

## Press Q&A with Botis Seva

### **Why did you start dancing and what inspired to you to start choreographing?**

I started dancing at the age of 15. At secondary school, I was lucky enough to have an active dance department and we regularly had guest choreographers teaching, such as Tony Adigun from Avant Garde Dance. This inspired me to enter the annual school talent shows and from here, I presented small works through a variety of community dance platforms.

My reason for starting to dance was music. Before I was dancing, I was rapping at my local youth club and I was immersed in grime music. The school was tough and with the restrictions and conflict from many of my secondary school teachers, music gave me freedom but dance gave me an opportunity to unleash my frustrations.

### **You established your company Far From The Norm (FFTN) in 2009. Tell us more...**

Far From The Norm is a collective of dance artists who are not only my soldiers in the studio and on the stage, but we are all friends. The current company has been with me now for 6 years and that is a highlight. Seeing the company grow and support each other both in and out of the studio – it's really rare and we all know we have something special. One of my biggest challenges with the company was at the beginning, dealing with rejection from the industry and always working with an ever-changing line up of dancers because in the early stages people couldn't commit.

### **How did FFTN begin?**

Far From The Norm started in a youth club in Dagenham, between a group of friends. I used to invite different artists to come down and train in a closed community session, as I was interested in exchanging with different artists' styles and vocabularies. Before I knew it, we were creating short works together and presenting extracts at local street dance platforms, one of Far From The Norm's first performances was at an annual street dance competition ran by Leanne Pero called *Keep It Moving* at Fairfield Halls, in Croydon.

### **How would you define your dance language?**

My language comes from hip hop and the other street dance styles. I would describe it as free form hip hop as I use the core foundations physically, but I experiment with other theatrical devices, genres and artistic inspirations.

For me, hip hop on stage is about crafting and finding new ways to use the form and the culture. The idea is always to keep the energy of improvisation and use this as a tool to make the work.

I work a lot from visual imagery, paintings and movies. I try to animate the visuals I see with movement, exploring how I can extract movement qualities from my body or that of my dancers.

I use personal experiences, life encounters and tap into my childhood memories to find new references and ideas to bring into the studio. These references instantly change when they are transferred to my body or my dancer's bodies, it becomes an abstracted idea that takes a new form - which is an interesting process in itself.

## **Who or what are your biggest influences as an artist?**

I'm inspired by my family, God and my company of dancers. Artists who inspire me currently are Kano, Basquiat and Darren Aronofsky.

## **How have FFTN shaped you as an artist?**

It's really powerful to be surrounded by people that are artists in their own right. All of the Far From The Norm company 'specialise' in different dance styles but also have talents outside of dance, Shangomola Edunjobi for example, is an insanely talented comic artist and self-published his own 'One Page Comic' collection. They continually challenge me to do better choreographically, as I challenge them to execute that vision physically.

It's humbling to know that we have been on a long journey together for a while now and we all know how to support each other in the studio now, when to give each other space but also when to interject. All these small moments, the more human moments also shape me as an artist.

## **How do you work with Torben Lars Sylvest to create the unique scores for each of your works?**

We start with ideas both choreographically and musically, this happens in and out of the studio. I will offer motifs and physical inspirations from the piece and Torben will respond by creating samples of different music sounds and palettes. I then feed these sounds back into the studio to see what the impact is on the choreography, whether it informs something new, shapes existing material or, just doesn't work (yet!).

Torben is sometimes in the studio to understand how the dancers are responding and feel the energy and weight of the movement, then he goes back into his cave to add what he felt was lacking, or needed developing musically. From here it's an ongoing dialogue, continually feeding back on the layered versions that are growing constantly. This process doesn't really stop for us, even when we are in show mode. We keep patterning the sounds until we find something that is right. It's the same process choreographically too, the work is always evolving.

## **What can we expect from BLKDOG?**

BLKDOG has developed since the Sadler's Wells Reckonings extract in October 2018. There is light and shade, rather than just the dark side of the "story". We delve further into the childhood references of the characters to understand how much of what we have to cope with now as adults has been engrained in us from birth.

But ultimately, you can expect poetic potency; an insight into how our younger generation are trying to survive in a world that is not built for them.

## **What excites you most about the tour?**

For me, two things:

Meeting people. I hope BLKDOG will encourage people that don't usually go to their local theatre to come and experience the work. I made this work for ordinary people like me, who have come

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from humble beginnings and have to fight to be seen. It's important to me, as much as I want theatre lovers to enjoy the work, I want people to feel that they are represented on stage and that they can relate to what the work has to say.

Seeing the work breathe. I am very much use to working intensely for one big moment and the work doesn't have time to marinate and develop afterwards. This is an opportunity for me to watch the work live, in performance mode and keep refining and playing to see what else the work could be - I am keen for there not to be a "finished" version.

**Why should we come and see it?**

Well if I tell you everything then maybe you won't want to come and see it.

There is dance.

There are real life struggles of trying to cope.

But ultimately, there is hope.

**What are your ambitions for the future?**

I would love to create more work on film, there is something about working with film that you can't achieve in live performance and I would love to explore that further.

I would also love to get back into my music more.

I want to write a children's book...