



# Spring Faculty Dance

Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 7pm | Streamed online

FEATURING WORKS BY

Iddi Saaka

Doug Elkins

And a video-dance tribute created  
by 41 Wesleyan dance alumni



Wesleyan University

**Center for the Arts** Middletown, Connecticut | [www.wesleyan.edu/cfa](http://www.wesleyan.edu/cfa)

## PROGRAM

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**Welcome to our Spring Faculty Dance Concert featuring works by Faculty Members Iddi Saaka and Doug Elkins, as well as 41 Wesleyan Dance Alumni! Thank you for joining us. Enjoy the Show!**

### **WesDANCE! WeDANCE! (premiere)**

Featuring the performances of 41 Wes dance alumni, this piece is a video tribute, celebrating Wesleyan's Dance Department, honoring our 40 years of glorious dance at WES as WE continue transforming the lives of our students with the magic of DANCE.

Original Music: Jace L'Arouet '21

Vocals: Maria Thome

Video Design/Arrangement: Bill Rose

Dancers: Catherine Maguire '83, Sally Souders Firestein '83, John Jordan '86, Wendy Blum '87, Michelle Graves Seelman '89, Lynn Rosenbaum '89, Jody Sperling '92, Tnyetta Mitchell '93, Darrah Carr '96, Sara Pullen '97, Abdul Rasheed '97, Nicole Rodriguez Leach '97, David Edelstein '98, Carolyn Cryer '01, Yvette Luxenberg '01, Emily Chenette '03, Aki Sasamoto '04, Jennifer Buurma '05, Ellen Gerdes '05, Corey Harrower '07, Samantha Sherman '09, Devon Hopkins '11, Simone Moore '11, Naadu Bentsi-Enchill '12, Elena Georgieva '12, Nikolas Owens '12, Kate Finley '13, Matthew Carney '13, Lindsay Kosasa '13, Kelsey Siegel '13, Ibironke Otusile '15, Trinithas Boyi '16, Eury German '16, Emily Caywood '17, Nick Daley '17, Sonya Levine '17, Rick Manayan '17, Sophie Miller '17, Gabe Hurlock '20, Iris Ridley '20

### **Letting Go to Move On**

Choreography and Performance: Iddi Saaka, Assistant Professor in Dance

Music Composition/Design: Pete DiGennaro

Costume: Iddi Saaka

Lighting: Chelsie McPhilimy

Video: Chelsie McPhilimy and Suzanne Sadler

Stage Manager: Gabrielle Baba-Conn

Light Board Operator: Natasha Marder

Sound Engineering: Bob Russo and Tony Hernandez

Technical Support: Charles Carroll and Joseph Fonseca

Acknowledgements: A big thank you to Susan Lourie, Joya Powell, Hari Krishnan, Michele Olerud,

Peter Di Gennaro, Shirley Sullivan, Chelsie McPhilimy, and Suzanne Sadler for their immense support and insightful feedback throughout the making of this piece.

### **CHOREOGRAPHER'S NOTE**

*Drawing on my personal experience, "Letting Go to Move On" seeks to put a spotlight on a common yet hardly talked about issue in Ghanaian society—the apathetic attitude of parents towards their children and how that often defines and dictates the child's life. Although this phenomenon is quite common in Ghana, it is hardly talked about because of the cultural understanding that makes the actions of parents sacrosanct and deprives children of their voice even in matters concerning one's own life. Children are forbidden from questioning the actions of their parents. Through this dance I reject the silencing of my voice by finally acknowledging the unhealthy relationship I have with my father to break loose from its shackles, claiming my life as my own.*

There are so many things I wish we could talk about. You know, as father and son. But ours has always been far from a healthy father and son relationship, hasn't it? What makes it easy for you to be so indifferent towards me and yet so loving and caring towards my step siblings?

Did you write me off because my mother defied your order of abandoning her dream of going back to school? While her action must have deflated your ego, I endured the brunt of it. Even though I may not remember, to be abandoned by both of you at the age of 5 months must have been confusing and to lose the nourishment that would ensure the development of my feeble body, excruciating.

