

# #TheGathering

conceived by Camille A. Brown

facilitated by Baraka Sele

January 12, 2014

## *A Recap and Report*

by A. Nia Austin-Edwards / PURPOSE Productions

### **Contents:**

Our Collective Values	p. 2
What do we agree that we need?	p. 2
Additional Needs	p. 2-3
What barriers stand in our way?	p. 3
Suggestions for Follow Up & Next Step	p. 3
Suggested Resources	p. 3
Words from Attendees	p. 4
Individual Issues, Concerns, & Needs	p. 5-7

## **OUR COLLECTIVE VALUES**

*These are the ways of thinking that those present in the room have agreed upon moving forward.*

- solidarity & respect
- transparency
- integrity & honesty
- authenticity & bringing back the soul
- impeccability & excellence
- clear communication
- generosity, selflessness, & sharing (of resources, ideas, information, etc)  
i.e. cooperative economics
- healing through spirituality & faith practices
- collaboration with creativity
- nurturing

## **WHAT DO WE AGREE THAT WE NEED?**

*After hearing everyone's individual needs, issues, and concerns (see page x), these are the collective needs those in the room have agreed upon.*

- fitness, health, & wellness (supported by insurance)
- intergenerational exchange & mentorship
- training
- models for business, sustainability, & ways of working which involve not doing too much (What is enough?)
- money, funding, & resources
- jobs
- collaboration (including international & cross-cultural exchange)
- to create platforms
- advocacy
- database & support networks
- [affordable] space (for offices, rehearsals, performances, etc.)
- increased visibility & access
- infrastructure support, management, & production skills to increase capacity
- to take time to sit and drink tea
- constructive feedback (from mentors and peers)
- to place contemporary Africa at the center (rather than thinking of it as a mythological past)
- validation
- to demystify the psychology of money
- a shift in thinking from artist as stationary "farmer" to artist as traveling "pirate"  
(one who creates his/her own treasure in multiple locations)
- Step-by-Step guide for how we function
- community building & collectivism with organizations functioning in tandem

## **ADDITIONAL NEEDS**

These important values, issues, needs were also mentioned by several individuals but not defined by the group. They may be worth future consideration based on their frequent mention.

- archives / documentation / feature films
- building strategic alliances outside the dance world
- cultural equity / cultural democracy / cultural justice
- dance as an agent for activism / change
- dance education for children / youth / internships
- discrimination / prejudice: homophobia / misogyny / racism

- diversity: academia / ballet / dance field (the arts in general)
- infrastructure / process / systems that allow work to be created
- interdisciplinary collaboration: music / theater / performance and visual arts
- need for empowerment / healing / spiritual sanctuary
- need for quality administrators / agents / directors, managers
- preservation / research of the history / legacy of dance (by black female choreographers)
- salaries / benefits / disability
- transitioning from dance to other occupations (possibly dance writers)

### **WHAT BARRIERS STAND IN OUR WAY?**

*With a collective understanding of needs, those in the room defined the following barriers which prevent the established needs from being met.*

- balancing
- lack of time
- lack of education & information
- lack of understanding of the process
- lack of honest, clear communication (both speaking & listening)
- individualism
- lack of community
- fear, insecurity, & questioning self-identity
- lack of funding, money, resources, & support
- competition
- self-hatred & internalized racism
- current dominant paradigm
- journalistic criticism
- lack of self determination (we do not need to base our work on white supremacy)

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP**

- implement quarterly meetings which can have multiple locations  
Locations Offered: Middlebury College, VT (Christal Brown); Atlanta, GA (Dawn Axam); Philadelphia, PA (Coalition of Diasporan Scholars Moving)
- plan a weekend retreat with breakout groups (to honor the time it takes to do this work) with webinar or Skype capabilities & babysitters
- create a database (listing people, needs, and resources)
- create online discussion board
- create opportunities for choreographic residencies & workshops
- create a public document for individuals to share their needs and resources

### **SUGGESTED RESOURCES**

*The following resources were suggested and/or offered:*

- Rha Goddess
- [Dance from the Campus to the Real World \(and Back Again\): A Resource Guide for Artists, Faculty and Students](#) by Suzanne Callahan
- "My Sisters Keeper," a Choreographic Showcase hosted by Christal Brown at Middlebury College, VT
- additional resources / platforms for conversation: Cynthia Oliver (at University of Illinois), Onye Ozuzu (at Columbia College Chicago), Coalition for Diasporan Scholars Moving (Philadelphia, PA headed by Brenda Dixon-Gottschild)
- Indira Goodwine and A. Nia Austin-Edwards/PURPOSE Productions have agreed to work together to build a shared contact database

## **Words from Jo Anna Hazel Norris of Choreographic Sketches**

WE RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF CALL & RESPONSE.

Our power is based in the community that responds.

### ***A NOTE ON ARCHIVAL: WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE ARCHIVES?***

At the suggestion of facilitator Baraka Sele, everyone should buy every book Brenda [Dixon Gottschild] has written, and read everything Eva [Yaa Asantewaa] has written.

“We must read and research to gain respect.”

