

New Ways to Access

IT

BEGINS

Seke

Chimutengwende

IN DARKNESS

WELCOME

Welcome to Seke Chimutengwende's show, *It Begins In Darkness*. This booklet offers an elaborated experience of the show and its making, including exclusive interviews and expanded commentaries on the soundscape. This booklet is available in print and in audio and has been put together by SoundScribe, a global-majority collective offering audio description and access consultancy. Read more about us, and how to get in touch, at the end of this publication.

The content of this booklet combines audio description and captioning in the hope of offering an innovative access point into this performance work for both blind + partially sighted patrons and d/Deaf + hearing impaired patrons. The audio booklet can be accessed by scanning the QR code below.

As this work tours, not every performance will be audio described live but we encourage you to listen to our audio described extracts in the audio booklet. Let yourself be immersed in the show's soundscape: moments of stillness accompanied by silence, pattering feet, hunched sniggers, spine-tingling screams and shuddering convulsions of possession.



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Black and white Mayowa bearing
her teeth in a low snarling bow

© John Morgan





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IT BEGINS IN DARKNESS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SHOW

This is the audio described introduction to Seke Chimutengwende's choreographic piece, *It Begins in Darkness*. In a stark, stripped back 60-minute performance, five dancers move through mysterious and experimental rites of passage, channelling past, present and future tensions through their bodies and voices.

A dance full of ghosts, this show stages an environment for processing the fear, anger and confusion which arise from histories of slavery and colonialism that haunt the present. As if to exorcise the haunted house of history, the dancers whisper, jump, wrestle, shiver, wail and laugh, filling the space with horrors, both real and imagined.

The set design for this show is minimalist, with the dancers and their dancing the centre of our focus. Costume designer Annie Pender worked to keep the costumes understated, with earthy colours and natural textiles. The lighting is stark and simple, and the stage has no props or backdrop. It is a blank space for the performers to roam, barefoot.

At times it's populated by unseen or imagined ghouls and obstacles that prick and prod and trip them up. The performers audio-describe the haunted house in which they're trapped, tracing the outline of furniture or objects with their outstretched hands. In other chilling moments, they are possessed by energies that speak through them. They chant in unison or narrate their actions in broken, halting sentences, sometimes laying a comforting hand on each other's shoulders in positions of stillness, swaying as if in the hull of a ship in a storm. Together they find fellowship - not always existing on the same plane, trapped down never ending paths, eyeing each other wearily.

THE SHOW FEATURES 5 PERFORMERS:

Natifah (*nat-ee-fah*) **White** is in her mid twenties, a Black British woman with Caribbean heritage. She's petite with short, black, medium-size dreads that reach her neck. She has a dark brown complexion and sports a silky pink, short-sleeved shirt tucked into white linen trousers.

Isaac Ouro-Gnao (*oo-row / nah-oh*) is in his late twenties and of Black Togolese-British heritage. He has a lean build, short cropped afro hair, a moustache and goatee. His complexion is dark-brown and he is of medium height. His patterned silk shirt has a deep neck, revealing a peppering of chest hairs and he wears straight-leg blue cotton trousers.