I am grateful to grandma for not giving up on me. She raised me diligently along with my two brothers and seven cousins dumped on her by her children. It was so daunting for her to provide us with three square meals each day that balancing our diet was out of the question. I ate mostly one kind of carbohydrate every day of my childhood except on festivities.

By the age of 7, I was already helping grandma do dishes, hoe the land to grow crops, fetch water from the village dam 2 miles away, and carry food and firewood home from the farm which was even further than the dam.

Although grandma was not educated, going to school was non-negotiable because she wanted the best for me. But to be solely responsible for doing well in school your entire life without a role model or guidance, was excruciating to say the least.

It was a daily ritual to be flogged and humiliated in school. Answering a question wrong, struggling to read or pronounce a word in English, or failing to solve a math problem were some of the many ways that unleashed the teacher's wrath on you.

I was very excited about your return from your sojourns and yearned for your first visit to the village to visit us. The anxiety and nostalgia of waiting to see you after so many years was overwhelming. I remember thinking to myself; would it be okay to run to you, to embrace you, would I even recognize you, would you recognize me? Our interaction on the day you arrived in the village was very casual but it has left an indelible mark on me. You see, the knock you gave me after our brief and awkward reunion was not the strongest I ever received but it certainly was the most painful.

Despite that, I was still eager to visit you in the city a few months later. Not only was I going to see the city, I was finally going to live with you, my father. It was the first true attempt at having a relationship, but it became clear to me right away that I was never really welcome in your house and life. Looking back, I can understand. You were just starting a new life with your new wife and your newly born son and my presence must have felt like a disruption to your ideal family.

Your new wife ensured that I was cast into the shadows and background never to have a voice. The only safe place for me in the entire 4-bedroom house was the room I stayed in, sleeping on a bare blanket on the floor. I spent most of my leisure time in that room dancing to music from my portable radio and making music with my body and voice. It was my way of escaping my reality in the house.

You knew my stepmother starved me in your house and yet you did nothing about it. Luckily for me, the room I stayed in doubled as a storeroom for the free beer you brought home from work. At first, I drank the beer to quench my hunger but I soon became dependent on it so that when I would go back to boarding school, I would sneak into town to drink. I drank my way through high school and college because alcohol became my only companion. It was there for me in time of need and pleasure. But I also knew too well that it was not good for me because I had seen how it ruined the lives of many people around me, including my uncle's. I simply had no other choice.

I quit drinking at the age of 31 and you could say it was a miracle but there were a couple of things in my life at that time that gave me a new sense of purpose, motivation, and willpower to stop drinking. Falling in love with my ex-wife in college was a life changing experience, although we did not last. Not only did I feel loved in spite of all my shortcomings, I also had the privilege of witnessing with admiration my father-in-law's relationship with his two daughters when I moved to live with my wife in her country. I learned a lot about parenting from my father-in-law.

Although neither I nor my children will ever have any meaningful relationship with you or my mother, and despite the many hurdles I had to overcome on my own, I am proud of what I have been able to accomplish. I am at a moment in my life where I want to devote my time and energy to my children. Clinging onto the fantasy of your love for me only brings more pain and disappointment. And so, this is my way of finally letting go so that I can move on with my life.

—*Iddi Saaka*

## ABOUT THE ARTIST/Profile

**IDDI SAAKA** is an award-winning West African dance and music performance artist and teacher who specializes in Ghanaian dance and music as well as contemporary dance. Saaka holds a Diploma (with distinction) from the University of Ghana and an MFA in Dance from the University of California, Los Angeles. He has performed and taught nationally and internationally in several venues including Los Angeles, New York, Connecticut, North Carolina, Florida, Israel, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. In 2003, he performed for the president of Israel. He has created original multifaceted works that address the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ghana and Malawi and has worked with youths in detention centers across Connecticut as well as with physically challenged youth in Israel, using dance and music to equip them with lifelong skills such as anger

management, respect for cultural diversity, and self-dignity. Saaka has taught dance at Wesleyan University since 2008 and is currently an Assistant Professor of Dance at Wesleyan and a recipient of Wesleyan's prestigious Binswanger Prize for Excellence in Teaching award in 2019. Saaka has also served as Visiting Instructor of Dance at the University of California, Los Angeles and San Diego, and the University of Ghana.

