



## BAM presents DanceAfrica 2021 Festival

The nation's largest African and African Diasporic dance festival and BAM's longest-running program celebrates the vibrant culture and resilience of Haiti

### Tickets go on sale May 13

The 44th annual celebration also features Festival favorites—dance workshops, the virtual DanceAfrica Bazaar (launching today on BAM.org), FilmAfrica, and visual art—return with new programs including a choreographers' conversation.

Bloomberg Philanthropies is the Season Sponsor

#### **DanceAfrica 2021**

**Vwa Zanset Yo: Y'ap Pale, N'ap Danse! "Ancestral Voices: They Speak... We Dance!"**  
By Artistic Director Abdel R. Salaam

HaitiDansCo (Cap-Haitien)

Àşę Dance Theatre Collective (Brooklyn)

The Fritization Experience (Brooklyn)

Rara Tou Limen (Oakland)

**BAM/Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble** (Brooklyn)

and

**DanceAfrica Spirit Walkers** (Brooklyn)

Film Production by Chimaeric Motion Pictures

Virtual at [BAM.org/danceafrica](https://BAM.org/danceafrica)

May 29 at 7pm ET

Tickets: Pay-what-you-wish pricing \$10, \$25, \$44

**May 5, 2021/Brooklyn, NY**—**DanceAfrica**, the nation's largest celebration of African and African Diasporic dance, music, and culture returns with new content reimaged for the digital space. **Brooklyn Academy of Music's** (BAM) **DanceAfrica 2021** pays homage to the ancestral energy of Haiti, a metonym for Black liberation. On **Saturday, May 29 at 7pm ET**, the Festival brings together dance companies from Haiti and around the United States for unforgettable virtual performances around the theme *Vwa zanset yo: y'ap pale, n'ap danse!*, in Haitian Creole, or "Ancestral voices: they speak... we dance!". DanceAfrica Artistic Director **Baba Abdel R.**

**Salaam** commissioned pieces from **HaitiDansCo** in Cap-Haitien and three American companies—**Àṣẹ Dance Theatre Collective** and **The Fritization Experience** in Brooklyn, and **Rara Tou Limen** in Oakland. Press photos [here](#).

The virtual program features four dance premieres inspired by the characteristics of the *Iwa*, spirits of Haitian Vodou. Each company pays tribute to a different *Iwa* through traditional dance—Parigol, Agwe/Li Sirene, Banda/Guede, Petwo, and Nago. The dances manifest the *Iwa*, bringing messages of faith, hope, and healing, and staying connected to the ancestors, and giving praise and gratitude. The performances embrace Haitian culture's strength, healing, and resilience through deep, rich, vibrant-colored scenes and landscapes depicting traditional dance movements, costumes, masks, headwear, and elements from the Vodou tradition.

Also performing is the **BAM/Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble**, an annual favorite and a powerful symbol of youth involvement in preserving African heritage. Many long-held traditions are reimagined for the 44th celebration, including a virtual Libation Ceremony and a Procession of the Elders that crosses the country, featuring elders from seven presenting DanceAfrica cities.

Created in 1977 under Founding Elder Chuck Davis's artistic direction, DanceAfrica has evolved into a highly anticipated and high-spirited Memorial Day weekend tradition that brings together the entire community. This year the tradition is reimagined as a virtual celebration allowing audiences from around the world the opportunity to be a part of the DanceAfrica community and experience new content designed and directed for screen.

The Festival, which is centered around the dance performances streaming on May 29, also includes the digital **DanceAfrica Bazaar** with over 20 vendors featuring crafts, food, and fashion (launching today May 5 on BAM.org); Haitian movement master classes for families and adults; and a choreographers' conversation on May 19 (see below). Details on the DanceAfrica visual art exhibition, the FilmAfrica series, and a late-night dance party will be announced at a later date.

#### **DanceAfrica 2021 Programming Includes:**

- May 5—June 14      DanceAfrica Digital Bazaar
  - May 19              *DanceAfrica 2021: Choreographers' Conversation*
  - May 29              DanceAfrica Community Workshop
  - May 29              DanceAfrica 2021 (Performance) *Vwa Zanset Yo: Y'ap Pale, N'ap Danse! "Ancestral Voices: They Speak... We Dance!"*
  - May 31              DanceAfrica Adaptive Workshop
  - May 31              DanceAfrica Master Class
- \*more to be announced

Tickets for DanceAfrica 2021 dance performance go on sale Thursday, May 13 at 12pm/noon ET, at [BAM.org/danceafrica](https://BAM.org/danceafrica). Information on DanceAfrica programs are below.