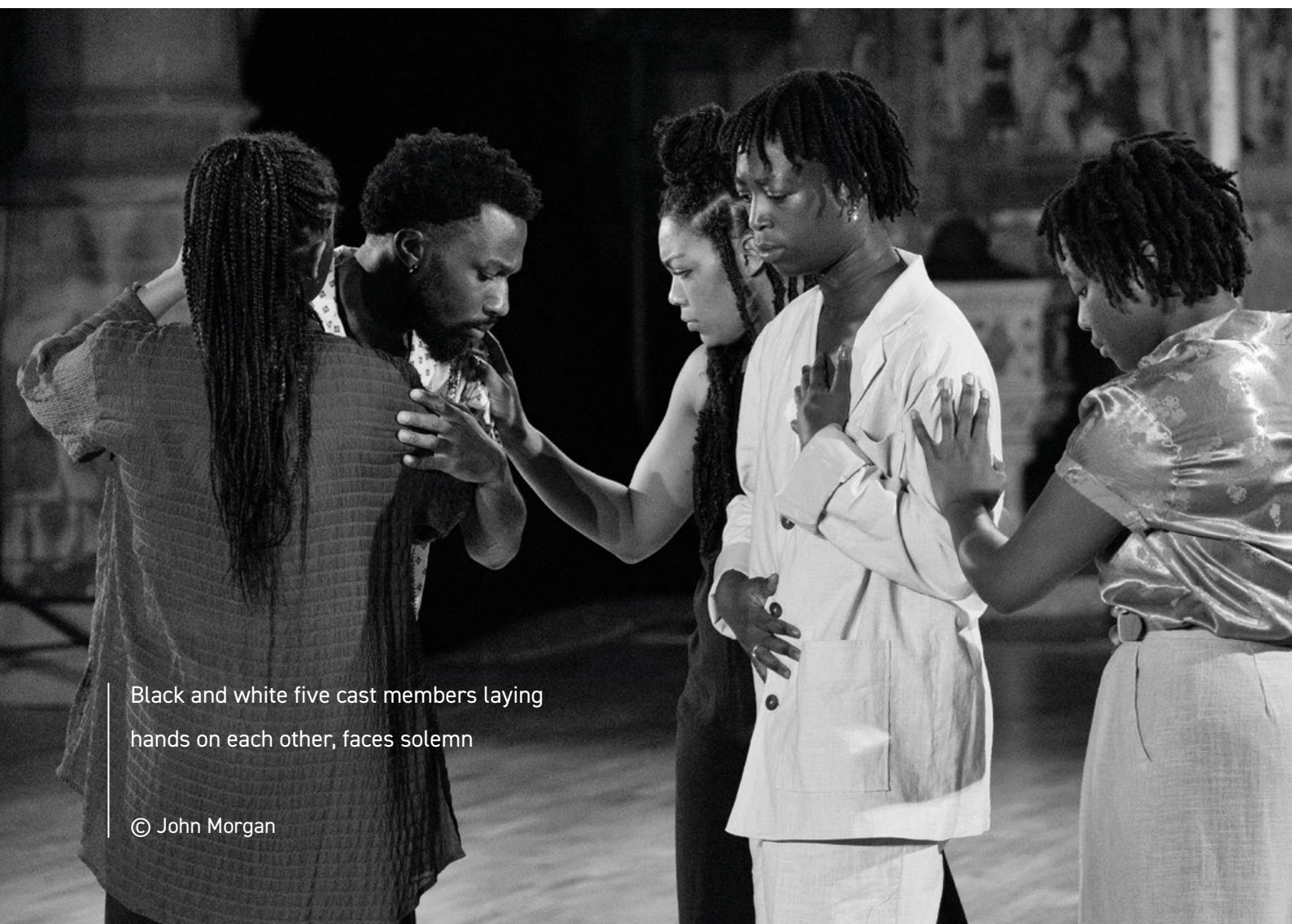
Kassichana (*ka-see-cha-na*) **Okene-Jameson** or Kassi is twenty-seven and of mixed heritage from Uganda and Britain. She is of medium height, with cinnamon brown skin and dark-brown coily twists pulled back into a ponytail. She's in an oversized, earthy-brown shirt with sleeves that hang to her fingertips. She wears wide-leg black cotton trousers.

Adrienne (*ay-dree-en*) **Ming**, who goes by Ming, wears black dungarees with flowing wide legs that fan out when she spins. She's in her early thirties, with a strong build that gives the impression she could handle herself in a fight. Her dreadlocks reach her waist and her complexion is sandy-brown like a latte. She has almond-shaped eyes and is multiethnic, with a heritage spanning Guyana, China, India, Puerto Rico, and America.

Mayowa Ogunnaike (*my-oh-wa / og-you-nigh-keh*) is the fifth member of the cast. She's a British-Nigerian performer with a dark-brown complexion. Born and raised in London, she's in her late twenties, with hair styled in short twists and a tall, athletic build. She's in a pale-pink linen suit jacket with matching wide-leg trousers. The two-piece is baggy and oversized. The hems of the trouser legs touch the ground and the jacket often slips off her shoulder. In Section 4, Page 20, this booklet offers an expanded encounter with Mayowa, where she speaks about her experience dancing in this show.

The show has some moments of bright light, so we recommend sunglasses for guests with sensitive eyesight. For those with sensitive hearing, there is infrequent screaming, so ear defenders or headphones may be advisable.

Seke Chimutengwende has been researching the connections between horror, haunting and the histories of slavery and colonialism since 2019. Seke elaborates on his creative process and artistic reference points in his interview, which can be found in Section 3, Page 16.



Black and white five cast members laying hands on each other, faces solemn

EXPERIENCE THE SHOW'S SCORE WITH SOUND-CAPTIONING

Seke created a choreographic score as part of his research into Black horror. He wrote it during the 2020 pandemic, as a hallucination of what this new piece could become. A 'score' in dance references a set of instructions or framework within which dancers can improvise. Seke's score is more of a blueprint for the piece. He tried to capture his memories of dancing in words - itself an action of audio description and captioning. It was using this piece of writing that he, along with the cast of performers, then created choreographic material for the show *It Begins In Darkness*. Some of the dance material is completely set and some is improvised within tight parameters.

In this section of the booklet, we have framed Seke's reading of the score within the soundscape of the performance, editing in snatches of corresponding sounds from the show with Seke's guidance. This section is designed to take you on a journey of the show, via his imagination. Below, we describe the full sound experience of these layers using colour-coded sound-captioning.

