

## **Covering Letter**

**29th of May 2019**

Dear chair of LUTSF,

I would like to thank the Lisa Ullmann Travel Scholarship Fund for funding my trip to Senegal to further my artistic development. This experience has really impacted me, the way view myself as an Artist and the direction in which I want to take my professional dance practice. I have grown, I have acquired so much knowledge and I have started to apply it to my current dance practice. This fund has allowed to achieve my outcomes plus more and I am truly grateful for it. Please find attached my report which includes pictures and video links of my overall experience and learning.

**Title of project:** Dance Afrique Experimental Flow International Workshop (DAEFW) and Artistic Development and Exchange with Local Artists in Senegal.

**Dates:** 8th of April 2019 to 28th of April 2019

**Venues:** L'école des Sables in Toubab Dialaw, Studio Ex Lat Daro de Rufisque, Centre Culturele Blaise Senghor in Dakar.

### **Timescale of the project:**

The DAEFW took place over the course of two weeks from the **8th of April 2019 - 20th of April 2019** at L'école des Sables in Toubab Dialaw, a fishing village which is an hour from the capital city of Senegal, Dakar. My exchange and training with local artists took place mainly in the capital city Dakar between the **20th of April and 28th of April 2019**. The timescale of my entire project spanned across three weeks.

### **Purpose, Aims and Achievement:**

The main purpose of my project was for artistic and personal development. Artistically, I wanted to deepen my knowledge of contemporary, urban, traditional and club styles from Africa, its diaspora and the Caribbean as these are dance forms I aim to use within my choreographic work and incorporate into my movement vocabulary. My purpose was also to collaborate with local artists choreographically, exchange knowledge and dance styles as well as build international connections. Overall I wanted to grow as a Professional Dance Artist, Performer and Choreographer and I believe that the LUTSF enabled me to do that. I was able to gain more knowledge in the various dance forms taught during DAEFW, learn the history of the dances and given tools and resources for further research on the styles.

Some of main achievements include:

- Consistently working on applying what I was learning through incorporating the new movement vocabulary through freestyle and creating a solo/choreography; a task that was set as part of DAEFW
- I had the opportunity to exchange and collaborate with local artist.
- I exchanged with other local Artists through cyphers and a battle I entered unexpectedly, which was organised by one of the Artists I stated in my application I would work with whilst in Senegal, Ibou. This experience enabled me to exchange movement styles and knowledge I previously had before the workshop and that which I newly acquired during my trip
- I developed my performance skills through sharing what I have learnt in a final performance following DAEFW, referred to as 'The Restitution'

## Highlights:

There were so many highlights for me during this trip both artistically as well as personally. There were all so fulfilling and impactful in one way or another, however there were some experiences that were particularly memorable.

- **The Restitution:** A sharing of everything we had learnt throughout the two weeks. This took place on the last day of the workshop. It gave us the opportunity to put what we had learnt into practice and perform and explore the different dance forms even further. For example, we were put into groups to create pieces exploring the different styles we had learnt and solos based on our experiences during the workshop. It was great to share what we have been working on with the locals of the village. It also showed me how much I had learnt over the two weeks.
- **The Battle:** I entered my first international dance battle held in the region of Rufisque by Local Artist, Ibou. I stepped out of my comfort zone and was able to move and exchange with Artists from the local area. I learnt a lot from watching and was inspired by every artist who took to the dance floor. The battle has now inspired me to enter more battles in the UK and internationally.
- **Festival Kaay Fecc:** I was fortunate enough to have been in Dakar during a Dance Festival at the Centre Culturele Blaise Senghor. I was able to take three very insightful and different classes which added to my experience and knowledge of movements of traditional African dances and street dance styles. I was particularly inspired by Abdou Ba, a 70 year old Choreographer and Dancer whose class I took. He was very physical and truly embodied the saying "age ain't nothing but a number." I've always said I would dance until I am old and grey and he confirmed to me that it was possible. He truly inspired me.
- **Classes on the beach:** I loved the fact that we had two classes on the beach during DAEFW. We had an Acogny Technique Class and a Sabar class right by the waves of the sea. This was an highlight for me as it is something I know I would only experience whilst in Senegal. It is not something I would normally experience in the UK.
- **Sabar Performance in Sobo Bade, Toubab Dialaw:** during DAEFW, an evening outing was organised to watch a Sabar performance by our Teacher, Mamadou Balde's dance company. The performances were incredible. I loved seeing different companies perform as I was able to see the different styles of Sabar. One thing I loved most was seeing the female members of these companies dance Sabar. Watching them truly inspired me to pursue the style further. Since being back in the UK I have done just that, attending a weekly Sabar class. Below are pictures of some of the performances (Mamadou Balde's company on the left).



