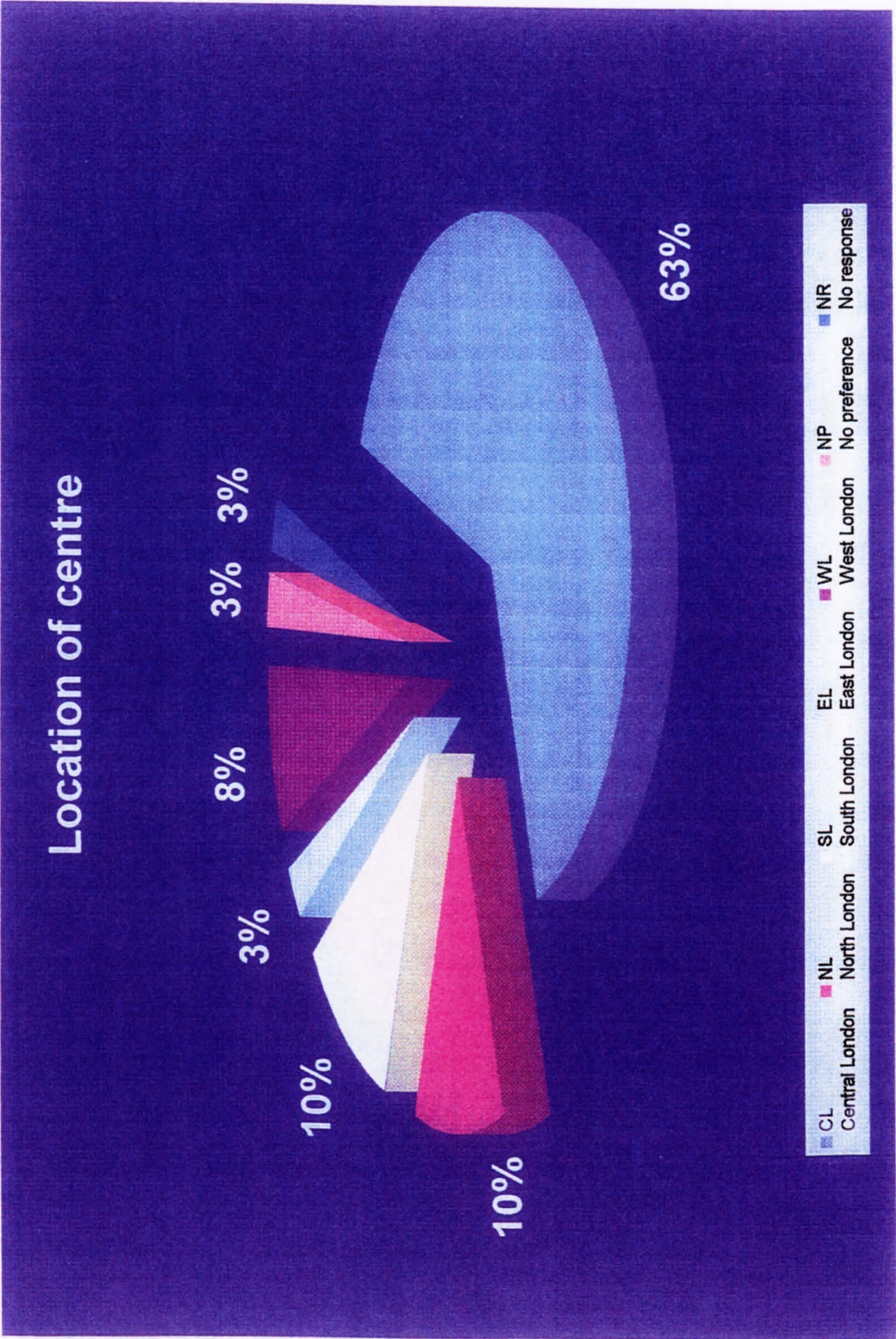
Yes	23
No	5
No reponse	3

*Should the centre be part of another dance organisation/arts complex?*

Yes	11
No	15
No response	1
Not sure	4



Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

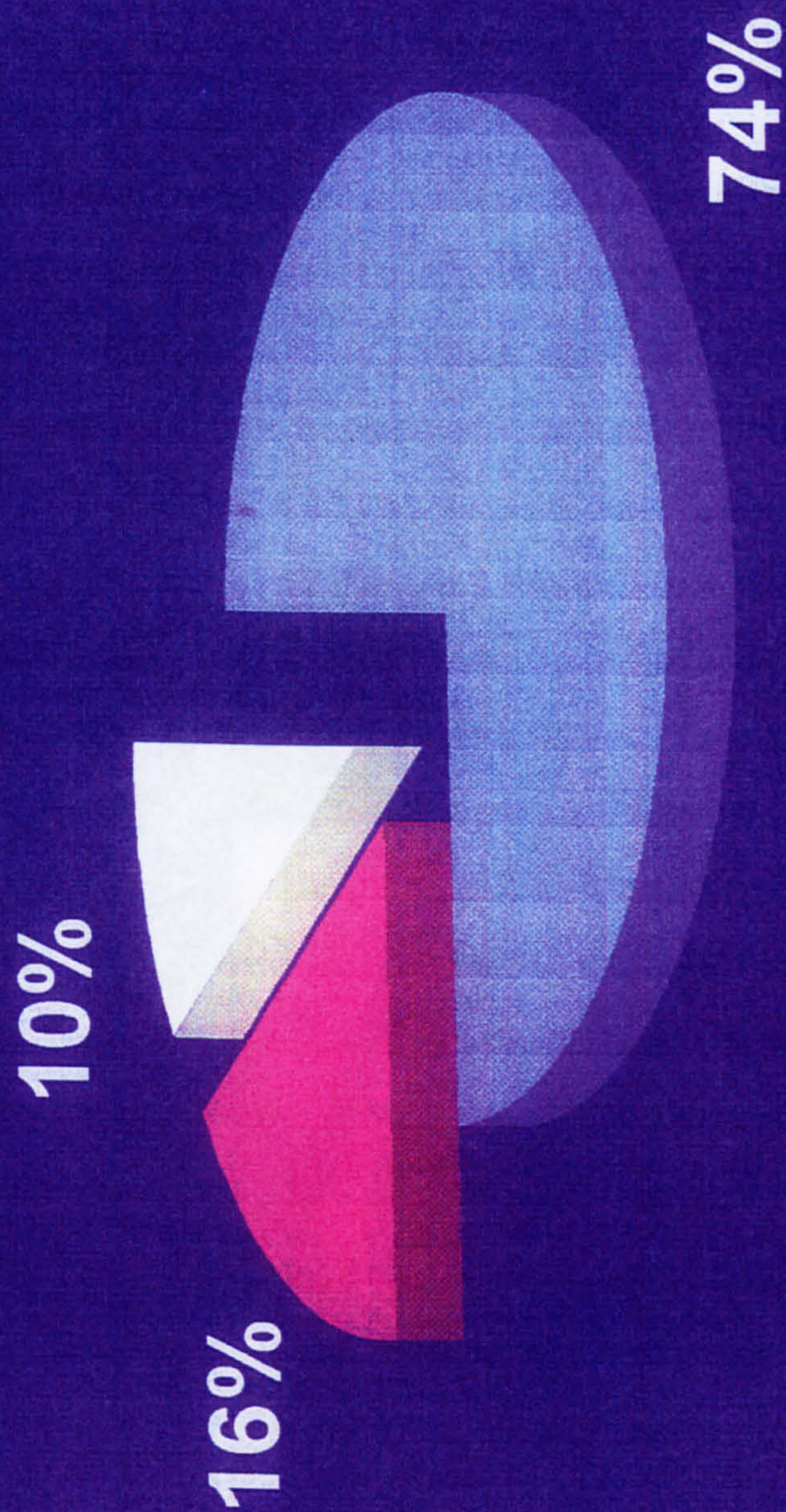




## Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

Should the centre be independent

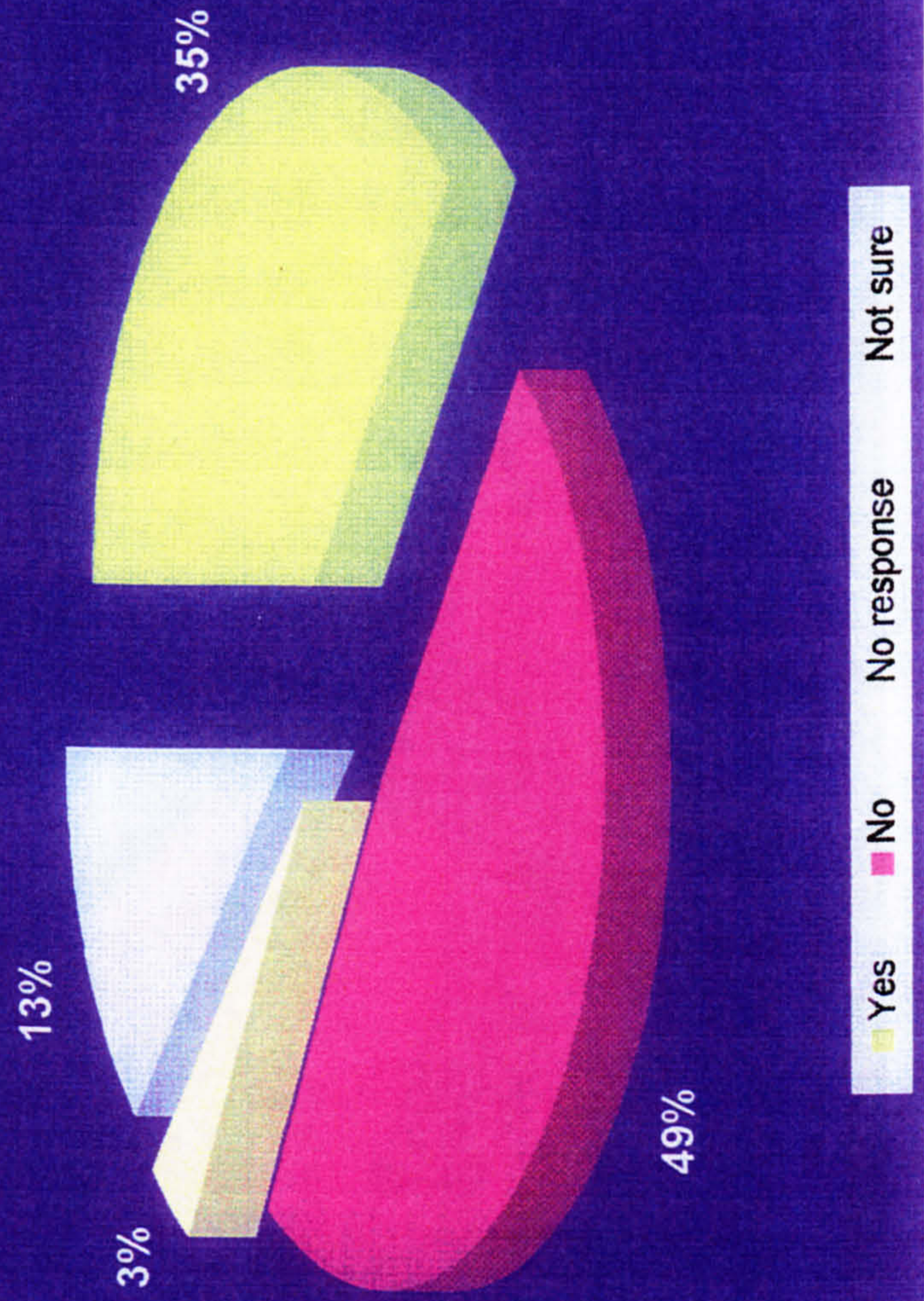




## Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

Part of another organisation/arts complex

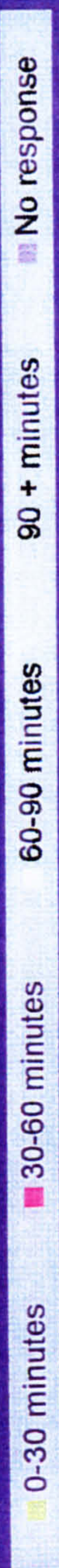
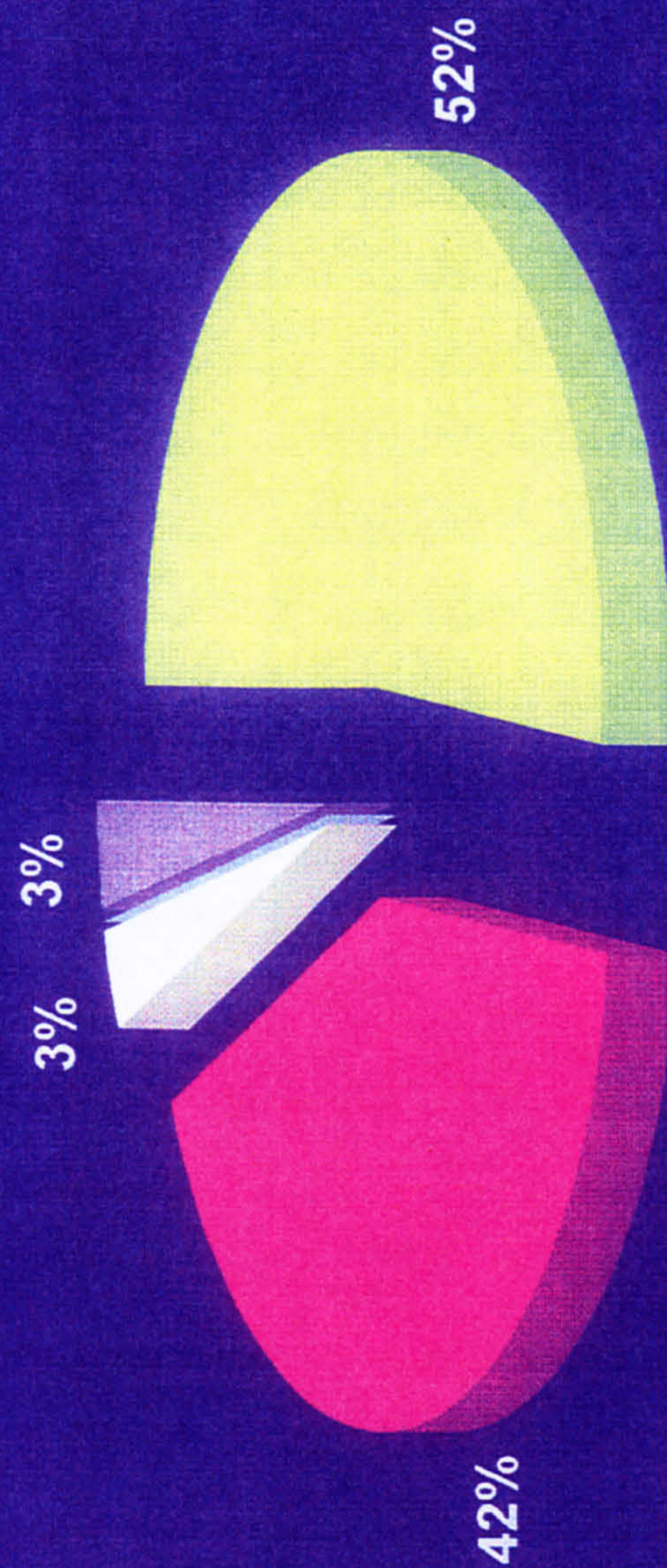




## Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

### Time prepared to travel

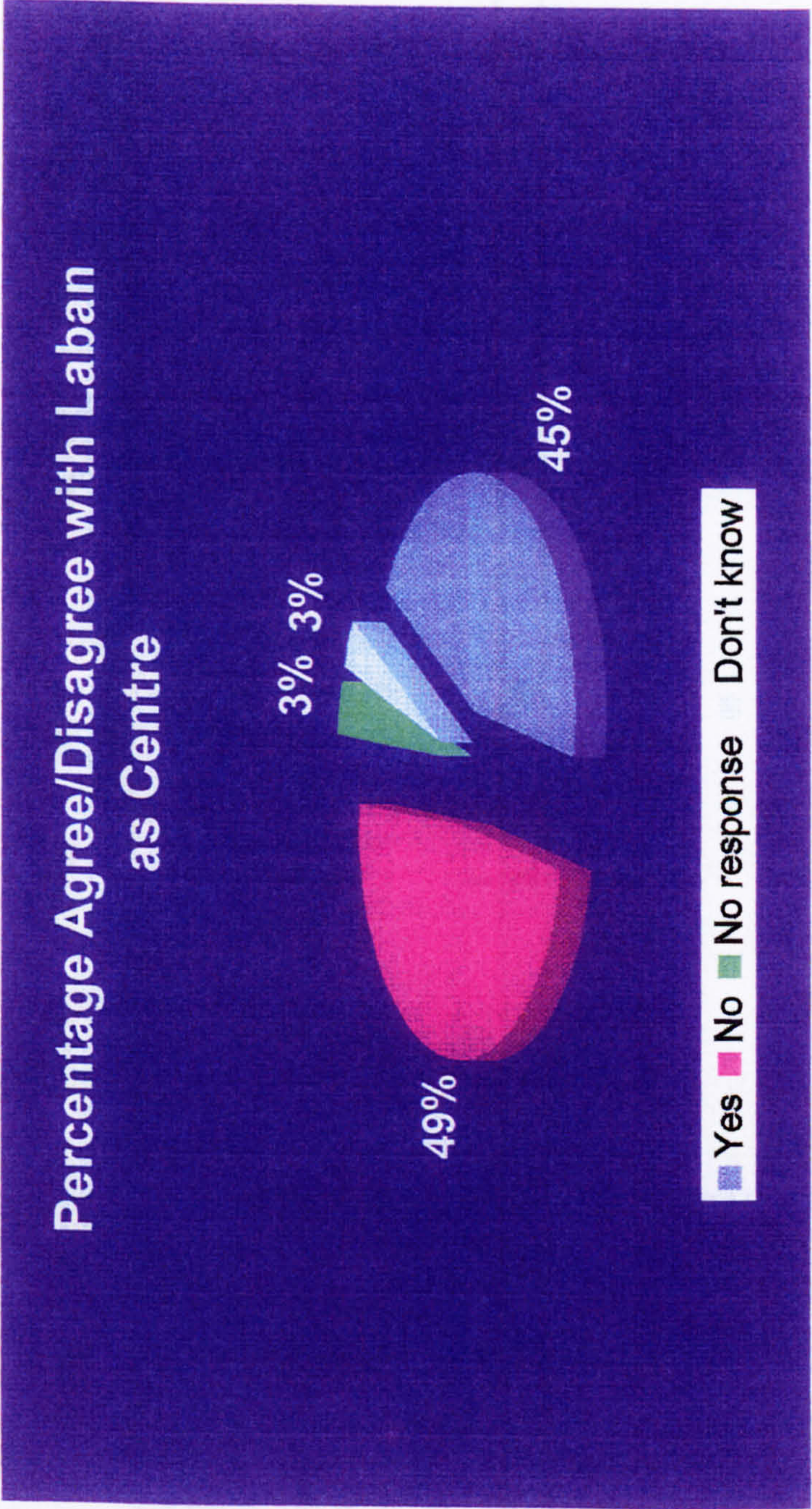