The soundscape for *It Begins In Darkness* was composed using recordings of the dancers. Sound technician and production manager Michael Picknett used floor microphones to capture the sounds created by their dancing. These sounds of stepping, feet brushing the floor, breathing and the movement of clothes were used by composer Aisha Orazbayeva to create ghostly echoes on violin and double bass. The result is a chilling, dark world of bumps in the night and distorted hollow reverb.

EXPERIENCE THE SHOW'S SCORE WITH SOUND-CAPTIONING

A KEY TO EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING SCORE WITH SOUND-CAPTIONING

Written score in white italics

"PERFORMER LIVE SPEECH IN YELLOW ITALICS"

[VOICE TEXTURES IN BLUE]

[BODY SOUNDS IN PINK]

[SOUNDSCAPE IN PURPLE]



Colour image of Natifah laying with
her forehead pressed to the ground

© Jemima Yong

[SHARP SHRILL GASPS]

[SILENCE]

[FEET TREADING ACROSS CREAKING FLOORBOARDS]

[HUSHED INCESSANT WHISPERING, CHITTERING TEXT UNINTELLIGIBLE]

It begins in darkness. The sound of a creaking door and then a high pitched flute. As a cold, blue light illuminates the space I see them standing at the edge of the stage in an uneven line facing the back. They slowly begin to turn, shifting in increments.

[FLAP OF CLOTHING, LIGHT LINEN, COTTON, SILK WAFTING]

[SHUFFLING FEET]

Their arms begin to reach up in a variety of ghostly poses. The singing starts quietly as they slowly begin to spread out, intruding into the space, and find positions of almost stillness.

[DEEP ECHOING CREAKING OF FLOORBOARDS]

[HUMMING CONTINUOUS LOW NOTE]

[DISSONANT HUMMING SLIDING HIGH AND LOW]

[VIBRATION OF HUMMING RESONATING THROUGH SKIN,
RESONATING THROUGH FINGERTIPS] [SOUND OF CONNECTION]

Some are squatting and some standing. The singing stops and they start moving.

[SILENCE]

[CAST CHANT ALOUD / ANIMATED OVERLAPPING SPEECH] **“ARMS TWITCHING. STEP ACROSS, KICK. PIVOT, REACH, LUNGE. ARMS TWITCHING. STEP ACROSS, KICK. [ACCELERATING] PIVOT, REACH, LUNGE. HANDS ACROSS CHEST. THE BODY REMEMBERS. MEMORY AS PROPERTY. KNEES QUAKE.”**

[EVERYONE] "ARMS SHOOT OUT."

[NATIFAH] "SHE LAYS HER FOREHEAD ON THE GROUND, MUMBLING.
THE PAST IS YOUR SHADOW. UNFINISHED [FLAT-TONED] BUSINESS."

[SILENCE]

She jumps, but softly so as not to rouse the sleepers. A quick glance from left to right, an almost imperceptible movement of the shoulders; that quivering, lilting motif will be one that we remember.

[SCURRYING FEET, ABRUPT STOPS]

[NOISY RUNNING, HEELS OF FEET SKIDDING]

[HEAVY BREATHING, SHARP BREATHS]

A drowning upwards, a waving to the fire spirits. Whole body flapping now. This dance has no centre as indeed history has no centre. We collect fragments on the shores of perception and arrange them in patterns creating knowledge forms. But so much of this history is missed or misplaced. Swept up again by the tide.

An arm curves upwards. Fingers meet above his head forming a circle of the arms which swoops forwards in front of his chest. His arms swim out to the side like a breast stroke as he turns, lilting from side to side. His head tilts back as his eyes gaze down. He leans forwards to test the waters. Fingers crawl up the buttons on his chest. Fingers brush hair. Three low, heavy jumps. His gaze follows his leg as it swoops up.

[EVERYONE SHOUTING, FEARFUL] "HE DARTS ACROSS THE
SPACE IN A SERIES OF SMALL PATTERNING STEPS."

[EVERYONE INTERMITTENTLY SCREAMING, TERRIFIED, PANICKED SHRIEKING]

[SUDDEN SILENCE]

A door slams shut. A syncopated flurry of movements - a polyrhythmic conversation between torso, arms and legs. An arch and a sudden curve of the back. Everyone pauses for a moment. Then darkness. The darkness says come in. Black lake inside you, the waters begin to stir - a hand pushes upwards.

[SCRATCHY STEELY SOUNDS, THINGS COMING LOOSE,
EERIE METALLIC REVERBERATIONS]

[GHOSTLY SHIFTING, SCRAPING ACROSS FLOORBOARDS]

Upward digging. Burrowing. Buried treasure. Buried history. A rebellion of the soul. As if possessed by a demon, he seems to splinter into a thousand pieces of dust.