For press information, contact Cynthia Tate at [ctate@bam.org](mailto:ctate@bam.org).

#### **About the Artists**

Named for the Yoruba word that describes every living being's power to make things happen, **Àṣẹ Dance Theatre Collective** is a "Neo-Folkloric" performance ensemble specializing in traditional and contemporary dance and music theater from the African diaspora. Under the artistic direction of Adia Tamar Whitaker, a dancer/choreographer and vocalist from San Francisco, this Brooklyn-based collective links contemporary and traditional dance theater to conceptual ideas in the

human experience. In addition to the east coast ensemble that Whitaker founded in New York City (2000), she formed a west coast ensemble in the bay area (2009). In 2010, ASE East and West performed together for the first time at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Performing Arts. In 2011, ASE West won an Isadora Duncan Award for outstanding performance. The current performance ensemble consists of dancers, musicians, and spoken word artists from both coasts.

Brooklyn-based company **The Fritization Experience** coalesces artistry that includes Haitian folklore, urban social dances, Pan-African dance forms, body percussion, spoken word, sign language, and visual arts to express human experiences, African diaspora identity, cultural exchange, and community empowerment. The diverse, interdisciplinary troupe was founded by Haitian-raised, African-descended, Brooklyn-born choreographer Fritzlyn "Fritz" Hector, who is also an educator, freelance creative director, a principal dancer for Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, and a veteran cast member and cast trainer of the international sensation off-Broadway show STOMP.

Cap-Haitien-based dance company **HaitiDansCo** was founded in 2013 by choreographer Dieufel Lamisere, who returned to his native country following its catastrophic earthquake in 2010. Lamisere sought out to inspire the youth of Haiti and create opportunities for learning and performing. HaitiDansCo fuses traditional Haitian dance with elements of classical ballet, modern, and jazz. It is one of the few consistently touring professional dance companies in the country and performs an extraordinary repertoire representative of Haitian culture. And use the art/culture as an asset to save lives through dance.

Bay Area-based dance company **Rara Tou Limen (RTL)** presents Haitian music, dance, and culture through classes, workshops, performances, retreats, and education events. Accompanied by dancers, vocalists, and celebrated musicians, the company brings to the stage a broad spectrum of diverse Haitian dance forms, from vibrant rituals of Vodou, the turbulent legacy of political struggle, to the celebratory and festive dances of Carnival. Established in 2004 by Artistic Director Portsha T. Jefferson, the company's mission is to educate audiences about the richness of Haitian culture through artistic expression, while building and enhancing working relationships with other Haitian cultural groups in the US and Haiti. RTL is committed to showcasing the best of folkloric dance and music, which carries the stories, struggles, and spirit of the first free Black Republic in the world.

An annual favorite and symbol of youth engagement in preserving African heritage, the **BAM/Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble** returns to BAM for the 23rd year. Under the artistic direction of Karen Thornton, the gifted young dancers of RestorationART, artistic home to the largest community of African descent in the nation, celebrate both ancestral roots and present-day community. *The Village Voice* has praised these young dancers as "exuberant and disciplined" and "a group worth following."

Baba Abdel Salaam founded the **DanceAfrica Spirit Walkers** in 2016 to honor the ancestors of Africa theatrically and its diaspora at the annual DanceAfrica Memorial Tribute, originally developed by the late Baba Chuck Davis. The group comprises professional dance artists and musicians from the Restoration Arts Alumni and Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, melding contemporary, hip-hop, modern, and African vernacular forms.

**Abdel R. Salaam** became DanceAfrica's artistic director in 2016. He is also the executive artistic director/co-founder of Forces of Nature Dance Theatre (FONDT), founded in 1981. Born in Harlem, Salaam is a critically acclaimed choreographer and has served as a dancer, teacher, and

performing artist on five continents throughout his 50-year career in the dance world. He has received numerous awards and fellowships for excellence in dance, including the National Endowment for the Arts, New England Foundation on the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, New York State Council for Arts, National Council for Arts and Culture, and Herbert H. Lehman College. Salaam and Forces of Nature Dance Theatre were honored with a 2017 Bessie for Outstanding Production for DanceAfrica's centerpiece performance, Healing Sevens.