### **Words for the Youngest in the Room:**

“With all people moving moving, in NYC especially, it’s also important to make sure you’re not so hard on yourself with “walking the walk.” Sometimes you may get stressed and moved in a different way. Saying hi, positive energy is also walking the walk. Even the simplest things are walking the walk. You should not be so hard on yourself because we’re all walking the walk.”

- Makeda Rooney

### **Words for the Eldest in the Room:**

“This gathering is so powerful for me. In the era when I was creating my own organization, Sound In Motion, making an ongoing sustainable organization like that, I was one of the few black females doing that in that era. I had the energy to ask people. I somehow asked around. I would find people and they would reply, “Oh nobody’s ever asked me that. Oh you just have to do this.” 5 years later people with the same questions would come into my dance studio, and I had the idea to produce them. Those of us who have studios, resources knowledge, let’s not be secretive. Don’t just hold, offer it offer it offer it. Giving goes in a circle. That’s what’s going to make all of us grow and our whole community of dance grow.”

- Dianne McIntyre

“Through all of these decades being involved in dance I think I’ve reached the sense that I have nothing to lose. It was very difficult talking about Balanchine in the same breath that I talked about Ailey. That was taboo. There was never a person of color who challenged what I was saying, but the dance conferences wanted nothing to do with me. You can always find support, and you can always find support in your people. It’s not about your ethnicity, but it’s about your state of mind. Black is not about color, but it’s about state of mind. I’m in a blissful state of mind, and I’m noticing in this millennium a kind of connecting and a kind of support that is not going to be put down. You all act as though you have nothing to lose.”

- Brenda Dixon-Gottschild

## **INDIVIDUAL ISSUES, CONCERNS, & NEEDS**

*Each individual in the room was invited to introduce themselves and offer up to 3 issues, concerns, or needs they have experienced or witnessed.*

- programmers
- diversity in ballet (choreographers)
- collaboration / willingness to collaborate
- more “us”-ing / “we”-ing
- multiplicity
- diversity in academia
- resource corridor to the arts
- artistic evolution
- global work
- combine commercial and contemporary dance worlds
- sharing resources & research
- finding commonality
- sustainability
- funding
- personal balance / balance all the acts (motherhood, wifeness, real-lifeness, with the artistic life, have to do with want to do, family, administrative/artistic, scheduling)
- bridge dance and theater
- financial support
- international exposure
- open mindedness
- diversity
- experimentation
- developing relationships with presenters
- opening the cross-cultural conversation
- “get back as much as I put out”
- visual art + dance
- platforms to show work
- telling more stories
- racism
- new/innovative structures for creating & sharing resources
- respect the time it takes to create and to allow work to mature
- who will stand up for jazz?
- diaspora
- longevity through wellness and recovery
- relationships with supporters
- learning to “small talk”
- misogyny
- management
- disability
- accessibility
- integrity
- authentic community
- sharing knowledge
- clear pathways (to success)
- time & energy management
- non-academic spaces for feedback
- holistic approach to health

- what it means to be a Black female body in performance
- understanding white privilege and owning racism
- mentorship
- west african / diasporic dance as a fine art
- healing place for Black women
- unlayer fears / insecurities
- seeing our reflection when we look at each other
- professional development + training of dancers
- visibility
- sustaining a rich rehearsal process
- archiving (esp. Diasporic dance forms)
- increased tools (information) for advocacy (more possibilities to offer) (besides residency & developments)
- sustainable organizational structure
- resources for creative exploration
- sing more
- intergenerational work
- bring spirituality into work
- cultural equity
- increase African American individual contributions
- time
- deepening commitment
- connectedness to the larger world of us-ness
- preserving history, legacy
- support with transitions (dancers-administrators)
- global connections for younger dancers
- gathering mentors for young choreographers
- writers helping choreographers
- writing by more of US
- reaching community audiences (very insular in NYC, reality check around what is happening in the rest of the city)
- working with young people
- interdisciplinarity
- representation
- honesty in diversity
- dance as medium for \_\_\_\_\_ (activism, social change, etc)
- dance as a therapeutic agent for marginalized groups
- synthesizing in a way that can transform community
- expectations
- perceptions
- passing torches
- educating ourselves outside of the arts so we can foster the arts
- intersecting social justice in creative process
- tradition of civil disobedience in concert dance
- decentering whiteness
- accepting femininity/softness in black male bodies
- love
- power
- money
- honoring the non-compete clause
- real love & true connection in social media
- bring back the soul: surviving in the new world of corporate dance

- funding (for marketing, etc.)
- build an easier bridge between Europe & States
- transparency between representation & theaters
- access (to funding, marketing, sustainable)
- STEP BY STEP guide following #TheGathering
- administrative support for those already in their vision
- mainstream media opportunities
- audience engagement
- initiatives for cultivating emerging choreographers: Incubators set up in smaller markets
- freelancer support
- keeping the roots of our dance (something we no longer own)
- procreation of diasporic dance
- physical, mental, emotional help for (late career) dancers
- encouragement
- arts in education
- continuity of what we do
- new business models (not a 501c3)
- longevity
- develop ideas beyond ideas