## Qualia

Choreographer: Doug Elkins

Rehearsal Directors: Carolyn Cryer '01 and Alexander Dones

Assistant Rehearsal Directors: Guilhem Mignon and Maren Westgard '22

Costumes/Assistant Lighting Design: Guilhem Mignon

Lighting Design: Chelsie McPhilimy

Videography: Chelsie McPhilimy, Suzanne Sadler, and Molly Scotti

Video Editing: Liam Elkins, Chelsie McPhilimy, Guilhem Mignon, and Molly Scotti

Video Design/Arrangement: Doug Elkins and Chelsie McPhilimy

Scene Transitions: Guilhem Mignon, Molly Scotti, and Liam Elkins

Production Design: Suzanne Sadler

Music Composition/Score & Design: Pete DiGennaro

Light Board Operator: Sierra Cervantes

Technical Support: Charles Carroll, Joseph Fonseca, Tony Hernandez, and Bob Russo

Performers: Patricia Beaman, Gabby Baba-Conn '22, Christian Denny '22, Maho Ishiguro, Katja Kolcio, Guilhem Mignon,

Michele Olerud, Joya Powell, Iddi Saaka, Spenser Stroud '22, Maren Westgard '22

Craft Services: Doug Elkins

*QUALIA are the phenomenal qualities of experiences-the raw felt qualities of sensations, emotions, thoughts or anything else. They are experienced privately, subjectively and directly; all of the consciousness states are made of them.*

*In my experience, dancing is a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. But hey, that's just me.*

*"Collaboration is not about gluing together existing egos. It's about the ideas that never existed until after everyone entered the room."*

*Dancing is just like a person telling a story. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everyone experiences it differently.*

*Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like a string full of knots.*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS/Profiles

**PATRICIA BEAMAN** is Artist in Residence at Wesleyan University. As a member of New York Baroque Dance Company, she performed in numerous opera-ballets worldwide, and has guested with numerous early music ensembles. Her Neo-Baroque works include *Medea*, *Goddess/Siren/Monster*, *The Narcoleptic Countess*, and *The Seven Deadly Sins*. She received a Mellon grant to reconstruct Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* and *Chair/Pillow*, which inspired her research in juxtaposing 18th century French theatrical dances and analytic Postmodern dance of the 1960s. She is the author of *World Dance Cultures: from Ritual to Spectacle*.

**CAROLYN CRYER** (Rehearsal Director) graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Wesleyan University in 2001, with a BA in Dance. Cryer was an original cast member of Doug Elkins & Friends' *Fräulein Maria* and has served as rehearsal director for doug elkins choreography, etc. since 2006. She has taught master classes and set Elkins's repertory at universities and high schools and assisted Elkins in choreographing productions for Gotham Chamber Opera and Paul Taylor American Modern Dance. Cryer was also a longtime member of STEELEDANCE. Her greatest project has been her son Miles.

**PETER DIGENNARO**, M.A. is a writer, musician, and International Human Rights educator with over twenty years of experience in the fields of arts education and program development. The founding Director of *A New Heroism: International Human Rights and Peace Education, LLC*, Peter is an alumni of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts' Arts Politics graduate and post-graduate studies program. While focusing his research, scholarship, and practice on cultural and social psychologies related to Power, Identity, and Violence, special attention is given to the frameworks of traumatology to address existential crises and social inequality. As a musician, he is a contributing composer to the Wesleyan University Dance Department and has composed and produced sound scores extensively for theater, film and dance. In addition to his research writing, memoir, and poetry, Peter has performed and taught internationally. Believing in the dialogic classroom and respectful co-learning environments, his classes are designed to honor students' authentic experience and knowledge of their own lives, while increasing their field of vision and engaging the skills necessary to live their lives fully, productively, and positively as themselves, in community with others. His current priority program is the URock! program – an interdisciplinary arts, culture, technology, and business program that offers students the experience of building sustainable, creative economies with their most authentic voice.

