

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

PRESS RELEASE

25 MAY 2021

Birmingham Royal Ballet and Kauma Arts in association
with BIDSF - Birmingham International Dance Festival present

WE ARE WEST MIDLANDS: WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE DANCE FUTURE

- **A FREE panel discussion on diversity in dance, the artform today, the heritage, and the workforce for dance professionals in the West Midlands**

Birmingham Royal Ballet and Kauma Arts are facilitating a panel discussion and Q&A on 7 June as part of BIDSF's Industry Professionals Programme.

This panel event is an open invitation to representatives from across the dance sector in the West Midlands to participate in an ongoing conversation about diversity in the industry with the aim of addressing issues, overcoming challenges and working out solutions to effect positive change in the region, with speakers including **Carlos Acosta**, **Sonia Sabri** and **Jamaal O'Driscoll**.

This event is part of a series of discussions with individual artists and organisations from the dance sector in the West Midlands aiming to:

- Bring together leaders in dance in the West Midlands to promote positive change
- Take stock and acknowledge a common discourse that runs across diverse cultures in the West Midlands
- Discuss challenges and barriers, and work towards solutions that will move diversity and inclusion in the West Midlands dance sector forward
- Begin creating a collective commitment to building a three, five- and ten-year strategy for the West Midlands' dance ecology towards an equitable future

Moderator and Host: **Wanjiku Nyachae**

Panelists: **Carlos Acosta CBE** - Birmingham Royal Ballet, **Iona Waite** – ACE Dance and Music, **Bob Ramdhanie MBE** – Independent, **Shane Shambhu** – Independent, **Abid Hussein** – Arts Council England, **Jamaal O'Driscoll** – DanceXchange, **Sonia Sabri** – Sonia Sabri Company.

Listings

We Are West Midlands: working towards an equitable dance future

Date: Monday 7 June 2021 FREE

Time: 1.00 – 3.00PM BST

Location: Zoom

Media enquiries and for media interested in attending this event please contact
clair@breadandbutterpr.uk / 07957 727 534

Notes to Editors: Panelists Information

Abid Hussain, Arts Council England

Abid Hussain is Director, Diversity with responsibility for delivering the Arts Council's work on equality, diversity and inclusion. He currently leads on the delivery of the organisation's Inclusivity & Relevance Investment Principle and Equality Objectives.

He is an alumnus of the U.S International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) and the Salzburg Global Seminar and is currently completing an MBA at Aston University. Abid has extensive experience of working with cultural agencies, government and academia internationally and has contributed to several international conferences and academic texts and journals in his field of expertise.

Bob Ramdhanie MBE

Bob is an arts activist and a cultural producer, who is totally committed to the nurturing, creation and promotion of dynamic diverse arts practice in the UK. He has been in arts management and a pioneer in the development of 'black arts' in the UK for over 40 years, travelling extensively throughout Africa and the Caribbean and continuously building cultural bridges and creating opportunities for artistes to collaborate both 'at home and broad'. He has been involved in dance development in the UK for several decades, establishing Kokuma Dance Company in 1977, in Handsworth, Birmingham and was actively involved in the explosion of the dance forms in the UK during the 1970s and 1990s. He was appointed the first Director of the Black Dance Development Trust (BDDT), the first organisation representing the interests of the African & Caribbean dance sector in the UK.

Carlos Acosta CBE, Birmingham Royal Ballet

Born in Havana in 1973, Carlos trained at the National Ballet School of Havana in Cuba. After winning a succession of awards, including the Prix de Lausanne in 1990, he went on to dance professionally with the world's most prestigious companies, with London's Royal Ballet becoming his home. Carlos retired from classical ballet in 2016, after 28 years, having performed almost every classical role from Spartacus to Romeo.

Carlos's extraordinary contribution to dance continues to this day and he was recognised in the Queen's New Year's Honours List in 2014 when he was awarded a CBE. In 2018 Carlos received the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Award from the Royal Academy of Dance in recognition of his standing as one of the most influential figures in Dance today and in 2019 the Critics' Circle bestowed Carlos with their Annual Award for Outstanding Services to the Arts.

Carlos Acosta became Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet in January 2020.

Full bio here: <https://www.brb.org.uk/profile/carlos-acosta>

Iona Waite, ACE dance and music

Iona's life has been steeped in the love of contemporary dance, and especially dance inspired and informed by the African diaspora.

Having spent 11 years in ACE Youth under the tutelage of award-winning choreographer Gail Parmel MBE, Iona went on to study first at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, and then at the University of Wolverhampton, where she earned a First-Class Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance and Professional Practice.

In her current role as Education Manager, Iona works alongside the company's directors supporting the strategic development of dance in the African Diaspora, contemporary dance, dance in education, children and young people as well as artist relationships. Iona is also a board member for Dance Consortium and People Dancing.

Jamaal O'Driscoll, Dance Xchange

Jamaal O'Driscoll, has been a part of the dance community since 2010, practicing a variety of dance styles, and developing a strong technique within the hip-hop style of breaking. In 2019, Jamaal created O'Driscoll Collective to give back to the community, facilitating conversation through movement, continuing to teach and deliver performances in a variety of settings. With passion and experience in outreach, Jamaal is currently the Participation Producer for Birmingham International Dance Festival, alongside his role as a freelance artist, delivering workshops, classes, choreographing and performing in self-produced performances.

Shane Shambhu, Altered Skin

As creative director of multi-lingual theatre company, Altered Skin, Artist-In-Residence, DanceXchange and Artistic Associate, CAT Yuva Gati, Shane's artistic career spans many roles across different artistic genres including work with Complicite, BBC, British Council, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance and Royal Opera House to name a few. Following his successful show Confessions Of A Cockney Temple Dancer he is currently creating two new productions premiering next year and is involved in a new play by writer and mathematician, Marcus Du Sautoy.

Sonia Sabri

Kathak artist, teacher, choreographer and mentor.

Sonia Sabri is a multi-award-winning dance artist and choreographer. She is one of the world's leading Kathak dancer, amongst the brightest and most inspirational of British born dancer-choreographers working in the twenty-first century. Creating work that spans from the presentation of classical roots of Kathak to explorations of contemporary approaches, her productions reflect an appreciation of Western and Eastern cultures. She has created a fresh, unique style of Kathak by reinventing it from within, by pushing boundaries and generating work that is original in concept and exciting and relevant to today's audiences.

Sonia's innovation has invited several commissions, some include BBC, Channel 4, Tanzhaus, ARTE, Birmingham Hippodrome, South Bank Centre, and part of London Olympics 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

Wanjiku Nyachae, Panel Host

Wanjiku currently combines psychotherapeutic practice with developing and delivering arts-led, tech-mediated projects for wellbeing through CascadeSciArts C.I.C. She continues to work across art forms as a facilitator, coach, producer and curator. She has been working in dance since 1998 including a period as Dance Officer for Arts Council England West Midlands during the cultural olympiad.

A NESTA Innovation Fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme (2009/10) and published author, she works with individuals, groups, and organisational systems. Previous clients include Merck (Geneva), Ashridge Executive Education (HULT, UK); Arts Council England; and the BBC World Service.

Wanjiku is currently developing a digital installation for mood regulation and wellbeing. She is a member and fellow on Phase 1.5, at STEAMhouse, BCU, Birmingham; a Fellow at BOM (Birmingham Open Media), Birmingham, and a Trustee for Artswork.