[RAMPANT, BOUNCING STEPS] [INVOLUNTARY CHOKED GASPS AND GULPS]

The rest of them meet. Pressing and humming. Hands to the floor then back up to the head. Fractured slow motion. Dragging. Wailing. Sobbing. Swaying.

[HEART-WRENCHING WAILS] [LOW MOANS] [SNIGGERING LAUGHTER]

The low reddish light fills the floor behind them. Their eyes meet. He smiles. She closes her eyes. Pressing her feet into his back. Sliding hands down the backs of his legs. Crawling backwards. Awkward low turns. We hear the slow beat of a drum.

Soul time, ghost time. Quivering and tilting. Shipwrecked proximities of ancestral flesh. Hands brush thighs. Inhale invisible history. Exhale.

[LONE SNIGGERING, BLUBBERING, MOANING ON REPEATING LOOP]
[EBBS AWAY INTO INDISTINGUISHABLE, MUFFLED MURMUR]

The momentum in these bodies is the material. It is a kind of doubt or leaning away from what we think we know; the courage to let yourself fall.

[INTENSIFIED HEAVY BREATHING] [SWISH OF LIMBS CHOPPING THE AIR]

[STEELY, INDUSTRIAL RUMBLING] [LOW HOWL LIKE WIND WHOOSHING IN A TUNNEL]
[ABRUPT BUMPS] [ECHOED PERSISTENT FOOTSTEPS] [LABOURED
METALLIC BREATHING LIKE WHEEZING THROUGH A RESPIRATOR]

For a moment I think “it’s all in the eyes” – that shifting search. A ripple of fear, a flourish of reverence to some long-forgotten god(s). Gathering as if for a guided tour. Let me show you the great hall. Filled with relics and trophies. The sound of tap dancing, the smell of sweat. The crescendo of an a-rhythmic thump heralds a new chapter. Soft undulations, soft collisions, an almost embrace, a distracted foot stomp.

This is a dance of abundance. It refuses the logic of scarcity. The sound of flutes and screeching violins. She turns and falls. I try to catch her as she melts into air. Unmoored and leaderless we traverse these energetic patterns and unregulated movements, haunted by the possibility of a better world.

This dance has its own history. It is closing in on me and I can taste its sweat and hear its heartbeat. Through the dimming light I can still make out their forms and features. I touch their warm skin and the soft fabric of their grey costumes. The rhythm intensifies...

[RHYTHMIC INTAKES OF BREATH TURN RAGGED, DESCEND
INTO FRENZIED GROWLING, SNARLING]

*...and then suddenly dissipates as the dancers scatter across the stage.
We breathe together for a moment in the empty silence.*

Under the spell of malevolent empire, dancing gravediggers of freedom assert and reassert their vampiric agendas. Shuffling in time to the blood sucking beat of profit, land acquisition and the accumulation of private property. Bodies as private property.

*The spectral tapestry of imperialism webs its smoke in mid-Atlantic memory.
Plantation terror. Haunted wealth. As capitalism destroys the planet we search for alternative routes. Paths away from or around catastrophe. Picking up signals from the past and future. Everything that can be counted will eventually be sorted.*

Lights fade up to a stark, white glare. Retreating, curved over, arms stretched out but hands limp.

[FURTIVE WHISPERS, SLIGHT AND ACIDIC]

[PATTERING STEPS]

An iron circle around your neck. History looking directly at you. How much sweat, skin and fear? You scream. Running, swarming, riotous and anarchic.

[TERROR-STRUCK GASPS] [EXCLAMATIONS OF REVULSION]

Insurgent smashing. Untethered and formless. Floating away through time.

Reclining, her arms reach up behind her head. Sinking into one hip. Arms hang down limply. Fists turn, turn. Hinging forwards. Looking down at the ground through splayed fingers. Shunting backwards. Twisted leap. Pointing straight towards the audience, moving slowly backwards. Retreating. Surveying. Hands against the black back wall. This dance is dangerous. This dance is an oracle. This dance self-replicates. This dance contains clues.

The distant past gets nearer through great iron gates. Along a wooded path. Among quiet green hills. Beyond the lake stands a great house. A property full of painful stories. A monster mansion with shivering walls of stone. Proud turrets casting long shadows. Gargoyles peering out between gothic arches. Stained glass saints frozen in time.

Listen to the voices in the black oak rafters.

I came here to uncover and dig up. To open the cupboards and find the keys to the locked rooms. A time tourist, a time looter? Taking time, robbing time. Who does time belong to?

At night we gather by the wide hooded fireplace.

