

Leeds Choreographer brings the Trickster *Kweku Ananse* to life at the Leeds West Indian Carnival

Created and produced by Leeds based choreographer Nii Kwartey Owoo, *Kweku Ananse* is a contemporary processional and stage dance which celebrates the folkloric stories and traditions that travelled with the archetypal trickster character, Kweku Ananse (the spider), from Ghana to the Caribbean, America and Europe during the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. *Kweku Ananse* will bring West African drumming, dance and storytelling to the streets of Leeds for audiences to experience the West African roots of West Indian Carnival tradition.

Drawing from traditions, ancestral practices and knowledge found across Africa and Nii's personal artistic journey, *Kweku Ananse* is an encounter that speaks to the trickster within us. Clever narratives found in the piece also draw attention to the journey enslaved Ghanaians took when they were loaded into boats along the coast of Ghana, departing through the 'door of no return' and later arriving on the shores of the Caribbean where they continued to struggle to survive on the plantations. *Kweku Ananse* presents issues of power shift, polytricks and humanity, through movements, sound, spoken word, imagery and symbolism, featuring artists Omari Swanson-Jeffers, Catrina Nisbett and Nana Asaase.

Kweku Ananse has both a vital educational and creative dimension, facilitating the examination of the traditional roots of Caribbean carnival for new generations of Caribbean young people in Leeds. - Dr. Emily Zobel Marshall

Nii grew up in Jamestown, Accra, Ghana where he undertook traditional training in cultural heritage including storytelling, music, dance and spiritualism. Nii was given the title Custodian of Culture by his elders at the age of 12, a role which he has carried forward and which continues to influence his artistic practice today. Nii incorporates this knowledge of West African culture and music in his work, recording traditional rhythms, sampling sounds he finds and using live music as part of his performances. Nii also makes traditional costumes using West African textiles and produces West African drums using both traditional craft methodologies and new innovative approaches utilising reclaimed wood. He also has a strong interest in sound engineering and media, in 2012 he founded community radio stations Radio GaMashie and A World In Accra.

Today Nii creates original choreography that blends tradition with current global dance styles, he currently also teaches African dance on the Diverse Dances Styles BA degree course (Irie! dance theatre and the University of Roehampton). He is a Navigate Artist, which is part of the Black Choreographic Programme at Ace dance and music in Birmingham; he is the director of Miishejelo Dance Theatre (Accra/London) and Miishe African Music and Dance (Leeds) and a Creative Associate at The Geraldine Connor Foundation (Leeds).

Kweku Ananse is funded by the Arts Council England National Lottery and Leeds Inspired. The project is also supported by Geraldine Connor Foundation, Yorkshire Dance, Irie! Dance Theatre, Miishe African Music and Dance and the Leeds West Indian Carnival.

Notes to editor:

First performance: Leeds West Indian Carnival Parade

Bank Holiday Monday 26th August at 2pm

More information about LWIC 2019: <http://www.leedscarnival.co.uk/leeds-carnival-events-2019/>

Prices: free

Kweku Ananse Showcase: Room 700, Leeds Central Library

Wednesday 2nd October, 6:30-8pm (Doors Open 6:00pm)

More information: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on?q=leeds%20central%20library>

For more information:

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Twitter- Nii Kwartey Owoo (@Niihofuture)

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Photo for Publicity:

Credit: Mary Owoo 2018

Artist Commissions, Performances and Residencies:**2019**

- Trickster Night, Leeds Library Salon, performance of *Ananse and the Gum Man* at the book launch of Dr. Emily Zobel Marshall's *American Trickster* (July 2019).
- Musician (representing Ghana), *Earth Orchestra* by George Fenton (May 2019).
- *Navigate Artist Black Choreographic Programme*, ACE music and dance, Birmingham. 1 year artist development programme incl. residencies and mentoring.
- *Agbegbɔgbɔ*, musical director and performer, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. I supported textile artist Enam Gbewonyo in activation of Senga Nengudi's Sandmining piece (February 2019).
- *Peace Process-ion 2*, Skimstone Arts, Newcastle City Library and Civic Centre (January 2019).

2018

- *Harvest*, The Art Hostel, East Street Arts Seeding Art Currency Project, Leeds (October 2018).
<https://arthostel.org.uk/2018/12/05/storytelling-drumming-and-food-sharing-with-nii-kwartey-owoo/>
- West African Connections to Carnival, Leeds Central Library, Leeds. Performance devised in response to Tim Smith's photography exhibition (July 2018).

2016

- 'Taboo', BBC TV Series (2017), Translator, language and cultural advisor to producer Tim Bricknell.

2015

- 'African Summer' Commission, Horniman Museum and Gardens, London. Created a theatre piece called 'Odehe' based on the museum's Africa collections (July 2015).
- 'Peace Process-ion' Commission, Skimstone Arts, Newcastle. Commissioned to choreograph, direct movements and to write a poem for a piece of theatre which explored immigration and displaced people (September 2015).

2014

- 'La Paillote Takpekpe' Commission, Alliance Francaise, Accra. Director of the circus-theatre piece '*Hiao! Pot of Wisdom*,' for an international and local audience, performed by Miishejeloi Dance Theatre.
- The Struggle of Man - original production with Miishejeloi Dance Theatre at The National Theatre of Ghana, Accra and Jamestown Community Theatre Centre.
- Ancestral Sacrifice - original production with Miishejeloi Dance Theatre, Jamestown Community Theatre Centre, Accra.