## Suggestions which could help future Awardees:

My suggestions for future attendees would be to have a solid plan prior to leaving for their trip but also be willing to be flexible in case of changes in circumstances. For instance, accommodation. I experienced booking an accommodation in Dakar only to go there and find out there were fully booked but had accepted my booking as though it was confirmed. As I was flexible, I was able to book something else within an hour which was actually closer to where I wanted to train. In all, my advice will be open to

change as that usually allows for enriching experiences which could help meet the aims of your project. For me, the things that did not go according to plan were actually those that made me achieve more than I aimed to with my project.

**Plans to share information about my project:**

Since my return, I have already started to share information about my project with others. One of the ways in which I have started to do this is through sharing videos from my trip (videos of practicing new movement vocabulary acquired, collaborative choreography with local artists as well as freestyle videos utilising the new movement inspired by my trip to Senegal) on my social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. These platforms for me are powerful in sharing my artistic journey. From doing this, I have had other artists contact me to ask me about the workshop and the purpose of my trip. They have told me that they have been inspired to train African dance styles. I have been able to start a conversation with them through this and give them an insight into my artistic development as a result of this trip.

Another way I shared my knowledge and information about my project is through creating a solo in which I fused hip-hop and street dance styles such as Waacking and House (styles which were part of DAEFW) with traditional African dance (particularly Acogny Technique and Sabar). I shared this solo at Runway House, a professional training hub for dancers to hone in on their dance skills and excel in their artistry. The solo received a great response from fellow students and the Creative Director of the company. I ensured that I shared with them that my piece was inspired by my trip to Senegal, the experience and the movement. I plan to continue to build on this solo and explore how it could be developed further by teaching it to professional dancers to create a visual which will highlight the amalgamation of street dance styles and traditional African dance.

Finally, I will be sharing the knowledge I have acquire through my teaching and workshops I run (B-free Movement Workshops). My trip has inspired my movement and choreography a great deal and I will continue to explore with the new movement vocabulary inspired by traditional African and Caribbean dances.

A massive thanks to the Lisa Ullmann Travel Scholarship Fund once more for supporting my project. I am truly grateful.

Kind regards,  
Tina Omotosho

## **Lisa Ullmann Travel Fund Scholarship**

### **Dance Afrique Expérimental Flow Workshop at L'école de Sables and Artistic Development with local artists from Senegal**

#### **Report by Tina Omotosho**

In March 2019, I was funded by the Lisa Ullmann Travel Fund Scholarship (LUTFS) to attend the *Dance Afrique Experimental Flow Workshop* (DAEFW), an international dance workshop organised by Choreographer and Artistic Director of Vocab Dance, Alesandra Seutin. In addition, LUTSF also funded an extra week for artistic development and exchange with local artists in Senegal. My project spanned across three weeks. In that time, I was able to acquire a wealth of knowledge in traditional African dance and street dance styles (house and Waacking). I am still in the process of digesting all the information I acquire from this trip and working on strengthening them through research and practice.

#### **L'école des Sables**

DAEFW took place at L'école des Sables (the school of sand) also referred to as *Jant-bi*, an international centre for education and creation in traditional and contemporary african dances. It is located in the village of Toubab Dialaw which is about a 40 minute drive from the capital city of Senegal, Dakar. The school was established in 1998 by Germaine Acogny who is considered as the Mother of Contemporary African Dance along with her husband Helmut Vogt. As I learnt from the workshop, the land on which the school was built was nothing but rocks and many said nothing could be built there. Eventually, the school was built on the grounds proving everyone wrong. It was definitely clear to see that the school's foundations was built on rocks when you walk the grounds.