[PITCHLESS BLASTS OF CHILLING WIND, GATHERING SLOW MOMENTUM]

*We discuss inheritance, trade, natural resources, bricks and fabric.
Oil paintings, leather bound volumes and suits of armour.*

*Masks, busts, and tapestries, elephant tusks, animal bones, bracelets and bangles, rugs
and furs, thrones, cabinets, cuckoo clocks, diamonds, cobalt, machinery and manufacture.*

*Yes I know how to dance with this thing we call history. I slide, crash, twist down
on my back as it hovers above me, circling, surrounding me whole. And my eyes
wide, mouth wide, ears wide open. I turn – it's rushing, pushing past me.*

*The spectres are scurrying, hovering, limping, laughing. A turn on one
leg, a joyful jolt across the diagonal. A broken march in the faltering light.
Furiously shaking their hands, then abruptly jutting forwards.*

[UNEARTHLY LOW WIND HOWLS, ECHOED AND DISEMBODIED]

*One of them turns convulsing his spine. Leaning back, recoiling. His
leg sweeps behind. Hand like a knife. Head whips round, arms stretch
up in a V shape. Back and forth back and forth back and forth.*

*She jumps, but softly so as not to rouse the sleepers. A quick glance from
left to right, an almost imperceptible movement of the shoulders.*

[BUSIER BLASTS OF WIND HOWLING] [SHRIEKS, GASPS] [PULSING CLANGING]

*She turns and falls. I try to catch her as she melts into air. This dance has
no centre as indeed history has no centre. A moving, roving, circling of
seasons as the planet, hurled round its sun, consumes its dead.*

[CLASHING HIGH PITCHED INTONING, OUT OF BREATH, WITCHES' MOANS]

*They stand in a huddle now. Then all move in different
directions at once, gesticulating wildly.*

[DESPERATE, FLEEING STEPS, AGITATED PATTERNING]

Juxtaposing agitation with moments of stillness.

[SHUDDERING PULSES, SINISTER WIND BLOWING IN PIPES]

An imported arabesque. Rough magic. Manufactured momentariness. The feeling of time passing. Division of labour. Watching and being watched.

[GASPS SUBSIDE] [HEELS OF FEET SLAPPING GROUND SUBSIDE]

[SOLEMN RHYTHMIC KNOCKING]

[SOUNDSCAPE INTENSIFIES] [CACOPHONY OF DESOLATE METALLIC PULSING, CLATTERING, SCRATCHING, HISSING]

The light flickers and they disappear.

On the south lawn. I took a break from my explorations and lay on the spiky grass and tried to relax. Looking up at the sky I saw four black clouds coming together, blown from the north, south, east and west. As they came together they began to form the shape of Africa. The clouds began to descend. They were coming steadily towards me. Coming nearer, coming down, so close now. I was soon enveloped in their cold wet droplets. Swallowed whole, they picked me up, up, up above the trees, higher, higher still as we left the blue of the atmosphere. From the blackness of the void I looked down at my home planet and saw that the continent of Africa was missing.

[SOUNDSCAPE JUDDERS INTO RESONANT SILENCE]

MEET CHOREOGRAPHER SEKE CHIMUTENGWENDE

Seke is a choreographer, performer, movement director and teacher. He is a 44-year old, tall and slim man with short brown afro hair. His skin tone is light brown, and he sports a goatee and a moustache. Seke is of mixed heritage, half English and half Zimbabwean.

Seke uses choreography to experiment with collectivity and alternative approaches to authorship and governance; playing with form to shift and question hierarchies. In addition to *It Begins In Darkness*, Seke has also choreographed a group work for Candoco Dance Company, called 'In Worlds Unknown', which premiered in October 2022.

As a performer Seke has been practising completely improvised performance since 2006, and is currently exploring long solo improvisation performances of fifty to sixty minutes. He has performed over seventy improvisations internationally and has also worked with DV8 Physical Theatre and Lost Dog. He is currently in a new work called 'If All Else Fails' with Forced Entertainment and lectures in improvisation and composition at London Contemporary Dance School.

You can find out more about Seke, his practice and his other work at his website www.sekechimutengwende.com.



WE SPOKE TO SEKE, TO UNDERSTAND HIS PROCESS FOR *IT BEGINS IN DARKNESS* MORE DEEPLY.

"There are these legacies of slavery and colonialism that I think most of the time we either ignore or try to get on with our lives. I wanted to make a dance piece and not ignore those things and have them in the room. And see what kind of show you make if you have an awareness or connection to those legacies. That sense of being haunted by it...There's a lot of physicality in the show and images. Quite a lot of humour. Maybe perverse humour, I don't know. Maybe humour that some might find funny and others not. For me it's a processing space."

