

## Covering Letter

25<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Dear Chair of the LUTSF,

Firstly I want to make a sincere apology for the lateness in my report to you. On returning back from my trip, I arrived home to find my mother had been admitted to hospital (an illness that she was battling with for 14 years). Six weeks later she passed away and this as you can imagine was a difficult time for me. In all honesty the completion of this report escaped my mind along with many other tasks. On a positive note it has been a great experience to finally write and complete this for you.

Secondly I would like to thank you for accepting my proposal and deeming it worthy of a scholarship. This particular trip was priceless and really embedded my knowledge of my chosen dance styles, which has allowed me to achieve my aims and more. I am truly grateful for the support from LUTSF.

**Title of project:** House Dance International (HDI) and Classes in New York  
**Dates:** 29<sup>th</sup> June to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009 (HDI: 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July 2009)  
**Venues:**

- 1) Sullivan Rooms, 218 Sullivan Street, New York, NY 10012, United States (*HDI choreography and club venue*)
- 2) Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, 2nd Floor (entrance on Chambers), New York, NY 10007-1868, United States (*HDI workshop venue*)
- 3) Dance Theatre of Harlem, 466 West 152nd Street New York, NY 10031-1896, United States (*HDI main event venue*)
- 4) Peridance Studio, 126 East 13th Street, New York, NY 10003, United States
- 5) Broadway Dance Centre, 3rd Floor, 322 West 45th Street, New York, NY 10036, United States
- 6) Alvin Ailey, The Joan Weill Center for Dance, 405 W. 55th Street (at 9th Avenue), New York, NY 10019
- 7) Djoniba Dance Studios LOCATION AT TIME OF TRAVEL: 300 West 43rd St & 8th Ave, 3rd floor. NOW BASED AT PERIDANCE STUDIOS
- 8) Steps On Broadway, 2121 Broadway # 3, New York, NY 10023, United States
- 9) Chelsea Studios, 151 West 26th Street, (between 6th & 7th Ave), New York, NY 10001
- 10) Sin Sin, 85<sup>th</sup> Street, 2nd Avenue, New York, NY 10003-8629

### **Timescale of the project**

The project on a whole was undertaken over 11 days, with the House Dance International (HDI) event taking place over 3 of these. I utilised my knowledge from a previous trip to create a timetable of classes that I would attend in the following styles: House, African, Jazz, Ballet and Contemporary. Plus a 5 day (2 hours per day) summer school in Waacking and Vogue. The trip ended with the HDI event that would further develop my understanding and knowledge of House Dance, Waacking and Vogue. This would be achieved through the events workshops, club nights and main battle events.

### **Purpose of the project/aims/achievements**

The main aim of this trip was to further develop my knowledge (practically, theoretically and historically) in House Dance, Waacking and Vogue. My initial aims were to complete this with the perspective of a choreographer. However I gained a volume of knowledge and met pioneers, influential teachers and contacts that I had not foreseen, which allowed me to also develop myself as a Teacher, Dance Manager and Performer. Plus, grow my network internationally.

### **Highlights**

Meeting Pioneers and great teachers including Tyrone 'The Bone' Proctor, Aus Ninja and Princess Lockeroo of the Imperial House Of Waacking, Benny Ninja of the House Of Ninja (Vogue), Brian 'Footwork' Green and Ejoye Wilson (House Dance), Joan Peters, Katherine Dunham Teacher at the Alvin Ailey School (Peter's was a dancer for the Dunham Company) and the House Dance International event itself because I was not only immersed in the dance, but the music, the energy, the history, the club life and culture of these Urban dance styles.

As an example, the first week there I attended a House Club night and really did not know what to expect. I was instantly struck by the wide age range of people at this club; I would make a guess of 18-65. Everyone was getting down on the dance floor and one lady in particular caught my eye, she was about 60 years old and House dancing! I was in total shock (I was indeed) because this is something I did not expect to see. What really struck me (other than her age) was that she wasn't throwing steps on the dance floor but being the dance. She was House Dance and House Dance was her. It was this lady that allowed me to understand (very quickly) what I was researching was bigger than just dance styles and steps; it was a culture that transcended many generations.

### **Suggestions for future awardees**

Ensure you understand the purpose of your trip, what do you want to get out of this? Even if this changes/alters as you are there (which is fine and a definite possibility) having this in the forefront of your mind will allow you to plan and also recognise opportunities that you had not foreseen.

Check that the people, classes and venues you want to meet/attend are in town, still running and open. Through prior research I found a number of studios that were open the year before had either closed down or moved location. Some of the teachers/Pioneers I wanted to meet were not in New York because they were touring Europe at the time.

From this information create a timetable for yourself, something to use as a guide for your trip. You do not need to stick to it but it will help you plan your time efficiently. I noticed and appreciated the difference between my first trip and this one as I was better prepared and utilised my time better.