**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no**  
**(London respondents only)**

**Responses to question:**  
**If the Laban Centre for Movement & Dance (Lewisham) becomes available, would that be a potential venue?**

Yes	No	No response	Don't know
13	14	1	1





**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no**  
**(London respondents only)**

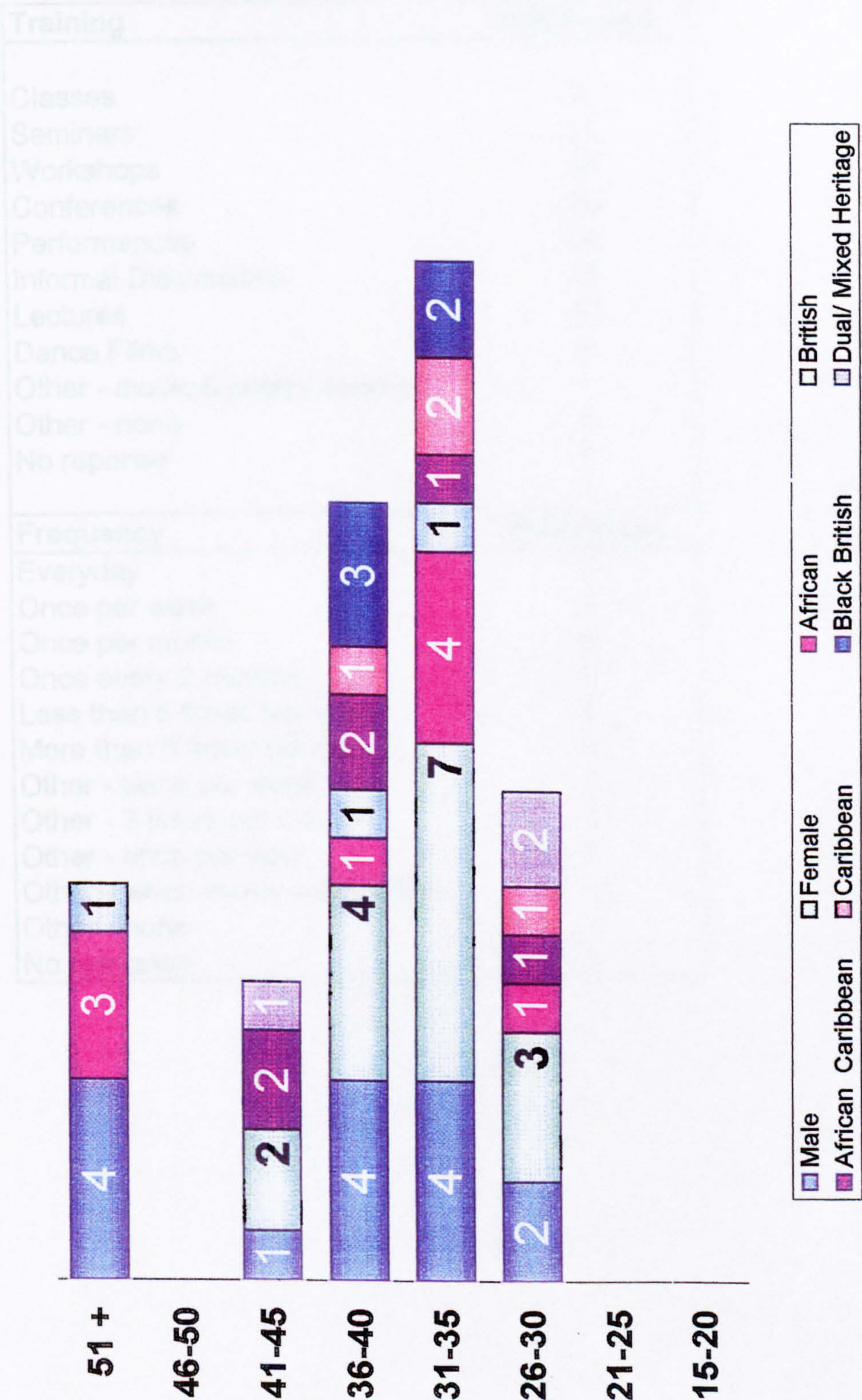
**Background of respondents (London)**

Age Group	Sex		Ethnic Background				
	Male	Female	African	British	African Caribbean	Black British	Dual/ Mixed Heritage
15-20							
21-25							
26-30	2	3	1		1		2
31-35	4	7	4	1	2	2	
36-40	4	4	1	1	1	3	
41-45	1	2			2		1
46-50							
51 +	4	0	3	1			
Total	15	16	9	3	6	5	3



# Does London need a centre for Black Dance? 29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no (London respondents only)

Background of respondents (London)