**ALEXANDER DONES** is an interdisciplinary artist from Portland, Oregon with an emphasis on dance. Throughout his travels he has had the opportunity to perform, choreograph, and collaborate with various companies and choreographers including MOMIX, Luna Negra Dance Theatre, ArtLab J, and others, and he continues to work with internationally-acclaimed choreographer Doug Elkins. Alexander has had the privileged opportunity to travel throughout the United States & Canada as well as Europe and Asia performing & teaching at notable venues & festivals including the Joyce Theater, Fall for Dance at City Center, Jacob's Pillow, The Yard, the Lobero Theatre, Théâtre de Suresnes Jean Vilar, Newmark Theatre, and others. In 2016, Alexander went to Seoul, South Korea where he performed & taught at the New Dance For Asia Festival. In 2020, Alexander was commissioned by the Portland Dance Film Festival to create an original dance film titled HARBOR. Dones is also a certified member of Youth Protection Advocates in Dance, an organization created "as a response and solution to various negative trends that commodify and exploit youth and adults in performing arts". For more information about Alexander and his ongoing projects, you can reach him through his website at [www.AlexanderDones.com](http://www.AlexanderDones.com).

**DOUG ELKINS** is a two-time New York Dance and Performance (Bessie) Award-winning choreographer and 2012 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Creative Arts Fellow. He began his dance career as a B-Boy and House Dancer, touring the world with Break/House dance groups New York Dance Express, The Royal Rockers and Magnificent Force, among others. He has also performed with and collaborated with

Rennie Harris and the legendary House of Ninja (Voguing). Elkins is a recipient of significant choreographic commissions and awards from the NEA, The Yard on Martha's Vineyard (Paul Taylor Fellowship 1991 and Resident Artist 2011-2013), Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, The Joyce Theater Foundation, Arnhold Foundation, Dianne & Daniel Vapnek Family Fund, National Performance Network, Jerome Foundation, Choo-San Goh & H. Robert Magee Foundation, and The Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts. Elkins is artistic director of doug elkins choreography, etc. which has toured nationally and internationally with works including *Fräulein Maria* (2006), *Mo(or)town/Redux* (2012), and *O, round desire* (2017). Between his current and original companies (Doug Elkins Dance Company 1988 - 2003), he has created over forty works. He was among the first choreographers commissioned by the late Paul Taylor to make work on Paul Taylor American Modern Dance; *The Weight of Smoke* premiered at Lincoln Center in March 2016 and remains in their tour repertory. A graduate of SUNY - Purchase, Elkins received his MFA in Dance from Hollins University/ADF in 2007. His tenure teaching at The Beacon School on the Upper West Side of Manhattan is the subject of *Where the Dance Is*, a short film by Marta Renzi.

### ABOUT THE ARTISTS/Profiles (cont'd)

**MAHO ISHIGURO** An ethnomusicologist whose research focuses on dance and music of Indonesia, Maho uses dance as a lens for studying and engaging with Indonesian people, cultural practices, and living traditions. Maho began her study of Javanese court dance at Wesleyan under former Artist in Residence, Urip Sri Maeny, and has since trained with renowned teachers at the Mangkunegaran court in Surakarta, Indonesia. A longtime student of Sumarsam, a prominent Indonesian ethnomusicologist, and I.M. Harjito, master of Central Javanese Gamelan, Maho regularly performs with gamelan ensembles throughout the Northeastern United States. Her doctoral research, conducted under the auspices of the Fulbright-Hays DDRA Fellowship, took her to Indonesia's westernmost Aceh province, which boasts its own performing arts practices that are distinct from the rest of the nation. Maho holds the Ph.D. and M.A. in Ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University (2018) and the M.M. in Historical Musicology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst (2010). Her publications include articles and reviews in *Asian Music Journal*, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* and *Asian Theatre Journal*. Maho is a strong exponent of pedagogical techniques that employ both scholarly engagement and praxis within the performing arts. Maho also teaches music at Smith College, Central Connecticut State University and Yale University.