The school has two beautiful studios in which we trained in daily, Henriette (a western style studio with the unique view overlooking the horizon and nature that surrounded the school) and Aloopho (an outdoor studio covered in sand). Student stay in bungalows dotted around the grounds of the school and sectioned into three villages (Village A, B & C). Each bungalow could sleep 3 students and included the basic necessities needed for a comfortable stay. The school was surrounded by nature, rocks, sand and the unique baobab trees (the tree of life), a significant aspect of the school grounds. The centre truly allowed me to feel at home whilst giving me an invaluable experience away from home.



#### **Dance Afrique Experimental Flow International Workshop**

DAEFW was created and organised by Alesandra Seutin, Choreographer and Artistic Director of Vocab Dance with the support of L'ecole des Sables. It is a 14 day immersion in contemporary, urban, traditional and club styles from African, its Diaspora and the Caribbean. It aims to bring participants from across the world and Africa to one place where they will "live together, train daily with inspiring and excellent teachers; exchange, discover dances, practices and cultures from one another." The workshop consisted of 6.5 hours of training per day in African Contemporary dance (Acogny Technique) with Alesandra Seutin (UK & Belgium), Senegalese Dances with Mamadou Baldé (Senegal), House Dance with Clara Bajado (UK), Ivorian Dances and Song with Saky Tchebe (Ivory Coast and Senegal), Deconstruction of African Traditional Dances Masterclasses with Patrick Acogny (Senegal), Waacking with Vicki Igbokwe (UK), Caribbean Dances based on the Talawa Technique with Thomas Presto (Norway) and Jazz with Michele Moss (Canada). There was a class entitled *Experimental Flow* with Alesandra Seutin and Mascha Tielemans (Workshop Assistant). This class allowed room for reflection on the workshop, our experiences, movement and what we intend to leave behind following the workshop.

DAEFW began at 9.15am on the 8th of April with an opening ceremony which set the intention for the entire workshop and allowed us to meet the teachers and other students participating in the workshop locally and from around the world. In total, there were 41 participants from 20 countries and 3 continents. It was an intense two weeks of training, learning and exchanging with artists, teachers and musicians across the globe.



### **The classes and teachers**

A regular training day comprised of four classes a day of the various dance styles offered by the workshop. The classes were enriching, fun, informative, physical and inspiring. The timetable of the classes was well structured allowing us to have two classes in the morning, a two hour lunch break to rejuvenate and revitalise the body before an intensive afternoon of classes and an open floor session which allowed us to explore and experiment with aspects of the last class further. In the first week each class had a focus on a certain part of the body. For instance, in our House Dance classes the focus was on the hips and the importance of this when doing the dance as it's usually a vital part of the body that is usually ignored.

What I loved most about the classes was the link between them. As I experienced each class, I found that although they were different styles there were vital aspects that link them. For instance, in Thomas Presto's Talawa Technique class, the connection to the floor and pulling from the ground to execute the movement (e.g. whining or ticking of the hips). This was also important in Acogny Technique where the movement always come from the ground up. A link between Waacking and Yoruba dance, 'Oya' was

also highlighted. It was great to find these links as it made my aim of mixing street dance and club styles with african and Caribbean dances a lot clearer.

Despite enjoying all the classes, I found that I had some favourites - Sabar and Ivorian Dance. I loved the movement vocabulary, energy, physicality and loved learning about the history of these dances. I learnt that Sabar was predominantly a womens' dance and over the years more and more men began to do the dance therefore transforming it to a dance form that is mainly danced by men. It was also interesting learning that the Sabar drum is making played by people from a griot family and the connection the dancer must have with the drummer during a Sabar dance performance. I was especially intrigued by the dancer-drummer connection. I watched my Sabar teacher, Mamadou Baldé and the lead drummer, Ndeye interact seamlessly and was completely blown away. It was as though the drummers had already discerned what Baldé's movement was going to be and arranged the beats to marry his movement perfectly.