## **Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**

**29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no**

**London respondents only)**

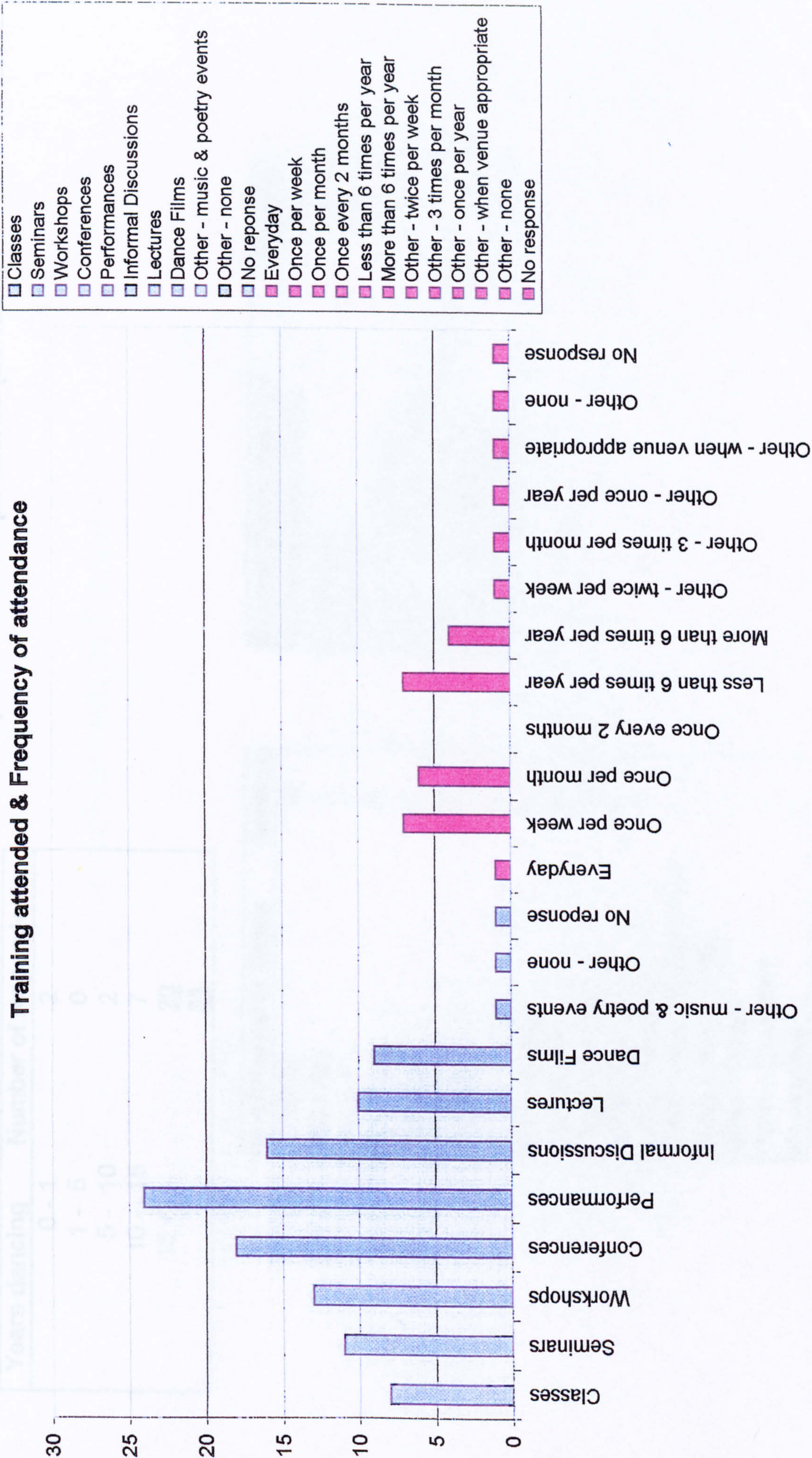
### **Training attended & Frequency of attendance**

<b>Training</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Classes	8
Seminars	11
Workshops	13
Conferences	18
Performances	24
Informal Discussions	16
Lectures	10
Dance Films	9
Other - music & poetry events	1
Other - none	1
No reponse	1
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Everyday	1
Once per week	7
Once per month	6
Once every 2 months	0
Less than 6 times per year	7
More than 6 times per year	4
Other - twice per week	1
Other - 3 times per month	1
Other - once per year	1
Other - when venue appropriate	1
Other - none	1
No response	1



Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
(London respondents)  
29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no

Training attended & Frequency of attendance





Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

Dance experience of respondents (London)

Years dancing	Number of respondents
0 - 1	2
1 - 5	0
5 - 10	2
10 - 15	7
15 +	20
	<u>31</u>

Involvement in Dance	Number
Teacher	20
Historian	3
Funder	0
Performer	22
Manager	8
Musician	6
Student	5
Critic	2
Photographer	0
Researcher	8
Choreographer	15
Administrator	7
Other - Examiner	1
Other - Artist Director/Prodl	1
Other - Script Writer	1
Other - Punter	1
Other - Consultant	1
No reponse	1

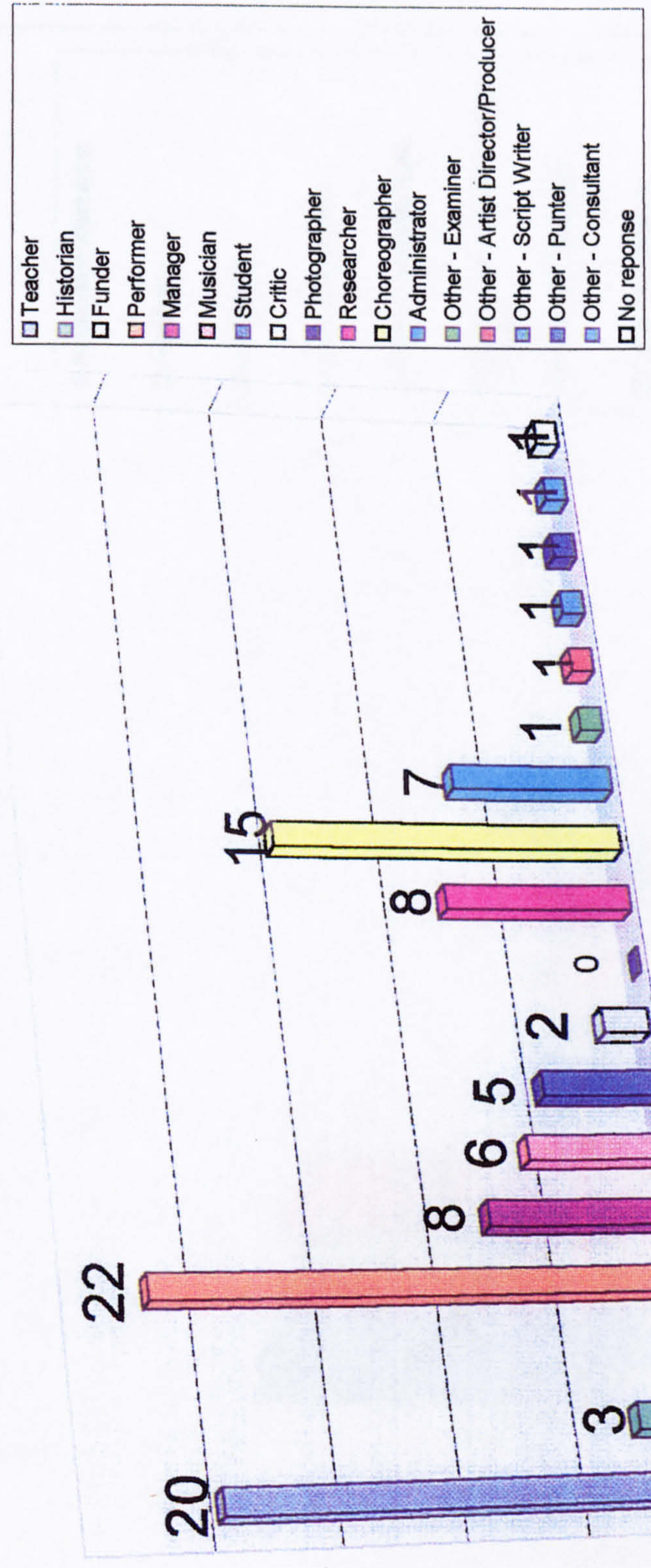
Current Dance Practice	Number
Solo/Independent artist	13
Freelance	12
Permanent	12
Other - Partnership	1
Other - Work with artists	1
Other - Own company (project-bas	1
Other - Not applicable	1
Other - No response	2



# Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

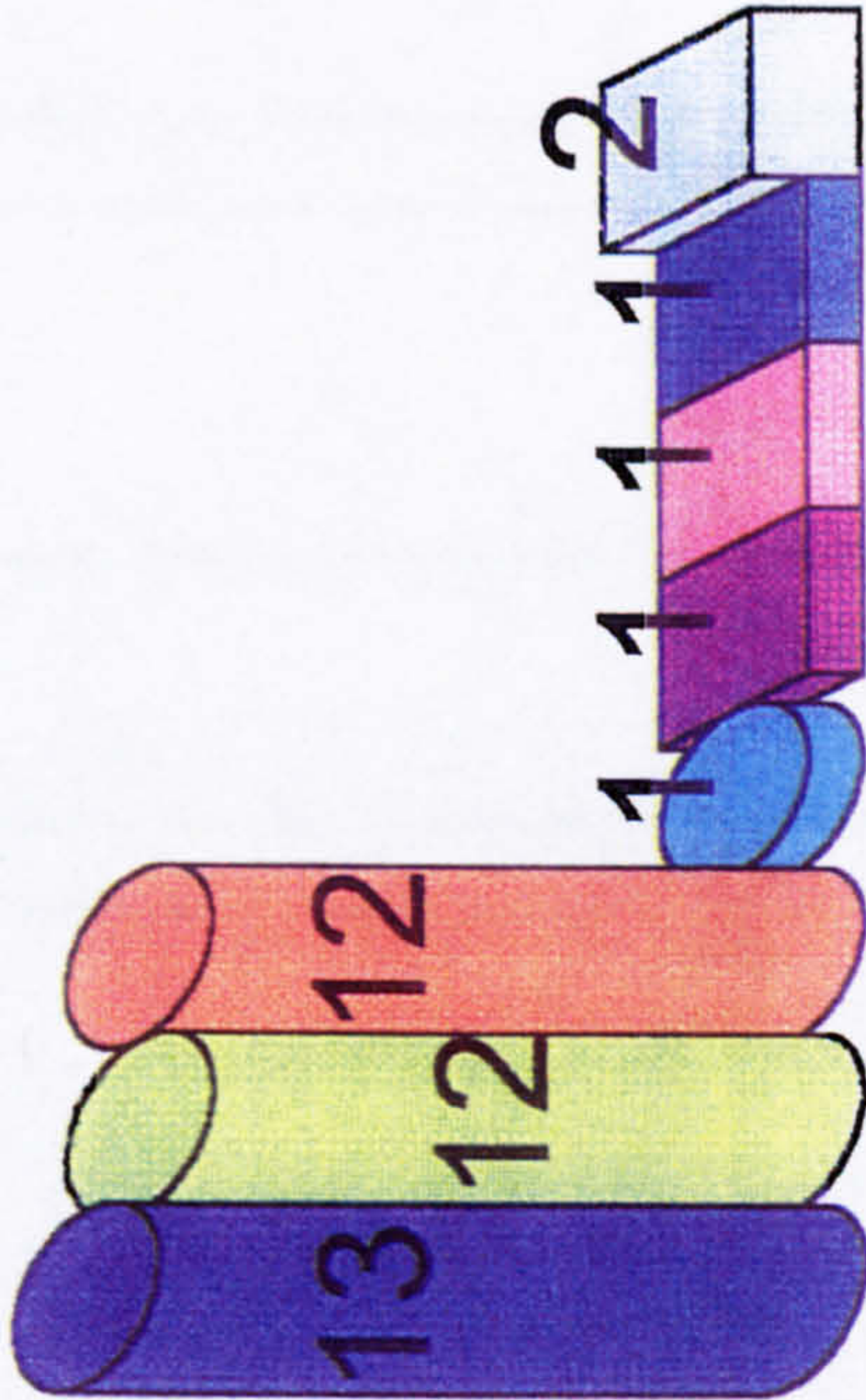
## Involvement in Dance





Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

## Current Dance Practice



- ☐ Solo/Independent artist
- ☐ Freelance
- ☐ Permanent
- ☐ Other - Partnership
- ☐ Other - Work with artists
- ☐ Other - Own company (project-based)
- ☐ Other - Not applicable
- ☐ Other - No response



# Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

(7 - Yes 1 - No)

(Out of London responses)

## Training programmes to offer

<i><b>Description</b></i>	<i><b>Key</b></i>	<i><b>Response</b></i>
Arts Management	AM	4
Entertainment Law	EL	4
Information Technology	IT	6
Human Resource Management	HRM	4
Stage Management	SM	4
Sound/Lighting	S/L	5
Touring	T	4
Marketing	MKT	5
PR	PR	5
Other - Once need arises offer other courses	Other	1

## Payments willing to make

<i><b>Description</b></i>	<i><b>Key</b></i>	<i><b>Response</b></i>
Membership fees	MF	5
Daily use fees	D	2
Individual services/activities	IS/A	4
No response	NR	0