Research accommodation wisely and if you can find alternative ways of verifying where you are staying. Especially if you are using websites and not recommendations from people you know. For this trip I decided to stay in an apartment and not a hotel, finding (via Craig's List) what I believed to be a bargain

place. On arrival to the apartment at about midnight I was shocked to find my apartment was an office building and my contact did not exist. I also found out I was the fifth person that month that had come looking for this particular contact and apartment. I had to walk the streets of New York (Times Square) for 2.5 hours, looking for a place to stay for the night and ended up paying \$200 for ONE NIGHT in a hotel. Bearing in mind I had sent a deposit for my 'apartment' in advance, I was not happy about my current predicament and had lost close to \$500 and the trip had not even begun. Thankfully I made contact (I was very lucky she was up so late) with a lady I now always refer to now as my New York Guardian Angel (who I had spoken to about accommodation during my research) and the next day I met and stayed with her (at one of her apartments) for the remainder of my trip.

I aim to use this new information to explore my creativity as a choreographer. I am now also in position to utilise this with my work as a Teacher, Dance Manager and Performer. Since November 2009 I have also worked with some of the teachers and pioneers bringing them to London to deliver workshops, courses, master classes and performances.

Again I would like to thank LUTSF for its support.

Thank You

Vicki Igbokwe

## **Report: Vicki Igbokwe**

### **New York Classes and House Dance International 2009**

In 2007 I was awarded one of four Trailblazer fellowships from the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD). I used half of this award to travel to New York in August 2008 to begin my research on House Dance. I created a two-week timetable of classes, cultural exhibitions/museums/events and club nights.

On my return I worked intensively for a week with five dancers on this style and then created a piece, which was presented at the Siobhan Davies Studio's as part of ADAD's Open Stage event. This was also the birth of my creative outlet, the Uchenna Dance Company (UDC).

I received valuable feedback from the expert panel that included Eckhart Thiemann, Funmi Adewole and Jeanette Bain, as well as the audience who attended. One aspect of the feedback I received related to my understanding of the form in its pure state. A greater knowledge and understanding would allow me to move forward in creating and developing a signature vocabulary of movement, that fused with my current dance styles – Contemporary (Graham and Dunham influences) and African (West African influences) Dance.

At this point, I realised a second trip was needed in order for me to go deeper with my understanding and to gain a richer palette of movement vocabulary. My reasons for the application to ADAD were so that I could re focus my career from a Dance Manager to Choreographer. The LUTSF allowed me to continue this practice based research that would give me the layers and depth required, to discover who I am as an artist and the type of work I want to make.

My Trailblazer bursary from ADAD inspired me, and the LUTSF gave stability to this positive turning point in my career.

As this was my second trip to New York I was keen to grasp as much information as possible. I also had to recognise that this time round I was focusing on three styles and not just one as I had done previously. During the end of my first visit which was solely focused on House Dance, I began to hear about Waacking and Vogue, seeing snippets of this at clubs and stumbling across a Waacking class. Because of this, I created a timetable (see attached) that I was able to pull together through research, which allowed me to have a focus and know what I was doing day to day (I had put together a busy timetable) to ensure I utilised my time efficiently.

My trip for me was split into two halves, the first being open classes and summer courses that I would be taking at various studio's. The second was the House Dance International (HDI) event that I had heard many positive things about. The event would be the last 3 days of my total stay and a melting point of knowledge.

## **THE CLASSES**

Throughout the two weeks I took part in the following classes: House, Waacking, Vogue, Dunham Technique, Ballet, Jazz and Hip Hop. My main focus was the first three however, I realised that I wanted to get a sense of what the latter styles were like in New York, to provide some sort of comparison to London. At the time of my trip House Dance, Waacking and Vogue were just arriving to London (classes starting to be taught sporadically).

Like London, I found a great deal of classes in the latter styles and was spoilt for choice regarding which ones to attend. Some I had taken previously during my first trip and the rest were recommendations from other students I had met in classes. All but one proved to be great experiences for me. The classes allowed me to network with other like minded individuals from all over the world, as summer proved to be a popular time for those in dance training and professionals to visit. Most of the classes I attended were made up of 98% of students not based/from New York. This in itself allowed a greater richness of learning and exchange, not only between students but teachers too. This exchange was something that really inspired me to look at my own teaching practices and how I could embed this in my own teaching style.

It was also really apparent that, New York was lucky enough to have many pioneers/leaders of my three chosen styles, still teaching and spreading knowledge. For example, It was satisfying to know that I was taking Waacking classes with Tyrone Proctor one of the original Soul Train and Outrageous Waack Dancers. We just don't have that in London.