With the Ivorian dances, I was captivated with the fast movement of the feet, the effortless groove, the style and the charisma that comes with dancing the style. I also loved that Saky's class had the element of song. This is not a norm for me and something you would not find in any western style class. I felt that the singing allowed the whole class to loosen up and open our airways especially as the class was very intense, physical and fast paced. During the workshop I ensured that I explored these styles and the others outside of training hours. I found that by doing this, it allowed the movement to sit in my body better and I was able to naturally incorporate them when tasked with creating a solo or when freestyling.

Finally, the masterclass with Patrick Acogny, son of Germaine Acogny, Theorist, Artistic Director and Choreographer, was a very insightful and informative class. He disseminated a lot of knowledge and movement, going through the variations of all the different dances e.g. doing each movement towards different directions. He also shared how African dance movements are similar across the continent, they have a commonality but danced differently depending on where in Africa you are. For instance, the same movement in Mali will be danced differently in The Gambia and Senegal. In his class we followed him closely as he moved from one movement to another, breaking them down and instructing us travel with them across the sand studio, Aloopho. He also explained that different dances told different stories. I remember one in which the men would show off their women. I thought this was very cute!

### **The Restitution**

The restitution was a sharing of everything we had learnt from the teachers over the course of the two week intensive. It took place on the 19th of April which was the last day of classes. It was an opportunity for us to work together and show the teachers and local people what we have been doing for the past few weeks. It was directed by Alesandra with support from Masha and other teachers on the programme.

The Restitution comprised of choreography we had learnt from the teachers, group pieces that we had been asked to work on to explore and experiment with the movement vocabulary we had learnt throughout the workshop. My group were tasked with creating a piece which explores the Talawa technique with a focus on the hips. We were to ensure there was always a circular movement occurring and that we were constantly travelling in a circular motion. This was particularly hard to do as we were all still coming to grips with the movement. However we managed to create a great piece that included these extra additions. This was also highlighted by Alesandra which was a confirmation that the task was accomplished. It was great working with a group however it was also apparent that everyone works very differently. This task allowed me to look at what my choreographic style was, especially when working with movement that I am not yet entirely familiar with. As one of the aims for my project was to use these dance forms within my choreographic work, this task was a stepping stone towards doing this.



The Restitution for me was an indicator of just how much movement knowledge I had acquired over the two weeks. The sharing lasted about 30 minutes and we showcased every style that the workshop comprised of. One of the most exhilarating parts of the sharing for me was at the end. The drummers continued to play and some of the participants (including me) went into a cypher circle using their unique movement and personal style as well as newly acquired movement language to introduce themselves to the local people. Another one of my favourite moments was the audience members also jumping into the cypher to show off their skills, something you hardly or never see in the UK unless the individual is called out. I was particularly inspired and mesmerised by the ladies who had

been serving food in the restaurant at the school throughout our stay. They came out as a unit and showed us off their Sabar dance skills. It was truly a beautiful moment and one that inspired me greatly. It reminded me that dance has no limitations unless we create them and to enjoy dance.

### **The Dance Battle**

As one of my aims was to connect, exchange and collaborate with local artists, the all styles battle held by a local artist, Ibou, was the perfect way to do this. The battle was held on the 20th of April in Rufisque, a town that was about 35 mins from Touba Dialaw. I went to the battle with the intention of learning by watching but ended up signing up after a friend inspired me to. The predominant style at this battle from observation was Popping and the music also reflected this. At first, it made me feel like I had to battle in this style however as an experimental Movement Artist, I made the decision to do what I felt was natural and true to me when I got on the floor. I made it through the prelims (a preliminary round where each dancer freestyles in front of the judges and from there they pick the top dancers to go head to head) and then we picked our opponents by picking out a piece of paper in which a number was written on. The person who had the same number as you was the person you would battle. Ironically, I picked another experimental style Artist who had previously performed a solo earlier in the battle. I noticed that his solo included some Acogny technique movement. The fact that I noticed was an indication that I had remembered my learning from the previous weeks.

