

Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) in the UK and the legacy of ADAD



A DADAI information sheet

With the founding of the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD) in 1994, the term **Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD)** and its variants began to be used within the UK dance sector. This information sheet summarizes ADAD's contributions to the development of the dance sector, particularly in supporting dance practices rooted in African Diasporic traditions.

For a historical overview of ADAD and the DAD up until 2016 please see the HOTFOOT magazine's **21st anniversary edition** which was published just before ADAD merged with One Dance UK.

DANCE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA (DAD)

ADAD was established following the closure of the **Black Dance Development Trust (BDDT)**, the first support organization for the African Peoples' Dance sector. In the mid-1990s, practitioners adopted the term **Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD)** to place an emphasis on the cultural origins of dances forms. This was to direct focus and resources to support the development of dance practices within the professional dance sector which draw on dance forms from Africa and diaspora. Until then, there had been little institutional support or funding for such initiatives.

The term **DAD** did not replace Black Dance or African Peoples' Dance (APD) but marked a pivotal moment when independent dance practices drawing from African, Caribbean, and other Diasporic traditions gained greater prominence in the UK. Today, **DAD** is used in multiple contexts, both within and beyond professional practice, and can refer to:

1. A collection of dances and dance practices with African and Diasporic influences, whether social, traditional, theatrical, or professional.
2. A subject area, discipline, and field of cultural and artistic study, explored within dance studies, cultural geography, African studies, and Diasporic studies.
3. A sector within British dance, comprising individuals and organizations whose work relates to the **Dance of the African Diaspora**. While many practitioners engaged with African and Diasporic dance forms do not necessarily use the term **DAD**, it is frequently employed by organizers and academics. Some practitioners may instead categorize their work under labels such as **contemporary dance** or **hip-hop**.
4. A global network of dance practitioners and scholars interested in the study and practice of African and Diasporic dance.

THE EVOLVING DISCOURSE ON DAD

In 2002, ADAD's steering committee prioritized the development of a **critical discourse** around **DAD**, aiming to support academic research and professional practice while embracing diverse perspectives. The terms Black Dance and African Peoples' Dance (APD) continued to be used by ADAD members, reflecting the richness and complexity of the field. This shift fostered deeper dialogue between artists, academics, and institutions, ensuring that practitioners could engage not only within the **Dance of the African Diaspora** but also across broader dance and arts sectors. Additionally, it facilitated **intercultural exchange** and expanded opportunities for **multiracial audiences** to engage with African and Diasporic dance.

ADAD'S LEGACY

When ADAD was founded, African Diasporic dance had little presence in UK universities, and there were almost no books on Black British choreographers. As a result, it was difficult for researchers to study Black British dance, and choreographers or teachers often struggled to be recognized as serious practitioners unless they worked within well-documented artistic genres. ADAD launched several initiatives to create a professional context for Black dancers and those drawing from African Diasporic traditions. Early projects such as the **Black Dance Roadshow**, **ADAD Choreographic Platform**, and **ADAD Forum** helped break down barriers that had historically limited Black British dance to roles within multicultural and diversity agendas. These initiatives expanded career opportunities for dance practitioners, allowing them to establish themselves as independent artists.

One of ADAD's most significant contributions was the **ADAD Heritage Project**, which was the first initiative to document the history of Black dancers and Black-led dance companies in the UK. As part of this project, ADAD produced the first-ever photographic exhibition dedicated to Black British dance history, *Moments – Black Dance in Britain 1930s–1990s*. This exhibition continues to tour UK venues and serves as a backdrop for conferences, programs, and festivals. Additionally, the publication of *Voicing Black Dance* marked a milestone, as it was the first book to feature a range of Black choreographers.



Re:generations International Conference 2019 by Dani Bower, One Dance UK

Before ADAD's **Trailblazers Fellowships**, there was little critical discourse on Black dance in professional practice. This gap was highlighted in the report *Time for Change*. The Trailblazers Fellowship provided funding for dance practitioners over a 15-year period, enabling them to travel, conduct research, and develop their individual dance practices. The **Trailblazer Champions** initiative further supported some practitioners in building businesses and developing dance infrastructure.

The **Re:generations International Conference**, held biannually, played a crucial role in establishing **Dance of the African Diaspora** as an academic subject. It fostered connections between artists and scholars and created a much-needed space for academic engagement with Black dance in England. The conference helped build networks between UK dance artists and international practitioners, particularly in Europe, Canada, and the U.S., collaborating with organizations such as **IABD** and **Dance Immersion**.

In the 2000s, the **BLOOM Festival** helped bring the sector's work to broader audiences through partnerships with venues and cultural organizations across the UK. In later years, ADAD shifted its focus toward **leadership development**, providing opportunities for dancers to curate events, refine their teaching and choreographic skills, present work in the U.S. and Canada, and contribute to book projects.

ADAD's legacy continues to shape the landscape of African Diasporic dance, fostering artistic growth, academic recognition, and professional opportunities for Black dance practitioners in the UK and beyond.

30 YEARS ON: CELEBRATING THE LEGACY OF ADAD

Three decades after its inception, we celebrate the enduring legacy of ADAD. While there is no longer a dedicated dance organization solely focused on the Dance of the African Diaspora, a wider network of organizations and individuals now lead training programs, projects, and performances within this field. Many practitioners continue to develop dance practices and projects that either draw from African Diasporic traditions or celebrate them. Additionally the activities and resources from ADAD offer rich opportunities for historical and archival research.

This information sheet has been produced by the Dance of the African Diaspora Advocacy Initiative (DADAI) to mark the 30th anniversary of the Dance of the African Diaspora in the UK, first established in 1994. DADAI is committed to promoting the legacy of ADAD. Its formation in 2024 was inspired by choreographer Alison Ray's need for resources to write a book. The initiative's founding members are Dr. 'Funmi Adewole Elliott (Founder), Akosua Boakye BEM, Dr. Mercy Nabirye, and Judith Palmer MBE. DADAI has worked in collaboration with One Dance UK to make resources about ADAD, including past editions of HOTFOOT magazine, freely available for download. We extend our gratitude to One Dance UK for their support.

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