It Begins In Darkness emerged from an exploration of Afrofuturism with choreographer Alexandrina Hemsley, where Seke began linking his own experiences of racism to a fictionalised history of the universe. *Kindred* and *Wild Seed*, two novels by sci-fi fantasy author Octavia Butler, inspired Seke to think about horror in relation to slavery, while Black American choreographer Ralph Lemon's investigation of the definition of Blackness also became an important reference point. Seke spoke to us about discovering Jordan Peele's films - the whole cast went together to see his third feature film, *Nope* - and beginning his own research with the question: What could a Black horror dance piece be?

"There's not somebody chasing me down the street right now but there's a sense of haunting. And definitely in buildings in the UK and most venues, theatres, there's some connection back to that [slave trade] money, most likely. That was the metaphor for me, this haunted house that we're living in... It's not about a Black experience. I feel like everyone has this experience in different ways of being haunted by these histories. It's not like some people are untouched by it. It's just different for different people. I feel like everyone's implicated in it in some way. And using dance as a kind of exorcism of that or an attempt at exorcising. Not that I think dancing around on stage is going to solve inequality but as a coming to terms of something, even on a tiny level, those are the themes."

There are no named characters or roles in this piece; centering the performers as dancers first and foremost, Seke did not bring character motivation or autobiographical backstory into the rehearsal space. He speaks about the task-based improvisational scores that the dance is based on.

"Yeah, we worked with the idea of recoiling and moving away from something nasty. There are two different ways that that happens at different points in the show... There's some material that happens the first time with text and then it comes back later, but without the text. So they're speaking while they're doing this material. It's as if they're conjuring up images of rooms that aren't actually there, but they're conjuring them up through movement and then that movement comes back later, but without the text. So there's quite a bit of recurring motifs."

The choreography is highly physical, where even the moments of stillness can be taxing. Seke explains how it feels in the body to perform certain sections.

"I'd say it's very athletic, the show. So the dancers are quite often out of breath. And there's moments where they need to use their voices. Like where they're running in a circle and they're singing quite high notes. They always tell me that that's really hard because they're completely out of breath at that point. So yeah, I'd say it's quite an athletic, powerful show in that way physically. And they're very sweaty, you know, quite quickly."

And I think something that's quite so particular about the show as a performer is that they are often changing states quite drastically, from one moment to the next. So they might be doing something that's really fast and physical and then they switch to do something that's really gentle and soft, that kind of thing, or something that's very light and silly to doing something that's quite dark and ugly...so that's quite a technical thing to be able to do, and they're really good at that. That's also something that we spend a lot of time practising."

"We had this singer called Randolph Matthews come to the rehearsals and he's physical and he was getting us to embody states of different animals, different instruments, with our bodies and our voices. I think that really helped with the piece. So we did stuff like that, that was about finding both extreme differences and also subtle differences and being able to access both of those things."

We asked Seke about his number one favourite section, but he cheated and gave us two...

"I like how the last section, which is made up of lots of mini sections, doesn't really make any sense. It just has all these different feelings and patterns...it feels very fragmented and I like that."

I guess the other section I really like is where they're pressing into each other and swaying. And at the same time this individual is switching between laughing, crying and wailing. And then one of them breaks off and does that by herself...But I think to watch, it's quite disturbing."

Seke speaks often of the humour and absurdity that runs through the performance, but also makes an important point about the ethics of working with emotionally taxing themes.

"I like that I don't feel that they're disturbed doing it. There's something really important about that for me. So politically, it's not a work that's asking them to drag everything out of their souls for the sake of an audience. There's something about that, I think, especially with the subject matter and the racial dynamics, that I just didn't want to go there."

MEET CAST MEMBER MAYOWA OGUNNAIKE

Mayowa Ogunnaike (*my-oh-wa / og-you-nigh-keh*) is one of the performers in the work. She is a British-Nigerian artist with a dark-brown complexion. Born and raised in London with a high-range voice, she's in her late twenties, with hair styled in short twists and a tall, athletic build.

In the past, Mayowa has performed in works that touch on the Windrush migration and Black history in a more general way. However this is the first time Mayowa has been part of a show specifically about slavery or colonialism. She spoke to us about her experience dancing in this piece.

"As performers in this work we're vessels expressing different potential stories. Of course it's related to me in a lot of ways, we have a lot of conversations about our personal stories, experiences, understandings of history but Seke was clear that he didn't want us to be emotionally drained in the process. He was like, how can we make a work where I'm not asking the performers to give their emotions and trauma but still express the trauma. I think he did that really well."

This piece plays with what's seen and what's unseen. There are a lot of gaps and eerie silences that last too long for comfort. Performers wander the stage, sometimes interacting with each other, other times battling imagined figures. The work invites us into this world to lend our own imagination to the ghostly encounters.

"Sometimes we have our eyes closed and we're describing different rooms and things that are happening to us. Or it can seem like we're fighting against something. Sense of heightened senses and everyone being sensitive to sight and touch and voice."

You can follow Mayowa's work on
instagram, at her handle @mayo_wa0.