He is currently a director at the Harlem Children's Zone/Forces of Nature Youth Academy of Dance and Wellness at St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Harlem. The company also received the 2013 Audelco Award for Dance Company of the Year. Salaam has served on the American Dance Festival's faculties in the US and Seoul, Korea; Herbert H. Lehman College; Alvin Ailey American Dance Center; Restoration Youth Arts Academy; and Harlem Children's Zone. Inspired by Dr. Maulana Karenga, Salaam created Kwanzaa Regeneration Night Celebration at the Apollo Theater, now in its 40th year.

### **About DanceAfrica 2021 Festival**

#### **DanceAfrica Digital Bazaar**

**Tue, May 4- Mon, June 14**

BAM.org

DanceAfrica's popular free outdoor bazaar is digital this year, creating an online marketplace that highlights Black-owned independent businesses offering the finest fashion, food, jewelry, and crafts. These vendors have been part of DanceAfrica throughout the years and contribute to the vital presence of African, Caribbean, and African-American culture in Brooklyn. All proceeds go directly to these businesses—providing critical support to independent artists, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Free and open to the public. For more information, visit BAM.org.

#### ***DanceAfrica 2021: Choreographers' Conversation***

**Wed, May 19 at 7pm ET**

BAM.org

FREE

In conjunction with this season's virtual DanceAfrica, participating choreographers from local, national, and international companies join together to discuss how traditional Haitian forms are translated and interpreted into contemporary performance today. DanceAfrica Artistic Director and founder of DanceAfrica Spirit Walkers **Abdel R. Salaam** is joined by **Dieufel Lamisere** (HaitiDansCo), **Portsha T. Jefferson** (Rara Tou Limen), **Fritzlyn "Fritz" Hector** (The Fritization Experience) and **Adia Tamar Whitaker** (Àşę Dance Theatre Collective) for this informal discussion, facilitated by **Thomas F. DeFrantz**, founding director of the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance and a professor at Duke University. The conversation will be closed captioned. For more information, visit BAM.org.

#### **DanceAfrica Community Workshop**

**Sat, May 29 at 10am ET**

Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 6

All ages

FREE

Caregivers and children of all ages deepen their engagement with DanceAfrica in this fun-filled, hands-on workshop presented in Brooklyn Bridge Park. Veteran traditional Haitian dancer, choreographer, and teaching artist **Nadia Dieudonné** guides families through the fundamentals of Haitian movement and music. Note to participants: This is not a drop-off class; please arrive ready and excited to engage with your family members at all times. Co-presented by BAM and Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy.

Registration is required. Free admission is based on a first-come, first-served basis. A limited number of spaces are available. Selected participants will be notified a week before the event with more detailed location information. For more information, visit [BAM.org](http://BAM.org)

### **DanceAfrica Adaptive Workshop**

**Mon, May 31 at 10:00am ET**

Mark Morris Dance Center

\$10 virtual / \$12 in person

Ages 16+

Acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and teacher **Pat Hall** leads this inclusive, interactive class designed for persons with disabilities. Choose to participate in person at the Mark Morris Dance Center or through livestream, and discover how African and diasporic dance forms celebrate community and aspects of daily life, providing a unique window into the culture, history, and traditions of its people. Co-presented by BAM and Mark Morris Dance Group.

*For adults (ages 16 and up) with disabilities, all levels of experience welcome. When you register, we invite you to share how we can make this event as accessible to you as possible and any other information that will help us best support your experience.*

*Registration is required. Visit [MMDG.org](http://MMDG.org) or contact Mark Morris Dance Center at 718.624.8400 to register. Patrons are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Dance Center's Covid-19 safety protocols before attending an in-person class.*

### **DanceAfrica Master Class**

**Mon, May 31 at 12:00pm ET**

Mark Morris Dance Center

\$10 virtual / \$12 in person

Join veteran traditional Haitian dancer, choreographer, and teaching artist **Nadia Dieudonné** for this immersive workshop on the music and dance of Haiti, available in person at the Mark Morris Dance Center or through a livestream that brings the joy of DanceAfrica right into your home. Designed for intermediate and advanced dancers, this class introduces participants to Haitian rhythmic traditions and teaches the fundamentals of traditional movement styles. Co-presented by BAM and Mark Morris Dance Group.

Registration is required. Visit [MMDG.org](http://MMDG.org) or contact Mark Morris Dance Center at 718.624.8400 to register. Patrons are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Dance Center's Covid-19 safety protocols before attending an in-person class.

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