In my first round with my opponent the judges were torn and it was a tie however in the second round the judges favoured my opponent. I was not disheartened but proud that I had just entered my first international battle and exchanged with some

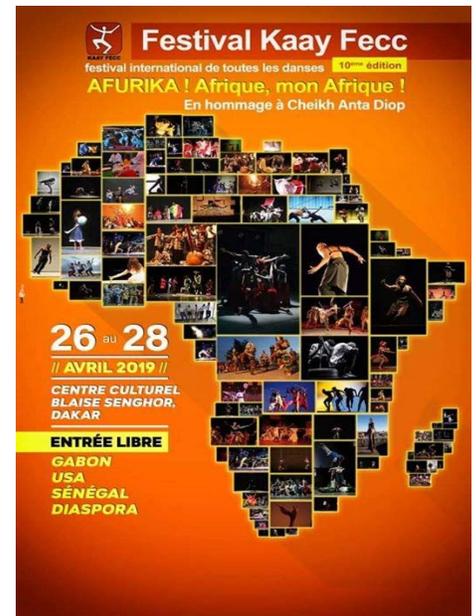


of Senegal's best street dancers. It allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and challenged myself to utilise movements I had learnt during DAEFW. It was truly an highlight of the trip for me. The talent in the room was inspiring and I learnt a great deal from watching. This experience has inspired and given me the confidence to enter future battles in the UK and internationally.

## **Festival Kaay Fecc**

I travelled to Dakar in the third week of my project to continue my knowledge of African dance, connect, train and exchange with local artists. I was pleased to hear from a fellow participant on DAEFW that the Festival Kaay Fecc was taking place that week. The Kaay Fecc Dance Festival is a biennial festival promoting dance in Senegal. Although I was only able to attend two days of the festival due to finding out late, I still had a fulfilling and enriching experience.

During the festival, I took a contemporary class with African Dance influences with Omar Sene, a master class in Traditional African Dance Class with Abdou Bá and a masterclass 'Corps & Graphique et Développement personnel' which was a freestyle and experimental movement class with Tishou A. Kane. Abdou Ba, taught us a variety of African dances including dances for engagement and Sabar. His class was very thorough, physical and precise. I was inspired by the fact that he was 70 years old and could execute the movement a lot stronger and better than the entire class. Following the class, we asked how we got tired so quickly doing the movement whilst he had the endurance to keep going. He plainly said to us that diet was key for a dancer's stamina and advised us to eat our locally grown food. This was the key to longevity in his career. The second class I took was a contemporary class with African dance influence from Omar Sene. The class was very challenging but at the same time very enjoyable. He allowed room for collaborative work and gave us concepts to work with.



At the festival, I was also able to spend time creating and exchanging with an artist I had met in a class the previous day named Zeus. We created a short piece which drew on both our dance styles. He was able to share some Sabar dance vocabulary and I was able to teach him some basic waacking and house dance. We created a short segment which we filmed at the end of our exchanging session. As one of my aims was to collaborate local artists choreographically as well as exchange knowledge and dance styles with them, I felt that this happened organically and despite not being able to communicate as well due to the language barrier, we were still able to communicate and work together through the understanding of movement.

I also had the opportunity to cypher with artists I met at the Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor. We all congregated outside the centre and moved freely in our different styles - house, popping, Waacking, dancehall, breaking and traditional African dances.



The festival also included performances from local artists. I watched the performances on the second night (please see timetable above). The movement language of the performances ranged from Sabar to Hip-hop. Each had a powerful message to convey. It allowed me to experience dance theatre in Senegal and how it was presented in contrast to the UK. One difference is the use of live percussionists and musicians. I find that it adds another layer to the story telling and gave it a raw quality. The amalgamation of African and street dance forms enabled me to further understand how these forms could be combined and used to convey a story.