## **THE CLUBS**

Clubs in New York are melting pots of raw, in your face knowledge. You have to be careful to know the 'dancer' clubs from the regular ones as there is a major difference. Regular clubs (like London) are all about what you look like (dress code), not much dancing and lots of looking cool. The dancer clubs are about the dance, music and exchange. I visited two clubs weekly the first being a night called Soulgasm at Sin Sin and the second Funk Box at the Sullivan Rooms. Both of which have names that speak for themselves. The atmosphere at Soulgasm and Funk Box were electrifying, educational and spiritually uplifting, being immersed in the culture was truly beneficial to my research as this is where I actually saw the styles and all of the learning from classes began to make sense.

Every single class I attended (Waacking, House and Vogue) had the teacher strongly recommend a visit or six to both clubs. They advocated going to these clubs because this is where as a student I would see the 'realness' of the styles, as they are all club dances. As busy as classes were (some had up to 40 students at one

time), the teachers made no mistake in informing us that their classes without the club experiences were incomplete. I found this fascinating realising how much sense this made; if the styles began in the clubs it made sense to go back there.

An added bonus to my trip was two experiences with Tyrone Proctor (Waacking) and Benny Ninja (Vogue). Both teachers organised an after class 'trip'. Tyrone took us to a bar to watch a Drag Queen show, which really allowed us to see in real time some of his teachings within his classes. Waacking (outside of fast arm combinations) is about allowing your audience to 'see' the music through your movement. You have to be the drums, the guitar, the lead vocal, backing vocals and so on. One of the key skills is your ability to do this effortlessly, something Proctor is a master of. Watching the Drag Queens become the artist and their precision in their performances really gave layers to the learning. Here I learnt the art of being 'in' the music.

Benny Ninja (one Wednesday) took his class to Soulgasm and danced the night with us. Being at the club with Ninja and fellow students was an amazing experience as we had a real 'tour guide' with regards to taking steps we had learnt in class and making them 'real' in the club. This totally blew my mind and solidified my learning.

### **HOUSE DANCE INTERNATIONAL (HDI)**

HDI is a worldwide Urban Dance battle event that takes place annually in New York, attracting thousands of dance lovers (enthusiasts and professional) who have a passion for House, Waacking, Vogue, Hustle (partner dance) and Experimental Dance (anything goes style wise). HDI is produced by Santiago Freeman, Red and Lee Soulja, running over three days and is a mix of club nights, master classes, performances, panel discussions and battles. Like the regular open classes, HDI has a worldwide attendance which again makes this a great place to meet and network, whilst gaining knowledge and developing learning.

This was my first time here and I was not totally sure what to expect (although I have attended/produced many battle events in London). The HDI club nights were at Soulgasm and Funk Box, workshops at New Amsterdam Dance Studio's and the main event at Harlem Stage.

Due to the volume of activity over the three days there were packages that could be bought, this ranged from just taking one master class to attending all master classes and a club night to attending everything on offer over the three days; I went for the three day access all areas package. What an investment.

The pre selection battle day was a long one starting at 5pm and finishing at 3am the next morning (these time frames are common with events such as these in New York) taking in to consideration I had been at the choreography contest the night before between 7-10pm and stayed for the after party that finished at 4am, then taken two classes during the day before the pre selections (it was the survival of the fittest), signed up for all 6 master classes during the day and then attended the finals

that night. I was unsure and nervous about not being able to last for the whole event ...How wrong was I.

HDI from the moment I arrived at the venue has such a buzz and energy to it, I knew I would be OK. The amount of dancers entering categories was amazing; I believe House had something like 200 dancers, Waacking 143, Experimental 76, Vogue 6 and Hustle 3. Judges for the event (some of whom also gave master classes) were Tyrone Proctor (Waacking), Drey Ebony, Grandfather of the House of Ebony (Vogue), Chino 3 (House), Evelyn Santos (Experimental) and David Padilla (Hustle).

I feel I should point out that the numbers for Vogue and Hustle are low because these are extremely specialist styles. When numbers were announced for these categories I was confused and really disappointed, as I assumed they would not be very good. However, once the preliminaries began for both, it was clear to see why. The calibre of dancers in both categories was so high. For example, The Vogue preliminary was an event in itself, having its own host (separate to the main host EJoe Wilson). The Dj's changed; the energy moved into a different gear, it was like the venue transformed before us, like the cars in the movie transformers.

The system for the battle events was pre selections where each dancer (per style) has 1 minute to 'showcase' their talent. This is not a battle but a freestyle/improvisation. It is then the job of the judges to decide the top 16 dancers to go through to the finals of each category, for Vogue this was the top four and Hustle top two. The following day the finals took place and this is where the 'battling' started using the following system

**Preliminary:** 16 dancer's battle (1 v 1) for a place in the quarter finals

**Quarter finals:** 8 dancer's battle (1 v 1) for a place in the semi finals

**Semi finals:** 4 dancer's battle (1 v 1) for a place in the finals

**Finals:** 2 dancer's battle and one will be crowned the WINNER

The showcase, quarter and semi final battles allow each dancer to have two 'throw downs' and the finals have three. A throw down is where each dancer steps into the arena to free styles/show off their moves, playing to the audience and doing their best to make an impression on the judges.