The show is based on a piece of writing by Seke, which he undertook during the pandemic in the absence of opportunities to dance with others. This text has served as a score for the choreography, a sort of blueprint, and you can experience this for yourself in Section 2, Page 7.

"[The score] has given us a lot of words to improvise from. We did a lot of improv in devising the piece but in the actual piece there's not that much. A lot of it's set. There are moments where we can have some variation, change direction and have a set pathway. But we know exactly when it starts, when it ends. Some of the improv came from the text quite directly."

Contrasting the moments of unearthly repose, there are bursts of frenetic movement. In one part, Mayowa twitches and jumps for half a minute. She explains how it feels in her body to commit to such physically taxing tasks.

"It feels like impulsive movement, there's not much thought behind it, it happens really quickly and because of that there's a lot of tension in the body but also relaxedness. I feel it in my arms a lot. My arms are reaching up often and coming down and then back up. There's this trajectory of energy upwards. And then in other sections, I often find there's tension in the shoulders and arms. The gargoyle section where we're holding our faces in gargoyle expressions and holding that for a while I find that it creates a lot of tension in the neck and shoulders. It's hard to hold that.

I get sweaty when we're doing this barking and growling at each other. Where we're just charging through the space. We're really low in the legs, it's tiring in the thighs and our hips low to the ground. And screaming as well! And our arms are quite held so there's lots of tension in our whole body."

Mayowa reflects on her favourite moment in the show.

“When I cross [the stage] the first time, I’m looking at my right hand in front of my chest. I play with that hand, the movements that the hand can do and the wrist, flopping it a bit, moving it around side to side and snaking it slowly. I’m walking from stage left to right and then sometimes I accidentally move too much and accidentally hit my face. When I’m doing it I feel like I’m tripping on acid. You look at something you know and then in this psychedelic experience it looks different and you’re like woahhh.” [Mayowa laughs]

We have audio described this moment from the performance.

WRITTEN AUDIO DESCRIPTION

{ Intonation of Audio Describer }

Mayowa rises and stands feet together, on the right. She swims her left hand in front of her chest, splaying the fingers as jellyfish tentacles. { excited } Eyes bright with child-like joy, she crosses her feet as she side-walks, fascinated by the floppiness of her wrist. Sometimes face collides with hand but always with a playful pleasure.

She wears a pale-pink linen suit jacket with matching wide-leg trousers. The two-piece is baggy, oversized. The trouser hems touch the ground and the jacket slips off her shoulder often.

“I chose the costume myself. I saw the costume designer. I tried on a few things. And then I saw her pulling this suit out of the bag. And I was like THAT’S MINE. I’m gonna wear that! I love a suit! It’s tailored. It’s something I would buy! [Mayowa laughs] It’s a bit too big but that works with the movement. I also have a bralette underneath it the same colour as the suit. I’m looking forward to wearing it again.”

The suit lends itself to spacious movement and Mayowa comments on how the sleeves hang when she stretches her arms out in an almost embrace, or performs long, sweeping gestures that undulate softly.

“So moving softly feels really nice to do in that linen, light fabric, draping and flowy. I think it’s quite flattering to the mover. It does get a bit hot! And it slides off a bit. There are lots of moments in the piece where there is a relaxed feel where you can adjust!”

Elaine audio describes another moment of Mayowa’s dancing, this time in a duet with performer Adrienne Ming, who goes by Ming.

WRITTEN AUDIO DESCRIPTION

{ Intonation of Audio Describer }

*Mayowa and Ming face each other, an intense unbreakable stare.
Standing at a diagonal towards the back right of the stage,
the others stroll to the back, stand in a line, spectators.
And Mayowa and Ming come to life, arms curving and twisting in the air.
Soft undulations; a current charging through them,
like those dancing inflatables outside a petrol station.
Sending them into soft ripples,
whole body swelling and dipping in, ever closer proximity,
as if propelled through water.
And as they edge right to left, their ripples mirror and repel each other.
Now towards the centre, the gap between them is closing,
Ming’s arms pulse near Mayowa’s midriff,
A hand brushes her thigh,
Her pale pink trousers.
Until... in a moment, they are connected.
Ming’s arms wrapped around Mayowa waist,
Mayowa hunched over, not fully committed.
In a fleeting embrace,
Their rippling quelled,
Mayowa thuds to the floor.*

EXPERIENCE AN AUDIO-DESCRIBED EXCERPT

This is an audio described excerpt written by Elaine, and performed during a performance at The Place in London in October 2023.



Rose, feet wide apart, rocking her head violently, long braids swinging

© Jemima Yong

WRITTEN AUDIO DESCRIPTION

{ Intonation of Audio Describer }

Like someone flipped a switch, the five stop, scattered across the stage.

Hands drift up, unshackled this time.