One experience from the festival which I felt truly enhanced my experience, exchange and training was after the performances, there were some drummers playing outside. I was asked by an artist I met at the event to come and dance. I followed her nervously but as I got there and saw how free everyone was as they stepped into the circle to dance, I also plucked up the courage to step in and move confidently knowing that the drummers will follow me and connect with me. The drummers did just that. I felt that the previous weeks of Sabar classes, learning that you can start dancing before you go in the circle and having to listen to the background sound - the bass, which is the instrument that gives you the timing, had really stayed with me. It was a euphoric experience and a moment I will not forget.



### **Reflection**

This trip has impacted my artistic journey in many ways. Professionally, it allowed me to understand African dance in more depth. For instance, the Acogny technique taught me that the movement comes from the ground through your feet upwards. It taught me about the power of repetition in order to truly understand the movement and where it comes from. I also learnt that most of the movement from this technique is inspired by nature of African culture and way of life. For instance there were movement inspired by the Baobab tree (the symbol and signature of Senegal) the palm tree, movement inspired by cooking e.g. women pounding yam or other foods as well as inspired by birds and other animals like the lion.

In addition, I felt as though I acquired so much knowledge and movement vocabulary from all the different styles I learnt during DAEFW and I was also able to put these in practice through creating a solo, taking part in a sharing and participating in cyphers and freestyle sessions during our open floor sessions. I feel that my trip has enriched my movement as an artist further. It has

allowed me to move in new ways whilst still staying authentic to my style of moving. The trip also inspired me to pursue Sabar dance further and since coming back to the UK I found a Sabar class, which I have started to attend weekly.

On a personal note, this trip allowed me to connect further to my roots. African Dance was my first form of movement and so far in my career, is a form of dance I've wanted to go back to but felt I couldn't due to the lack of traditional forms of the dance being taught in the UK. The only forms I saw was afro Beats, which I did not feel as connected with as I felt I wanted to go back and study the form first in its purest form. Furthermore, I was able to meet and connect with artists across the globe, learn about them, their movement, their styles, their art, their background, their stories, their struggles and their triumphs. Living together for two solid weeks in an intimate setting allows you to truly get to know people on a deeper level. I feel that I have gained a new family. Most of us from the workshop has stayed in touch via Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram.

In conclusion, I believe that I achieved several outcomes from this project including:

- Increased movement vocabulary
- Increased knowledge in African and Caribbean dance and resources to pursue further knowledge
- Choreographic tools
- Exploration of movement
- Understanding of the relationship between music (drums) and the dance, particularly in Sabar dance in which the dancer and drummer must connect and be as one
- Understanding of the relationship between nature and the cosmos. The sun (chest), the moon (bottom), the snake of life (spine) and the stars (pelvic area)
- Choreographing a solo and collaboration with local artists

My recommendations for future award winners is to stay curious, always be a student, practice what you learn, don't be afraid to look stupid or vulnerable as that is where growth stems from, do your research before you leave your home country as well as whilst you are there, find out about other events going on around the time you will be on your trip that could enrich and add to your experience, plan your accommodation prior to arriving, take lots of pictures and short reflection videos to help when you are writing your report, remember that as much as you are going to gain information and knowledge you can also kindly share what you know and leave your mark behind to inspire and empower.



## **Video links:**

Freestyle videos created at L'école des Sables:

- [https://youtu.be/3\\_TyExHYel0](https://youtu.be/3_TyExHYel0)
- <https://youtu.be/iByq2sPQV2M>

Practicing Sabar on the beach:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bx0BXTGHfkZ/?igshid=g62oq4xu4kmm>

Freestyling at the Kaay Fecc Dance Festival:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/BxSkb2on0pY/?igshid=48jqmu23iwhh>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bx3G6A6nWTA/?igshid=zn3eoh1agotm>

Dance battle in Rufisque:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bxc1eyhn0kL/?igshid=11vcmbb617m6m>

Snippet of the Restitution:

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bw6sov2HsPm/?igshid=c5d0j1q422x0>