**KATJA KOLCIO** is currently Director of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life at Wesleyan University as well as Associate Professor of Dance. Drawing on this background in politics, arts, and sciences, Kolcio investigates the role of the creative body/mind as an agent of social action and engagement. Her current research, *Vitality Project Donbas* in collaboration with the Development Foundation and funded by the United Nations Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme, develops and assesses impact of somatic methods for generating resilience and creative agency during trauma, crisis and social change. The program is in the process of being implemented on a national scale in Ukraine.

**CHELSIE MCPHILIMY (Dance Dept. Technical Director)** is pleased to be working with such a talented group of individuals on these three works as part of Spring Faculty Dance. Chelsie is a freelance lighting and media designer based in NYC. Her work is an imaginative combination of color and sculpture. Most recently, her credits include: *Cartography* (New Vic), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Flint Repertory Theatre), and *The Brutes* (New Ohio). For more information, please see [cmlightingdesign.com](http://cmlightingdesign.com)

**MICHELE OLERUD** holds a Bachelor of Art in Dance from University of Maryland, College Park and attended the Boston Conservatory of Music, Dance Theater, as Dance Major. Michele has performed with Jim Henson's/Vee Corporation U.S. tours of "Sesame Street Live" as a "muppet", dancer/performer with Patric Lacroix's Haitian-American Dance Theater, Boston, and University of Maryland's "Improvisation Unlimited" with the late Meriam Rosen and managed Boston's *The Dance Complex* (priorly named The Joy of Movement Center), Cambridge, MA. Michele has taught and choreographed a diverse range of contemporary technique in the midwest and New England. Michele is Wesleyan's Administrative Assistant in the Dance Department for over 20 years and enjoys being fully engaged in Dance at WES, meeting new students, guest artists and enjoys time with her family and travelling as she is an Outside Agent with Custom Travel @ [www.cttravel.com](http://www.cttravel.com).

**JOYA POWELL** A multiethnic native Harlemit, Joya Powell is a Bessie Award winning Choreographer and Educator passionate about community, activism, and dances of the African Diaspora. Hailed by The New York Times as a "radiant performer," throughout her career she has danced with choreographers such as Paloma McGregor, Katiti King, Nicole Stanton, Neta Pulvermacher, and Mar Parrilla. In 2005 Joya founded Movement of the People Dance Company, dedicated to addressing sociocultural injustices through multidisciplinary immersive contemporary dance. Her work has appeared in venues such as: BAM, Lincoln Center, SummerStage, La Mama, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, The Dance Complex (Cambridge), Mudlark Theater (New Orleans), Movement Research @ Judson Church, The School of Contemporary Dance & Thought (Northampton), BAAD! among others. In addition to being a performance-based company, MOPDC facilitates community engagements nationally and internationally, and they hold an annual Free Day of Dance and acclaimed Winter Intensive. Joya has choreographed such plays as: *Fit for a Queen* by Betty Shamieh (The Classical Theatre of Harlem), *JOB* by Thomas Bradshaw (The FLEA Theater), *Songs About Trains* by Beto O'Byrne (The New Ohio Theatre). Her research led her to teach and study in Brazil, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Israel. Awards and recognition include: The 2016 Outstanding Emerging Choreographer Bessie Award, 2016-17 Dancing While Black Fellow, Women in Motion Commissioned Artist 2017-18, EtM Choreographers + Composers Residency 2018-19, Angela's Pulse's North Star Arts Incubator 2020-21, CUNY Dance Initiative AIR 2020-21, The Unsettling Dramaturgy Award 2021. She is a collaborating member of Dance Caribbean Collective and Radical Evolution Theater Company. Joya is thrilled and honored to be a Visiting Assistant Professor at Wesleyan University, and a part of their diverse, illustrious, and inspiring community.