The difference between the showcase on day 1 and battles on day 2 are showcases give dancers the opportunity to prove they have what it takes to enter the battles (performance, energy, character, musicality and technique) whilst the battles allow you to prove all of this with the added factor of having to out-do your opponent.

Watching the drama unfold over two days gave such a valuable insight into my chosen styles and gave me a three dimensional learning environment (classes, clubs and battles). HDI was the perfect final instalment to my research and I spent the last

day of my trip recovering and reflecting on all I had just witnessed and taken part in during my trip. To say I was inspired and motivated was an understatement.

## **THE FUTURE**

Since my return from this particular trip I (and fellow creative people and students) have noticed the difference in my practice, not only as a choreographer but as a teacher, dance manager and performer. As an artist I know exactly who I am, what I like and the things I want to share, being so aware of this feels really good and gives me the confidence to challenge myself and others that I work with be this as a participant, spectator or event/project partner.

My network in the UK and abroad has grown considerably, which has allowed me to create many opportunities for me to disseminate the information I have acquired (and am still collating as learning never stops), these include;

**Uchenna Dance** – my organisation that works to create events, projects and education packages that promote these styles and more. These include *Cultural Explosion* at Rich Mix and *Juste Debout UK* at the Camden Centre.

**Uchenna Dance Company** – my creative outlet for choreography. I do not only share with the audiences and venues but my dancers benefit from my training as I work with them to develop their technique and performance within these styles. I have created my own company class titled *Urban Contemporary*. Here I have explored the similarities and differences between House, Waacking, Vogue, Contemporary and African (West) Dance influences. Create a technique class, with a structure like that of a Graham or Cunningham class.

**ADiaspora Collective** – a creative collaboration with Alesandra Seutin Artistic Director of Vocab Dance Company. Together we have been commissioned to create work for ADAD, East London Dance and the South Bank Centre. The work has been performed in events including Dance Umbrella and African Dance Encounter at The Purcell Rooms, Local International at Stratford Circus, Hip Hop Ladies Attack at Tanzhaus nrw (Dusseldorf, Germany), Theatre Louis Aragon (Paris, France) and Breakin Convention, Sadler's Wells (main stage).

**Lecturer** – I currently work as a visiting lecturer at Middlesex University (Jazz Dance Technique and Choreography), University of East London (House and Waacking) and Kensington and Chelsea College (Urban and Performance Modules, delivering Urban Contemporary).

**International Artist Programme** – Since my LUTSF trip in 2009 have brought over seven artists from New York, Denmark, Chicago and Paris to deliver workshops, master classes and intensive courses. I am proud to say that one of these artists was the Legendary Tyrone Proctor, who delivered a 5 day Waacking Course that was attended by 40 students from the UK and Europe.

**Imperial House Of Waacking (IHOW) UK** – in January 2010 a UK chapter of IHOW was born (after a successful workshop programme with Aus Ninja of IHOW New York), a group of dancers were handpicked by Aus Ninja to join this International network. I was appointed the leader of this and have been working with the chapter ever since on developing our own training and now moving into creating choreography to present to the public.

**Teacher/Choreographer** – I am in a position to now teach both professionals and dance enthusiasts classes and workshops in the following styles; Urban Contemporary, House, Waacking and Vogue. To date I have worked in the UK and Europe including London, Manchester, Vienna, Dusseldorf Germany and France. My blend of styles has also given me a wider range of choreographic opportunities as the interest for work that utilises these styles is steadily growing.

I have been blessed to have had a second opportunity to visit New York and continue my practice based research. And am in a position to disseminate all I have learnt in a wide range of settings, with different types of people. My choice of re focusing my career from management to choreography has been an exciting and rewarding journey so far and the support from the LUTSF has only strengthened this further.

I recommend the LUTSF to anyone who wants to make a difference to their own practice and that of others.

Once again THANK YOU LUTSF.

[www.uchennadance.com](http://www.uchennadance.com) (My organisation)

[www.housedancenyc.com](http://www.housedancenyc.com) (HDI)

[www.waacking.com](http://www.waacking.com) (Imperial House Of Waacking)

[www.broadwaydancecenter.com](http://www.broadwaydancecenter.com) (Studio)

[www.peridance.com](http://www.peridance.com) (Studio)

[www.alvinailey.org](http://www.alvinailey.org) (Ailey School)

[www.sullivanroom.com](http://www.sullivanroom.com) (Club)

[www.lamaisondartny.com](http://www.lamaisondartny.com) (Accommodation)