## Support for the centre

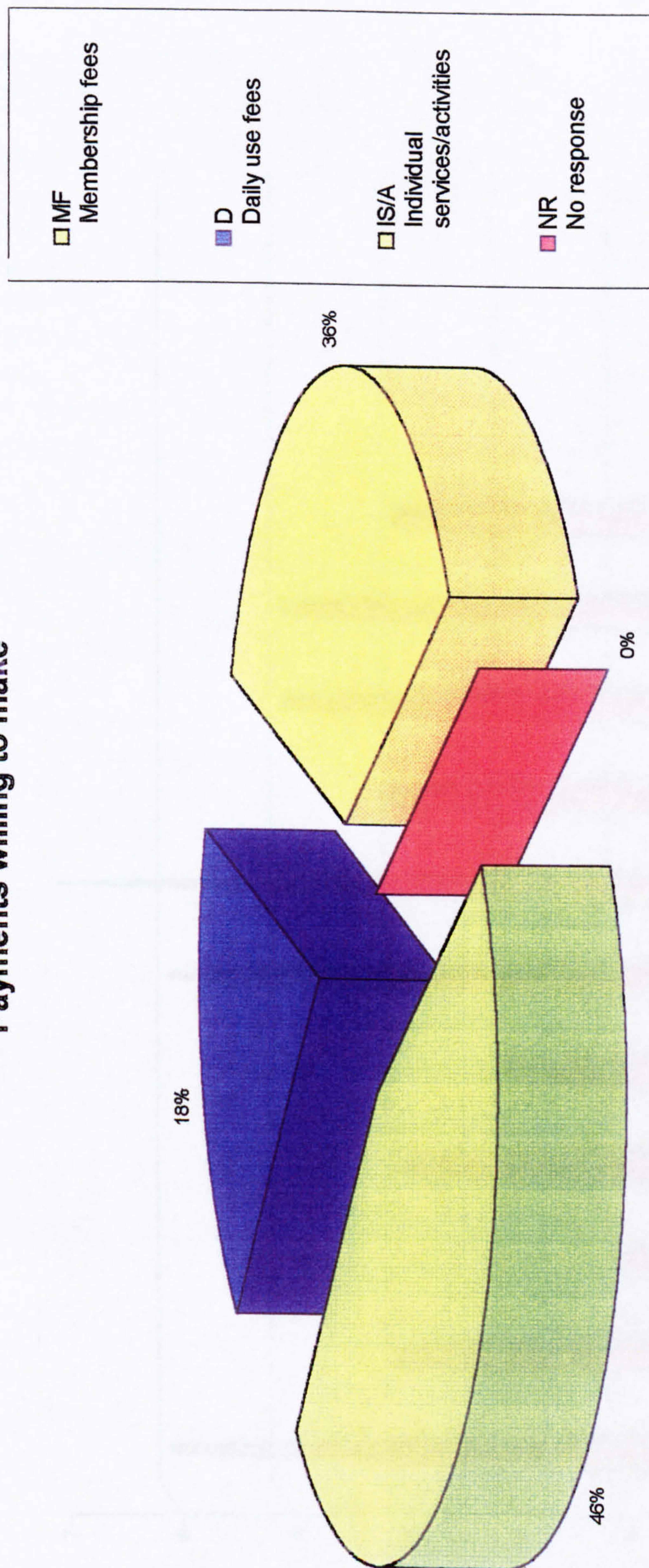
<i><b>Description</b></i>	<i><b>Key</b></i>	<i><b>Response</b></i>
Dance workshops	DW	6
Dance training	DT	4
Administrative support	AS	2
Complementary training	CT	4
Music workshops	MW	3
Performances	P	6
Seminars/Conferences	S/C	7
The bar	B	4
Films	F	5
Lectures	L	5
The café	C	4
Other - Rehearsal space	RS	0
Other - Task force/action plan workshops	TF	0
No response	NR	0



# Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

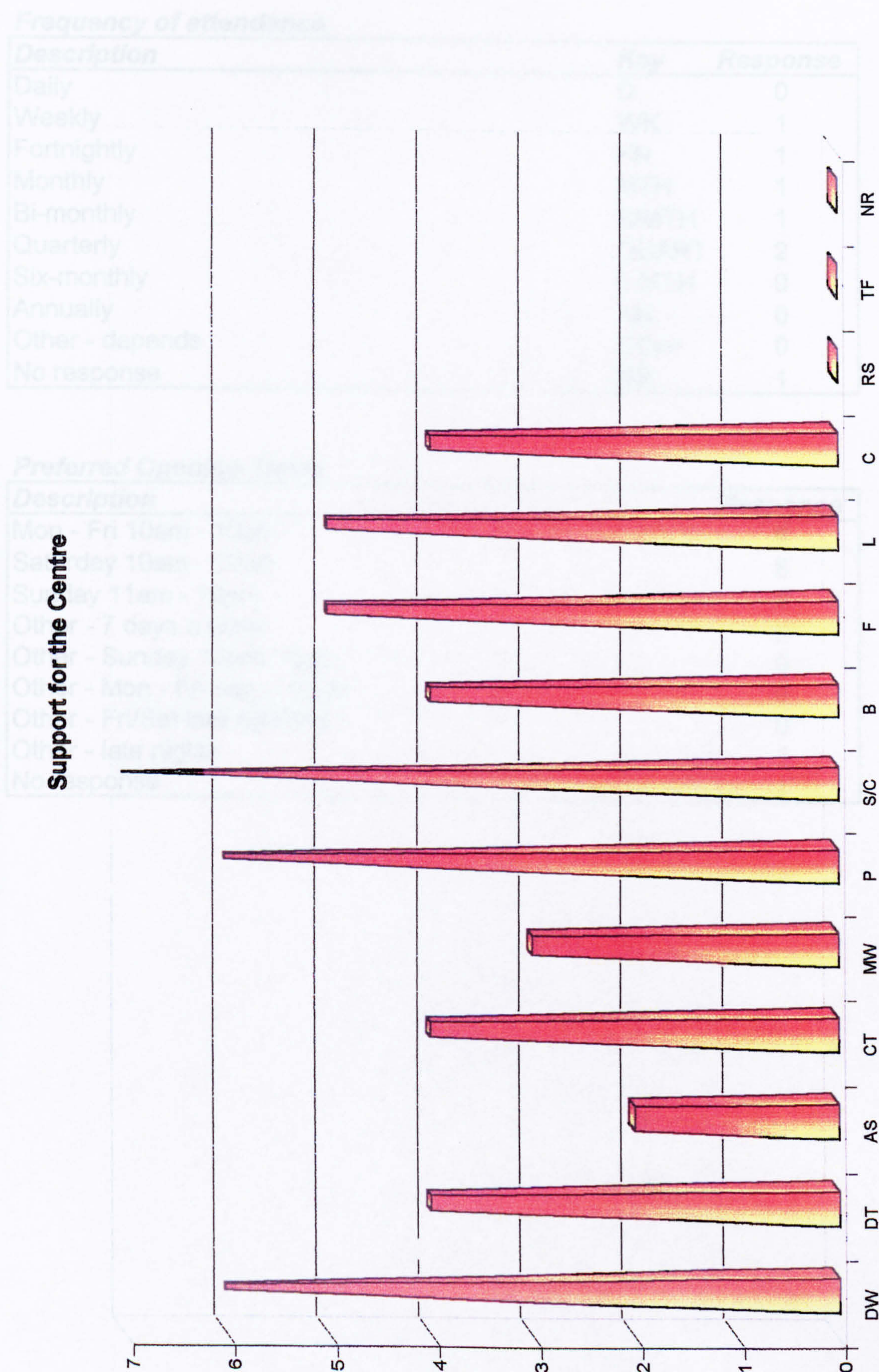
7 - yes, 1 - no  
(Out of London respondents)

## Payments willing to make





# Does London need a centre for Black Dance? (7 - Yes 1 - No) (Out of London responses)





**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(7 - Yes 1 - No)**  
**(Out of London responses)**

***Frequency of attendance***

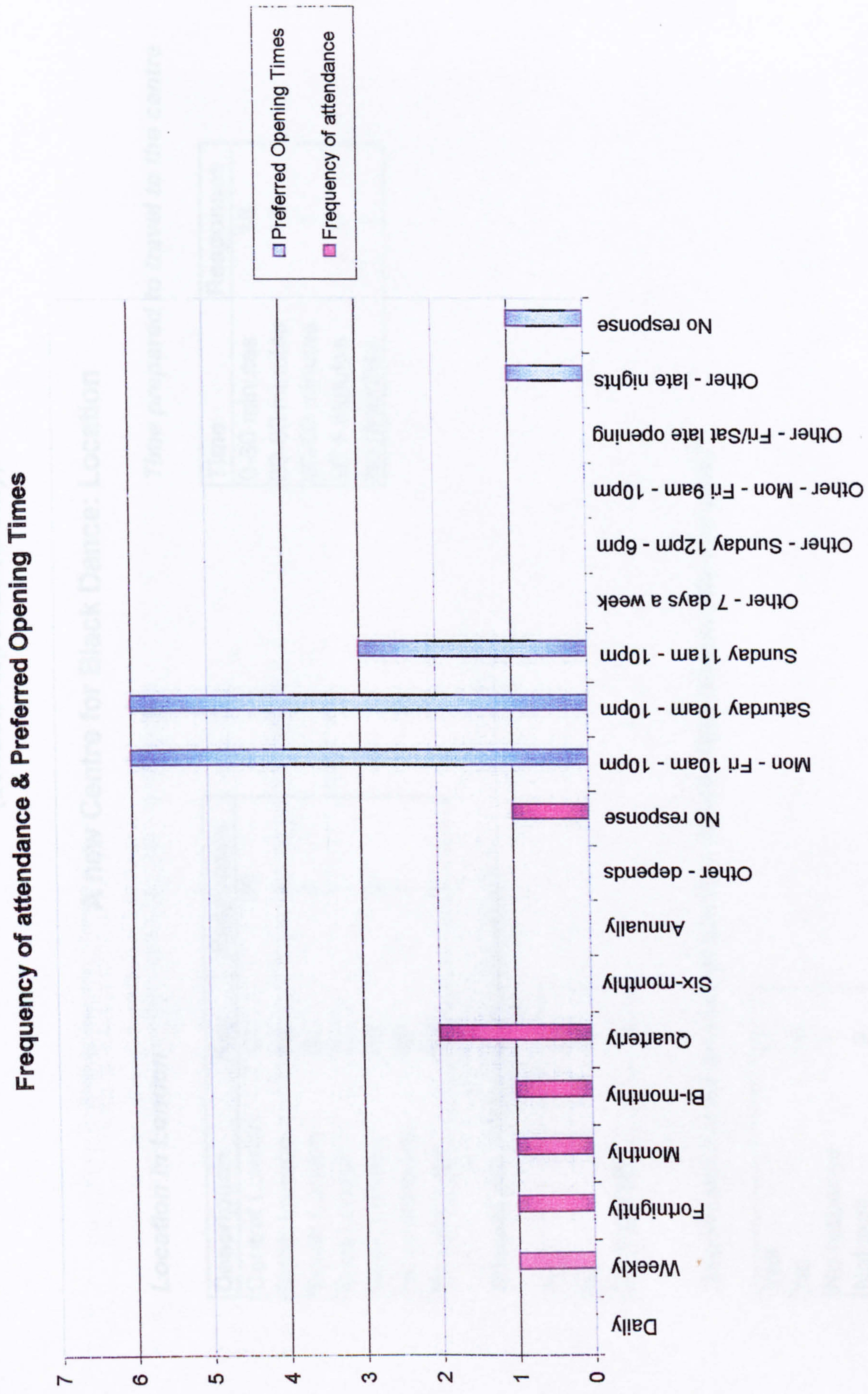
<b><i>Description</i></b>	<b><i>Key</i></b>	<b><i>Response</i></b>
Daily	D	0
Weekly	WK	1
Fortnightly	FN	1
Monthly	MTH	1
Bi-monthly	BIMTH	1
Quarterly	QUART	2
Six-monthly	6-MTH	0
Annually	AN	0
Other - depends	Other	0
No response	NR	1

***Preferred Opening Times***

<b><i>Description</i></b>	<b><i>Response</i></b>
Mon - Fri 10am - 10pm	6
Saturday 10am - 10pm	6
Sunday 11am - 10pm	3
Other - 7 days a week	0
Other - Sunday 12pm - 6pm	0
Other - Mon - Fri 9am - 10pm	0
Other - Fri/Sat late opening	0
Other - late nights	1
No response	1



Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
7 - yes, 1 - no  
(Out of London respondents)





**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
29 - yes, 2 - don't know, 3 - no  
(London respondents only)

**A new Centre for Black Dance: Location**

*Location in London*

Description	Key	Responses
Central London	CL	25
North London	NL	4
South London	SL	4
East London	EL	1
West London	WL	3
No preference	NP	1
No response	NR	1

*Time prepared to travel to the centre*

Time	Responses
0-30 minutes	16
30-60 minutes	13
60-90 minutes	1
90 + minutes	0
No response	1