## PROGRAM

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### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS/Profiles (cont'd)**

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### **TECHNICAL CREW/PRODUCTION**

Stream Manager: Katerina Ramos-Jordan

Chat Monitor: Zach Farnsworth

Video Operator: Spenser Stroud

Production Designer and Dance Dept. Technical Director: Chelsie McPhilimy

CFA Technical Director: Suzanne Sadler

CFA Technical Associate: Joseph Fonseca

Dance Production Coordinator: Shirley Sullivan

CFA Assistant Director for Programs: Hanna Oravec

Technical Support: Charlie Carroll, Tony Hernandez, Bob Russo, Nathan Baron Silvern, Sierra Cervantes, Matthew Cross, Miranda Derossi, Sam Driver, Sam Harris, Adam Kielbasa, Thea LaCrosse, Zoë Paglia, Luciel Sánchez, and Emma Singleton

### **DANCE DEPARTMENT FACULTY/STAFF**

Pedro Alejandro, Associate Professor of Dance (on leave)

Patricia Beaman, Artist-in-Residence

Milka Djordjevich, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance

Doug Elkins, Visiting Associate Professor of Dance

Maho Ishiguro, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance

Katja Kolcio, Associate Professor of Dance/Director of the Allbritton Center

Hari Krishnan, Professor of Dance/*Chair*

Chelsie McPhilimy, Technical Director, Dance

Michele Olerud, Administrative Assistant

Marcela Oteíza, Associate Professor of Dance

Joya Powell, Visiting Assistant Professor

Iddi Saaka, Assistant Professor of Dance

Nicole Stanton, Provost & Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/Professor of Dance

## **CENTER FOR THE ARTS STAFF**

Rani Arbo: Campus and Community Engagement Manager  
Kyle Beaudette: Assistant Director of Events and Ticketing  
Jennifer Calienes: Interim Director  
Charles Carroll: Assistant Technical Director/Scenery Specialist  
Benjamin Chaffee: Associate Director, Visual Arts  
Andrew Chatfield: Director, Arts Communication  
Fiona Coffey: Associate Director for Programming and Performing Arts  
Jennifer Diglio: Accounting Specialist  
John Elmore: Art Director  
Joseph Fonseca: Technical Associate  
Drew Gray: General Manager  
Tony Hernandez: Assistant Technical Director  
Rosemary Lennox: Exhibitions Manager and ICPP Program Manager  
Ariana Molokwu: Associate Producer, Antiracism Arts Initiative  
Hanna Oravec: Assistant Director for Programs  
Robert Russo: Assistant Technical Director/Sound and Video Specialist  
Suzanne M. Sadler: Technical Director/CFA Theater Manager

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

<https://www.wesleyan.edu/dance/calendar.html>

### **ARTISTS in COMMUNITY**

Final projects of students working with employees of Wesleyan Physical Plant and Custodial Operations  
In collaboration with Forklift Danceworks

**Friday, May 7, 1:30 PM ~ Location and details TBA on Dance website soon!**

### **SPRING WORLDS OF DANCE CONCERT**

A virtual concert featuring students in Afro-Brazilian, Bharata Natyam, Hip Hop, Introduction to Dance and Javanese Dance.

**Sunday, May 9, 1:00 PM, A virtual premiere via CFA Reservation**

### **DANCE AS ACTIVISM VIRTUAL PERFORMATIVE ARTIVIST SHARINGS**

**Tuesday, May 11th, 5-6:15pm EST**

Via Zoom will be available on [www.wesleyan.edu/dance](http://www.wesleyan.edu/dance) soon!

### **WEST AFRICAN DRUMMING AND DANCE CONCERT**

Assistant Professor of Dance, Iddi Saaka, presents a virtual premiere of our West African Dance I and III with live drumming with John Dankwa and his students.

**Friday, May 14, 7:00 PM, A YouTube premier with CFA Reservation**

## **VIRTUAL RESERVATIONS:**

**Center for the Arts / Wesleyan University**

**Email: [boxoffice@wesleyan.edu](mailto:boxoffice@wesleyan.edu) Call: 860-685-3355**

**Website of information: [www.wesleyan.edu/cfa/boxoffice.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/cfa/boxoffice.html)**