*Should the centre be independent?*

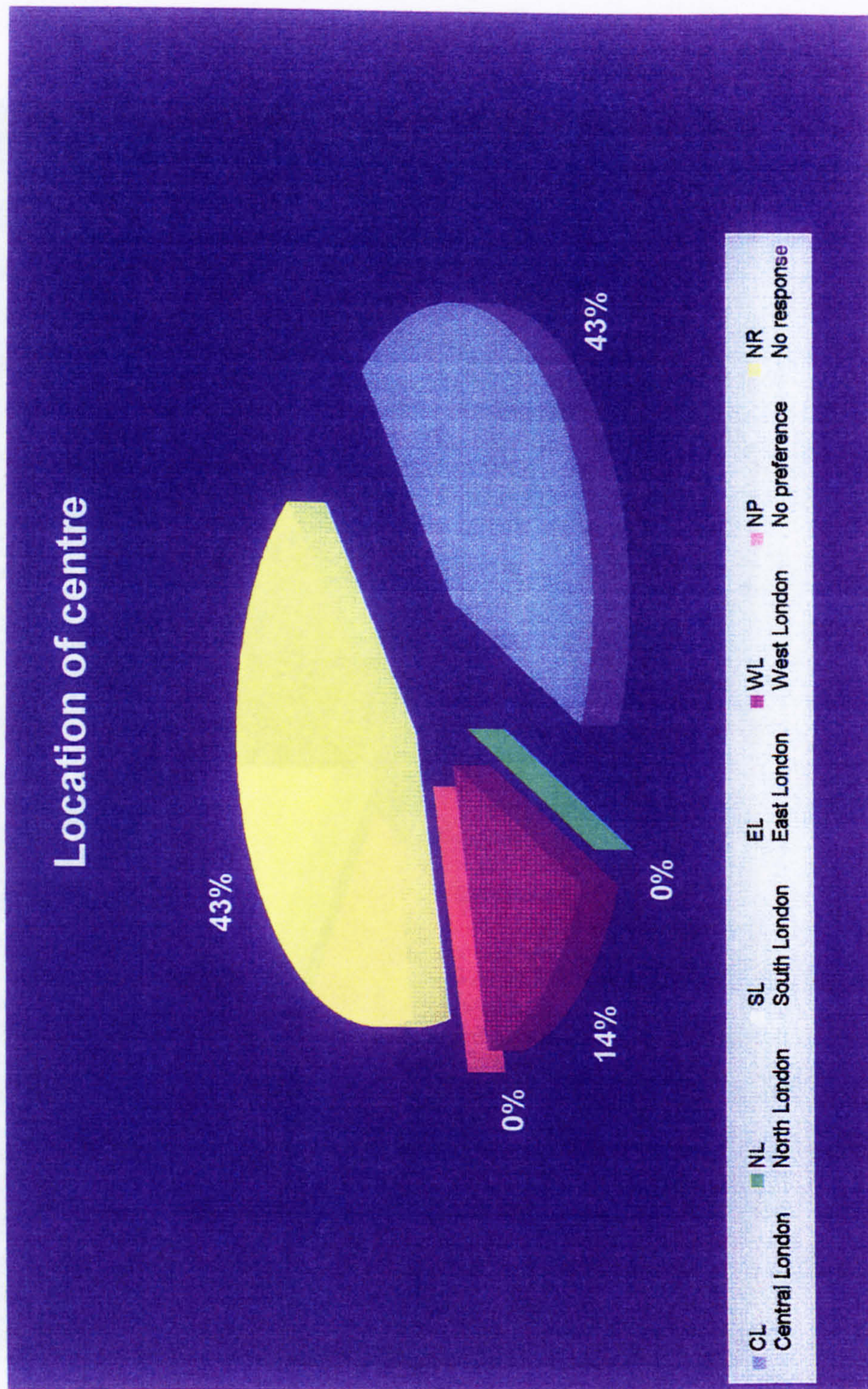
Yes	23
No	5
No reponse	3

*Should the centre be part of another dance organisation/arts complex?*

Yes	11
No	15
No response	1
Not sure	4

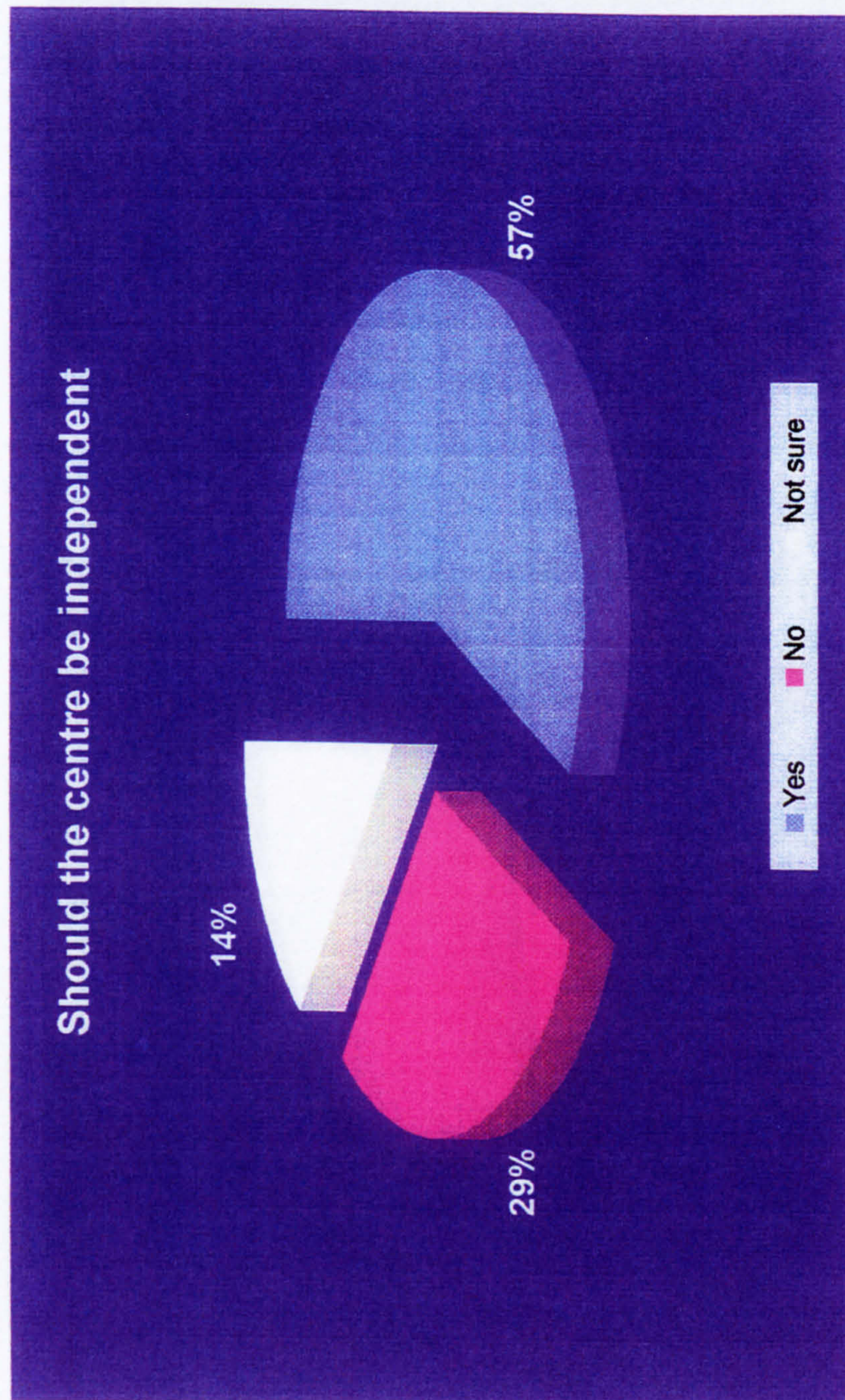


**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(7 - Yes 1 - No)**  
**(Out of London responses)**



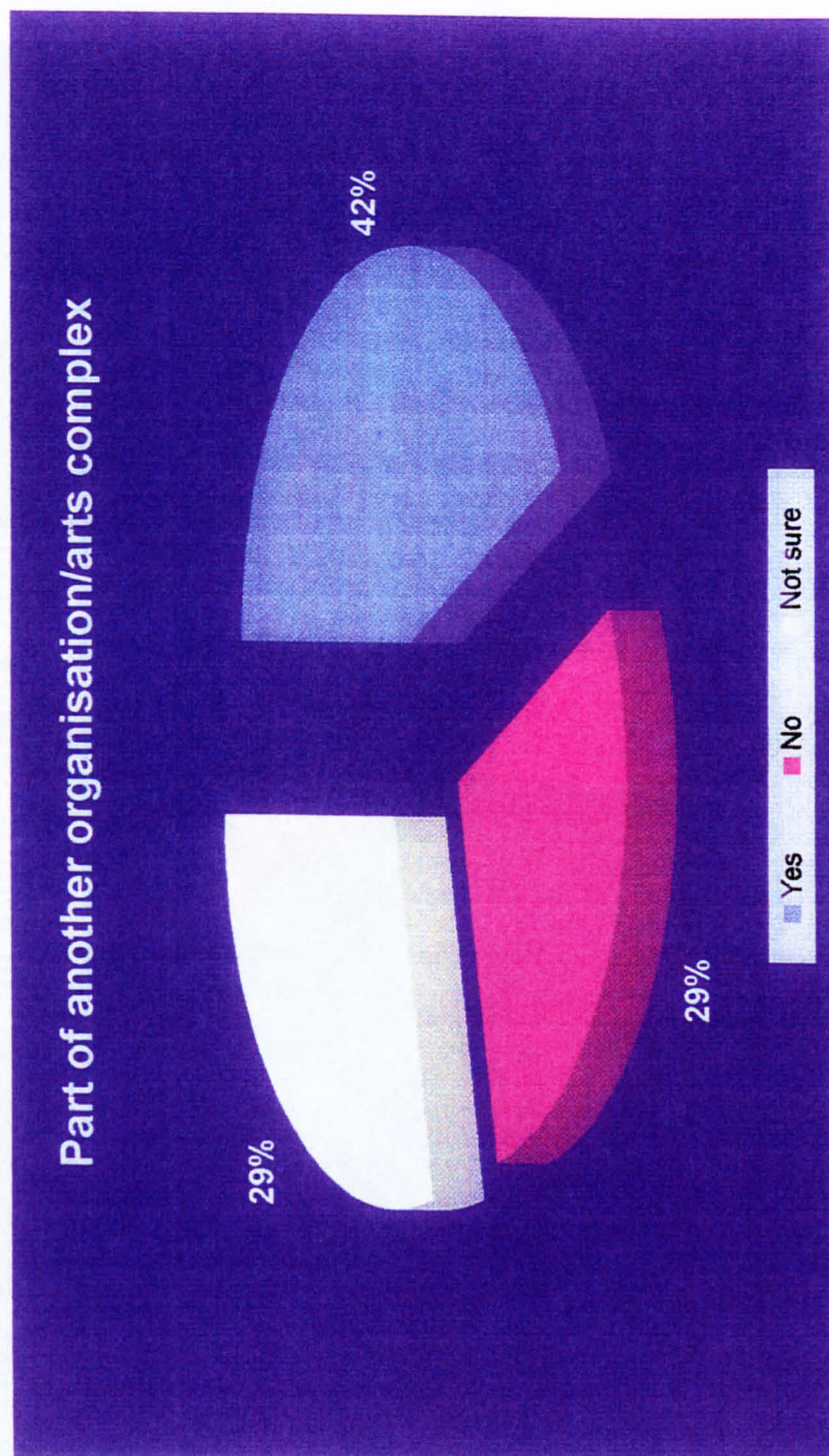


**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(7 - Yes 1 - No)**  
**(Out of London responses)**



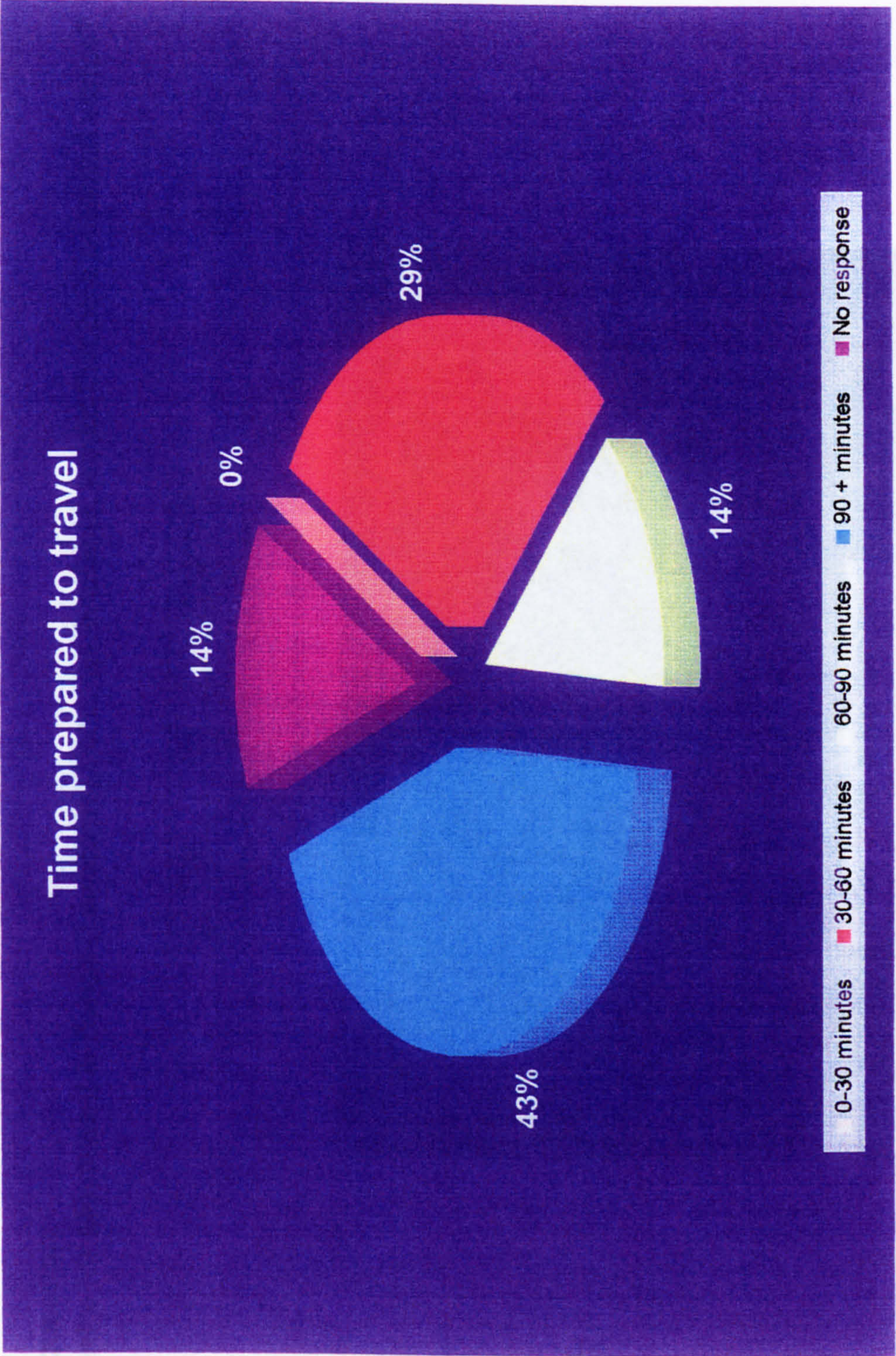


**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(7 - Yes 1 - No)**  
**(Out of London responses)**





**Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**  
**(7 - Yes 1 - No)**  
**(Out of London responses)**

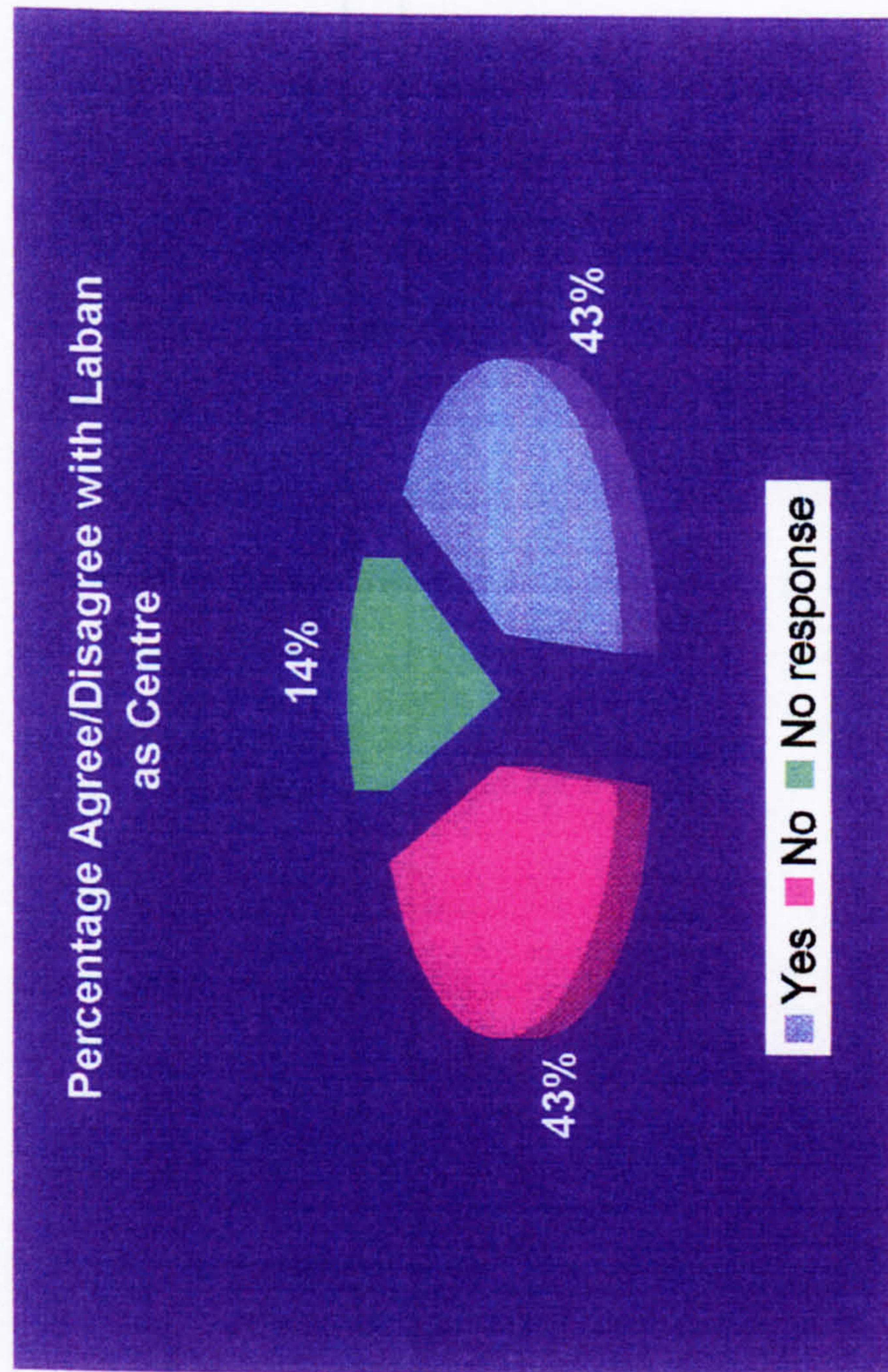




# **Does London need a centre for Black Dance?** **(7 - Yes 1 - No)** **(Out of London responses)**

Responses to question:  
 If the Laban Centre for Movement & Dance (Lewisham) becomes available, would that be a potential venue?

Yes	No	No response
3	3	1





# Does London need a centre for Black Dance?

## (7 - Yes 1 - No)

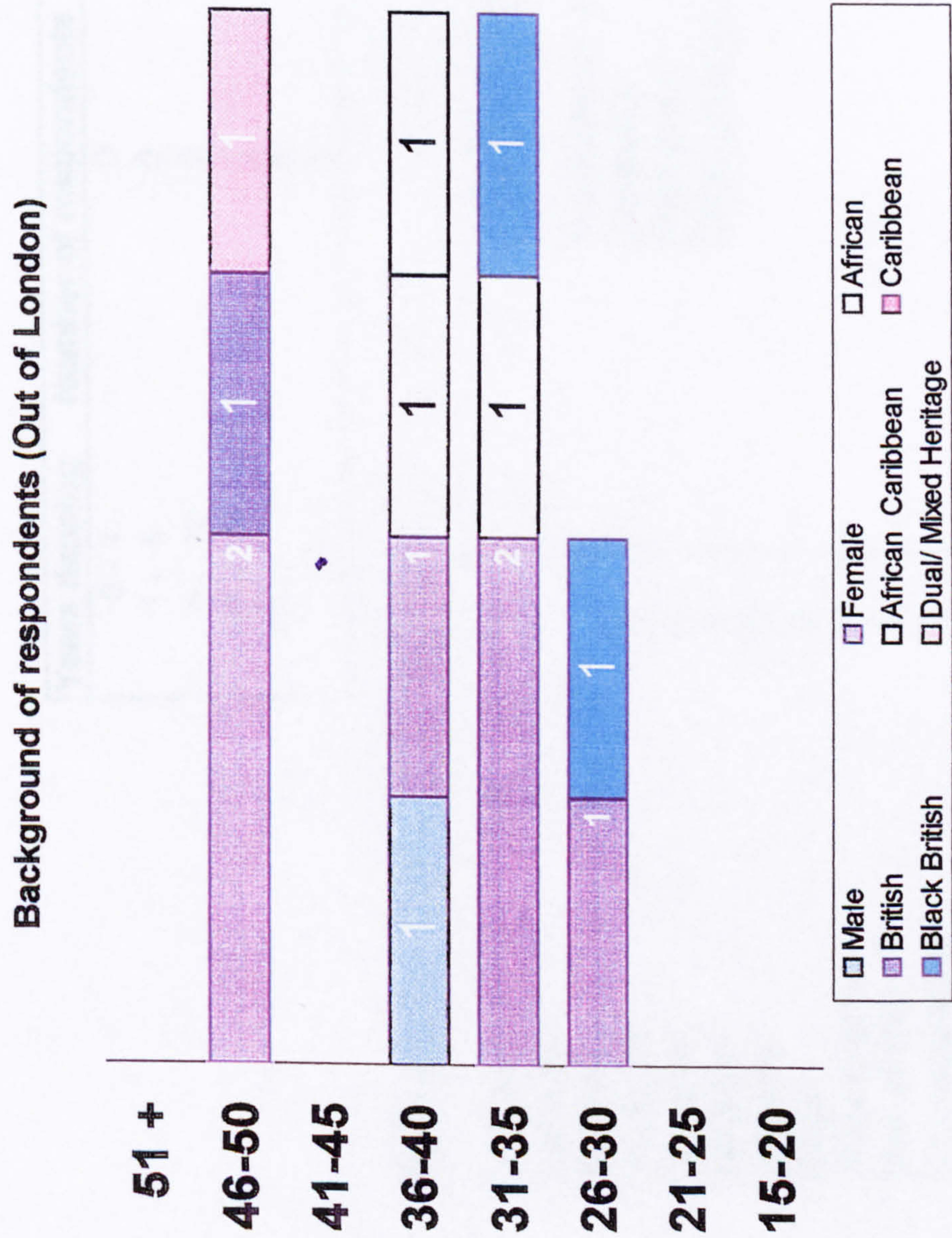
### (Out of London responses)

Personal Background of Respondents (Out of London)

Age Group	Sex		Ethnic Background				
	Male	Female	African	British	African Caribbean	Caribbean	Dual/ Mixed Heritage
15-20							
21-25							
26-30		1				1	
31-35		2		1		1	
36-40	1	1	1				
41-45							
46-50		2		1			1
51 +							
Total	1	6	1	1	2	0	2
							1



# Does London need a centre for Black Dance? (7 - Yes 1 - No) (Out of London responses)





Does London need a centre for Black Dance?  
(7 - Yes 1 - No)  
(Out of London responses)

Dance experience of respondents

Years dancing	Number of respondents
0 - 1	0
1 - 5	0
5 - 10	0
10 - 15	1
15 +	6
	7

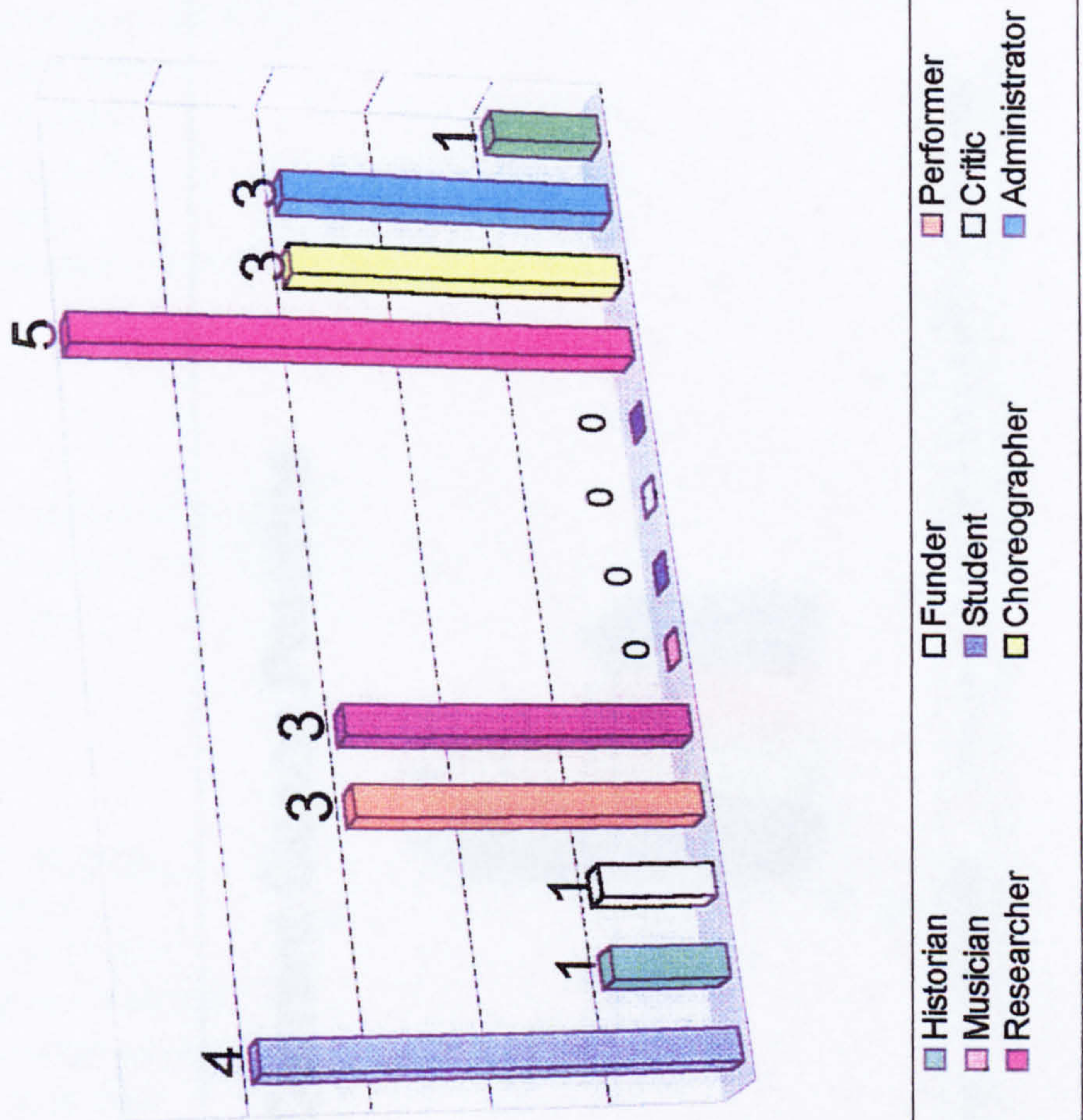
Involvement in Dance	Number
Teacher	4
Historian	1
Funder	1
Performer	3
Manager	3
Musician	0
Student	0
Critic	0
Photographer	0
Researcher	5
Choreographer	3
Administrator	3
Other (Documentation)	1

Current Dance Practice	Number
Solo/Independent artist	4
Freelance	4
Permanent	2
Other (University / Advisory role)	2



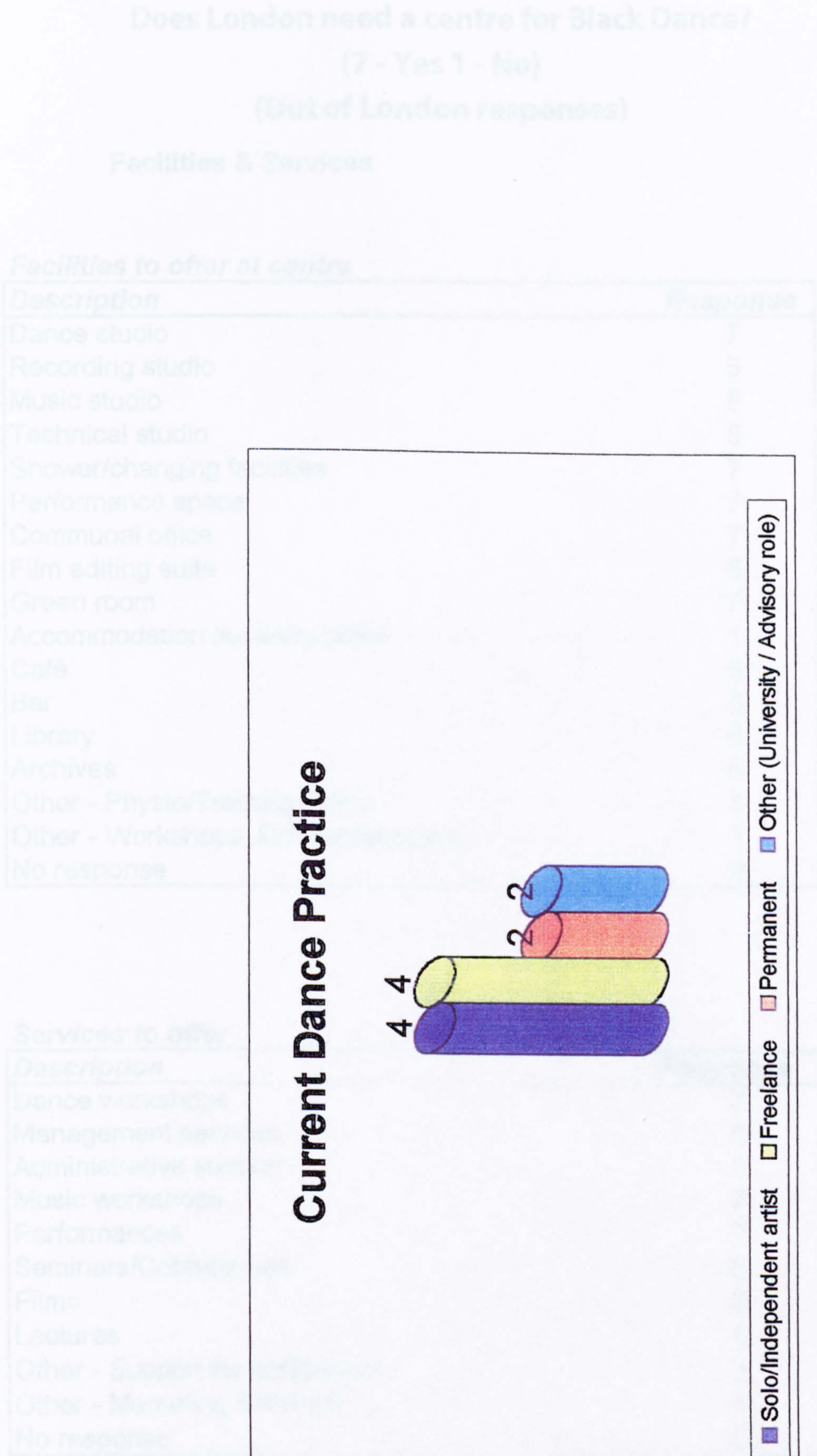
# Does London need a centre for Black Dance? (7 - Yes 1 - No) (Out of London responses)

Involvement in Dance





# Does London need a centre for Black Dance? (7 - Yes 1 - No) (Out of London responses)





# **Does London need a centre for Black Dance?**

**(7 - Yes 1 - No)**

**(Out of London responses)**

## **Facilities & Services**

### ***Facilities to offer at centre***

<b><i>Description</i></b>	<b><i>Response</i></b>
Dance studio	7
Recording studio	5
Music studio	5
Technical studio	5
Shower/changing facilities	7
Performance space	7
Communal office	7
Film editing suite	5
Green room	7
Accommodation (for visiting tutors)	1
Café	6
Bar	5
Library	6
Archives	6
Other - Physio/Training Room	1
Other - Workshops, Rehearsal space	1
No response	0

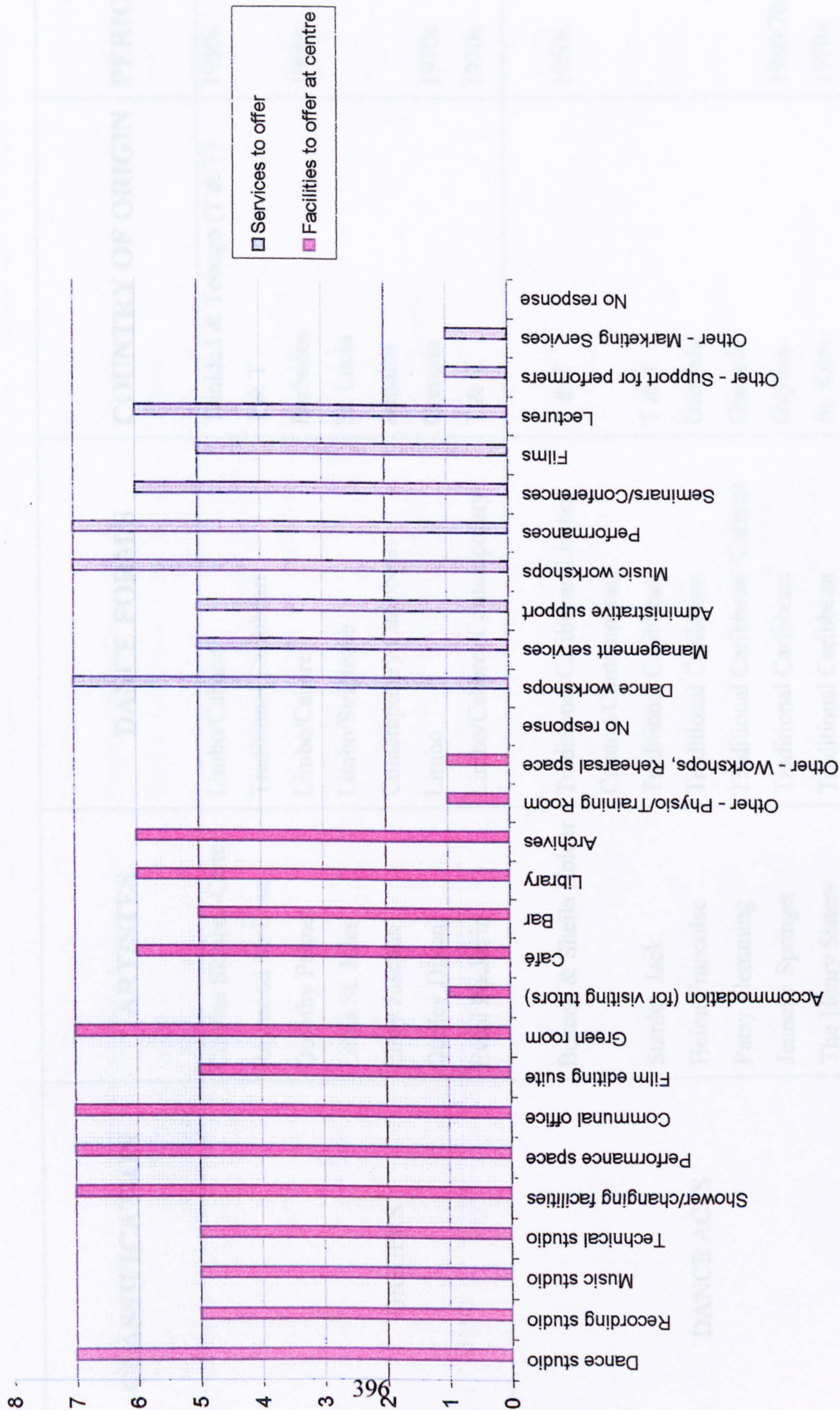
### ***Services to offer***

<b><i>Description</i></b>	<b><i>Response</i></b>
Dance workshops	7
Management services	5
Administrative support	5
Music workshops	7
Performances	7
Seminars/Conferences	6
Films	5
Lectures	6
Other - Support for performers	1
Other - Marketing Services	1
No response	0



# Does London need a centre for Black Dance? 7 - yes, 1 - no (Out of London respondents)

## Facilities & Services to offer





<b>CLASSIFICATION</b>	<b>ARTISTES</b>	<b>DANCE FORM/S</b>	<b>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</b>	<b>PERIOD</b>
<b>GIGGERS</b>	Corrine Skinner-Carter	Limbo/Cabaret	Trinidad & Tobago (T & T)	1950s
	Raymond McLean	Traditional Caribbean	T & T	
	Dorothy Palmer	Limbo/Cabaret	Barbados	1960s
	Louis St. Jules	Limbo/Striptease	St. Lucia	
	Elroy Josephs	Contemporary Caribbean	Jamaica	
	Dudley Dixon	Limbo	Grenada	1970s
	Evrol Puckerin	Limbo/Cabaret/Contemporary	T & T	1970s
<b>DANCE ACTS</b>	Boscoe & Sheila Holder	Traditional Caribbean/Limbo/ Cabaret/Contemporary	T & T	1950s
	Stanley Jack	Traditional Caribbean	T & T	
	Helen Francoise	Traditional Caribbean	Grenada	
	Patsy Flemming	Traditional Caribbean /Cabaret	Grenada	
	Jeanette Springer	Traditional Caribbean	Guyana	1960/70s
	The Henry Sisters	Traditional Caribbean	St. Kitts	1970s
	Felix Cobbson, Aklowa	Traditional Ghanaian	Ghana	1970s



	Ballet Negres	Caribbean/African	Jamaica	1940/50s
	Bee Wee Ballet	Traditional Caribbean	Grenada	1950/60s
	Legba	Traditional Caribbean	Guyana	1960/70s
	MAAS Movers	Contemporary	USA/ T & T	1970s
	Steel An' Skin	Caribbean/ Traditional African	Barbados/Ghana	1970s
	Ekome	Caribbean/Traditional African	Jamaica/England	1970s
	Lanzel Afrikan Arts	Traditional African	Jamaica/England	1970s
	Sankofa	Traditional African	Jamaica/Ghana	1970s
	Kokuma	Traditional African/Caribbean	T & T/Jamaica	1970s
	Dance Company 7	Contemporary Caribbean	Jamaica	1970s
	Daledo	Traditional African/Caribbean	England	1980s
	Shikisha	Traditional South African	South Africa	1980s
	IRIE!	Contemporary Caribbean	Grenada	1980s
	Adzido	Traditional African	Ghana	1980s
	Kizzy/Grass Roots	Caribbean/Traditional African	England	1980s
	Danse de L' Afrique	Contemporary African/Caribbean	T & T/England	1980s
	Ajah	Traditional African/Caribbean	Jamaica	1980s
	Abasindi	Traditional African/Caribbean	T & T/Jamaica/Ghana	1980s
	African Dawn	Contemporary African	Ghana	1980s

DANCE COMPANIES



DANCE COMPANIES	Dagarti	Traditional African	Ghana	1980s
	Watu Wanzuri	Traditional African	Ghana	1980s
	Koromanti Arts	Traditional African/Caribbean	England	1980s
	Badejo Arts	Contemporary African	Nigeria	1990s
	Sakoba	Traditional/Contemporary African	Nigeria	1990s
CULTURAL AMBASSADORS	Eurel Porter	Caribbean	Jamaica	1940s
	Cy Grant	Caribbean	Guyana	1940s
	Frank Holder	Caribbean	Guyana	1940s
	Vida Menzies	Caribbean	Jamaica	1940s
	Ivon Chin	Caribbean	Guyana	1940s
	Frank Jeremiah	Caribbean	T & T	1950s
	Roy Henry	Caribbean	Jamaica	1950s
	Jacques Compton	Caribbean	St. Lucia	1950s
	Claudia Jones	Caribbean	T & T	1950s
	Edric & Pearl Connor	Caribbean	T & T	1950s
	Arthur France	Caribbean	St. Kitts	1950s
	Ian Charles	Caribbean	T & T	1950s



	Alex Pascall	Caribbean	Grenada	1950s
	Doris Harper-Wills	Caribbean	Guyana	1960s
	Claude Brooks	Caribbean	St.Kitts	1960s
	June Baden-Semper	Caribbean	T & T	1960s
GENERAL ENTERTAINERS	Percy Thomas	Caribbean	T & T	1950s
	Ambrose Campbell	African	Nigeria	1950s
	Ginger Johnson	African	Nigeria	1950s
	George Henry	Caribbean	Jamaica	1950s
	Jeffrey Biddau	Caribbean	T & T	1960s
INTERNATIONAL DANCE TUTORS	Mathilda Beauvant	Contemporary	France	1960s
	Jackie Guy	Caribbean/Contemporary	Jamaica	1980s
	Sheila Barnett	Caribbean/Contemporary	Jamaica	1980s
	Francis Nii Yartey	Traditional African	Ghana	1980s
	Professor C.K Ladzekpo	Traditional African	Ghana	1980s
	Professor A.M. Opoku	Traditional African	Ghana	1980s
	Chief Muraina	Traditional African	Nigeria	1980s
	Peter Badejo	Traditional African	Nigeria	1980s



CARNIVAL PIONEERS	Claudia Jones				1950s
	Edric & Pearl Connor				
	David Russel-Milner				
	Learie Constantine				
	Lord Kitchener				
	Lord Beginner				
	Fitzroy Coleman				
	Terror				
	Russ Henderson				
	Sterling Bettancourt				
	Victor Critchlow				
	Frank Critchlow				
	Sonny Blacks				
	Dixieland Steelband				
	Coleridge Goode				
	Lord Eric				
	Lucita Lijetwood			London	1960s
	Selwyn Baptiste				



CARNIVAL PIONEERS	Darcus Howe				
	John La Rose				
	Junior Telfer				
	Frank Bynoe				
	Zack Herbert				
	Trevor Carter				
	Arthur Francis				
	Ian Charles				
	Merle Major				
	Granville Williams				
	Rhoden Gordon			Leeds	1960s
	Leslie Palmer				
	Andrei Shervington				
	Joyce Bacchus				
	Gloria Cummings				
	Lawrence Noel				
	Vernon Fellows				
	Pepi Francis				
				Leeds	1960s
				London	1970s



CARNIVAL PIONEERS	Gerald Forsythe		London	1980s
	Alex Pascall			
	V.J Ramlal			
	Louis Chase			
	Leslie Schaffe			
	Sister Monica Taiwan			
	Frank Rollock			
	Betrand Delandro			
	Wilf Walker			
	Ossie Gibbs			
	Dr. V. Lasse			
	Danny Holder			
	Norton McLean			
	Tex Flint		Birmingham	1980s
	Teddy Adams		Swindon	1980s
	Earle Robinson		Leicester	1980s
	Hurdle White		Leicester	1980s
	Herbie Higgins		Liverpool	1980s



### Appendix 3

#### **Guillermo Davis 'el lyawo' from Danza Libre Cuba** Classes in Salsa and Cuban Dance 2002 programme in London

<b>Saturday</b> Salsa and Cuban Dance at The Place	<b>Sunday</b> Afro-Caribbean Dance with Voodoo and Yoruba Dance at the Place	<b>Monday</b> Salsa and Cuban Dance in the East End
Jan 19 <sup>th</sup> 2pm Mambo 3pm Salsa Couples and Groups	Jan 20 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Voodoo 1.30pm Gaga	Jan 21 <sup>st</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Jan 26 <sup>th</sup> 2pm Mambo 3pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Jan 27 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Voodoo 1.30pm Gaga	Jan 28 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Feb 2 <sup>nd</sup> *later time 3.30pm Mambo 4.30pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Feb 3 <sup>rd</sup> 12.30pm Voodoo 1.30pm Gaga	Feb 4 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Feb 9 <sup>th</sup> 2pm Son 3pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Feb 10 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Voodoo 1.30pm Gaga	Feb 11 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Feb 16 <sup>th</sup> 2pm Son 3pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Feb 17 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Yoruba - Elegua 1.30pm Yoruba - Ogun	Feb 18 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Feb 23 <sup>rd</sup> *later time 3.30pm Son 4.30pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Feb 24 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Yoruba – Ochosi 1.30pm Yoruba – Babalu Aye	Feb 25 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Mar 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2pm Cha Cha Cha 3pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Mar 3 <sup>rd</sup> 12.30pm Yoruba - Oshun 1.30pm Yoruba - Chango	Mar 4 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Mar 9 <sup>th</sup> *later time 3.30pm Cha Cha Cha 4.30pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Mar 10 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Yoruba - Yemaya 1.30pm Yoruba - Obbatala	Mar 11 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Mar 16 <sup>th</sup> 2pm Cha Cha Cha 3pm Salsa in Groups and Couples	Mar 17 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Yoruba - Oya 1.30pm Yoruba - Elegua	Mar 18 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance
Mar 23 <sup>rd</sup> *later time 3.30pm Cuban Popular Dance Choreography 4.30pm Salsa Choreography	Mar 24 <sup>th</sup> 12.30pm Voodoo Choreography 1.30pm Yoruba Choreography	Mar 25 <sup>th</sup> 7pm Salsa technique 8pm Salsa & Cuban Dance



# *JazzXchange* SHERON WRAY MUSIC AND DANCE COMPANY

*PRESENTS*

## "DANCE IN CUBA TODAY"

ASHTON STUDIO  
FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2000  
7.30PM - 9.30PM

In celebration of Black History Month and supported by the London Arts Board, JazzXchange in collaboration with the Artists' Development Initiative of the Royal Opera House invites you to an open forum.

### 'Excellence in Diversity – Dance in Cuba Today'

An informal discussion reflecting on current themes within the professional dance movement in Cuba. There will be short presentations followed by an open dialogue. The panel will include four outstanding dancers from Cuba:

**Carlos Acosta** – Principal Dancer, Royal Ballet

**Leandro Delgado**- Dancer, Danza Libre

**Alfredo Velazquez**-Artistic Director, Danza Libre

**Rodolfo Fournier**- Choreographer, Teacher

### PROGRAMME

Introduction by Sheron Wray

Personal presentation by the Artists

Discussion facilitated by Bob Rambdhanie

Interpretation by Melissa Conner

Cuban dance photographs by Angela Taylor



ROYAL OPERA HOUSE  
COVENT GARDEN





**Bami Jo 2003 – Summer School Time Table      Week I**

**Appendix 5**

<b>Times</b>	<b>Sunday 03/08/2003</b>	<b>Monday 05/08/2003</b>	<b>Tuesday 05/08/2003</b>	<b>Wednesday 06/08/2003</b>	<b>Thursday 07/08/2003</b>	<b>Friday 08/08/2003</b>	<b>Saturday 09/08/2003</b>	<b>Sunday 10/08/2003</b>
10.00am	Class Registration	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	Class Registration	
10.30am	Welcome by P Badejo							
11.00am	Introduction Class on Bata dance tradition	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Creative Bata Dance Technique for Choreographic Development	African Dance Class Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	African Dance Class Bata Contemporary Dance Technique
11.30am	African Dance Class							
12 noon	(Traditional Bata Dance)							
12.30pm	Dance: Esther Music: Sikiru Music: Talwo	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Esther Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Esther Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Peter Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde Music: Ayan
1.00pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1.30pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
2.00pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
2.30pm	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class
3.00pm	(Bata Dance)	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Creative Bata Dance Technique for Choreographic Development	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique
3.30pm	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Talwo	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Peter Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde Music: Ayan
4.00pm	Talk & Review (Tutor: PB)							
4.30pm								
5.00pm								
5.30pm								
6.00pm								
6.30pm								
7.00pm		African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Master Class		
7.30pm		Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Bata Dance Technique		
8.00pm								
8.30pm		Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru		



**Bami Jo 2003 -- Summer School Time Table      Week II**

<b>Times</b>	<b>Monday 11/08/2003</b>	<b>Tuesday 12/08/2003</b>	<b>Wednesday 13/08/2003</b>	<b>Thursday 14/08/2003</b>	<b>Friday 15/08/2003</b>	<b>Saturday 16/08/2003</b>	<b>Sunday 17/08/2003</b>
10.00am	Class Registration	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	African Dance Class Bata Contemporary Dance Technique
10.30am							
11.00am	African Dance Class Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique		Dance: Peter Music: All Musicians
11.30am							
12 noon							
12.30pm	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Talwo	Bata Dance Dance: Isloma Dance: Esther Music: All Musicians
1.00pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1.30pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
2.00pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
2.30pm	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	
3.00pm	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Traditional Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Bata Contemporary Dance Technique	Conference Lecture/Demonstration Performance by Tutors & Students
3.30pm	Dance: Peter Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Esther Music: Sikiru Music: Talwo	
4.00pm							
4.30pm							
5.00pm							
5.30pm							
6.00pm							
6.30pm							
7.00pm	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Class	African Dance Master Class		
7.30pm	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Introduction to Bata Dance Technique	Bata Dance Technique		
8.00pm							
8.30pm	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Peter Music: Sikiru Music: Talwo	Dance: Isloma Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde	Dance: Esther Music: Talwo Music: Ayan	Dance: Peter Music: Sikiru Music: Tunde		



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**Miscellaneous Source Material**

**Videos**

- (1)     The Power Stone: A history of the Kwanyama Kingdom, Namibia.

A video documentary analysing the impact of the Berlin decision on the people of Namibia. It focuses on traditional African belief systems within a particular ethnic group and illustrates how these survived throughout all the political, religious and social intervention by Europeans. Produced by Mamokobo Video & Research. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland. Windhoek, Namibia: VHS 1999.

- (2)     The African Presence in Trinidad & Tobago: A Look at Cultural Continuity and Change.

Trinidad & Tobago Television (TTT) made a series of programmes in 1982 and 1983 on ‘The African Presence in Trinidad & Tobago: A Look at Cultural Continuity and Change’. These programmes were filmed at several traditional African religious events in Trinidad & Tobago, Nigeria and at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Conference on The Orisha in Bahia, Brazil.

The programme included numerous interviews with a wide range of practitioners of Traditional African religions and syncretic forms in the New World. Followers of Shango, Voodoo, Spiritual Baptists and many others talked about their belief systems and their physical and spiritual connections to Africa. Prominent scholars, historians, Babalawos and practitioners, including Dr. J. D Elder, Molly Ahye and Dr. Neville Linton (Trinidad & Tobago) and Wándé Abímbólá, (Nigeria) participated.

- (3)     Other Videos

Viewed a wide selection of videos of Traditional and Contemporary African Dance workshops and performances. Some of these are listed herein.

Badejo Arts:	A selection of videos by Badejo Arts covering the company’s production over the past ten years.
Compagnie Kossiwa:	“La Traversée du Jour”. Choreography by Flora Théfaine, France 1997.
Ghana Dance Ensemble:	“Solma”, “Musu”, “The King’s Dilemna”, Ghana 2000.
H. Patten:	Rehearsals and productions.
Kissi Faramaya Troupe:	West African Music and Dance, Sussex, England 1998.



L'Angola Fait Danser L'Afrique:	Luanda – Angola 1998.
Noyam:	Traditional and Contemporary music and dance performances from Noyam. Ghana 2001.
Pan African Orchestra:	Rehearsal and workshops for the production “Yaa Asantewa”, Ghana 2000.
Redemption Song:	A series of six television programmes looking at different aspects of life in the Caribbean, including cultural lifestyles.

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