Grasping invisible railings that disintegrate through their fingers.

*Bodies light, inflating full of air, dancing upwards,
like electrically-powered tube-men waving outside a petrol station,
Like buoyant balloons, they tiptoe-tumble about, deflate.*

A drowning upwards, a slow flail.

*They're swept along by gusts of wind, their
bodies spin and flap out of control.*

*A polyphony of movement,
growing ragged, bodies spasm.*

*Flowing arms replaced with stiff, outstretched arms, hands quaking.
Isaac on bended knees, shakes everywhere.*

*They patter about again, failing to catch hold of something just out of reach.
Blown around by the currents, their bodies so light they waft and revolve,
though their paths never collide.*

The shakes overcome them.

{ relief } *They freeze one by one, and the shakes finally stop.*

All but Mayowa, on her knees, shoulders shuddering.

The other four in a loose semi-circle around her, stare.

She shuffles, hops, steps; the skeleton of a tap dance.

{ strained } *Always off centre, her body flinging her through the jumping,
twitching routine, threatening to overcome her.*

Cursed to perform as the others stand, glassy eyed, watching in stillness.

*It's a contorted thrashing of limbs,
baggy suit jacket sliding incrementally off her shoulder.*

*Isaac strides purposefully from the right to the left,
Halts abruptly.
Rocks on the spot, legs wide apart, and...wails loudly.*

*Natifah joins his wails, hand on his back.
Kassi stands behind him, laying her hands on Isaac and Natifah,
And finally Ming.*

*They sway on the spot as if passengers in the hull of a ship in a storm,
or trapped inside something living with no escape.*

*Shipwrecked proximities of ancestral flesh,
misery, despair.*

{ incredulous } *And then Natifah laughs? Face creasing, grin widening?
It's hard to tell if mouths are open in moan or laughter.*

*In the centre, Mayowa's ragged tap-dance jerks to a stop.
She notices the wailers, rubs her braids and trudges over,
tips her head back and adds her voice to the cacophony.*

*A mass of lolling, open-mouthed figures.
They take turns kneeling or standing.
Still swaying, hands laid on each other's backs or shoulders,
in comfort, in humour, in pain.*

*Natifah in the middle looks deeply troubled,
the others throng her, she clutches her stomach, steadying herself.*

*Expressions switch in a second from glee to fear, from joy to dread,
gulping tears becoming bubbling sniggers,
they all break apart, eyes locked, grinning.*

Only Kassi remains swaying and wailing at the back, hand on heart.

In pairs, Isaac and Natifah sit on the floor to the left.

Ming and Mayowa to the right.

*They toss and turn on their backs and bellies,
sharp shifts and twists, troubled sleepers plagued by nightmares.*

*Isaac and Natifah roll in opposite directions,
reach for each other but just miss,
shipwrecked companions tossed on a wave.*

And the four slump still.

*Kassi pads down the aisle between their outstretched figures,
Kassi sniggers, moans, wails.*

She stoops down.

Cackles, blubbers, wails.

Her eyes grow fearful as she lies down on her side,

She rolls over on her back as wails turn to murmurs.

All five are stretched out on their bellies.

The rise and fall of the sleepers backs, soft undulations.

Kassi barely lifts her head off the ground, fails.

She tries again, rises, awakening the others who stroll over to new spots.

MEET COSTUME DESIGNER ANNIE PENDER

Annie Pender (*an-nee / pen-duh*) speaks in a soft Southern English accent with a mixed London lilt. She is a white British woman and her long light brown hair is worn in loose waves over one shoulder. She has a fair freckled complexion from her English, Irish, and Scottish family. She is in her mid 40s, 5 ft 8 tall with a medium build.

Annie is a costume designer, creative consultant and psychotherapist, working on projects that have spanned across film, fashion, theatre, dance, art and the community.

The common thread between her work is gathering material and finding the cohesive essence of her latest project. She has worked with Seke on all of his choreographic output, designing costumes in collaboration with him and his cast. At the heart of Annie's practice is a sense of fun, creativity and play.

We asked Annie to talk us through her design process on *It Begins In Darkness*.

"With this particular project, Seke's someone I've worked with loads, we always end up working together and I'm very experiential. So we chat about what the project is to the choreographer. But I always keep a very open mind. Just to see whatever thoughts come to mind when they're talking about a particular subject. Then I'll go into whatever the early stage they're at.

With this piece it was sitting in rehearsals and watching what was being created. And I will make notes about any words that are coming to mind for me. I might draw. I often take a lot of photographs. And I sit down with the dancers or performers and listen to their experience of what the piece is. From that I have a collection of words, a collection of images. I take it from that. I work instinctively. I often work with either found pieces or I will buy in things and source them. And often some elements will rise to the surface from the collection of elements I have."

"I'll pull a load of source clothes and take that back to the dancers and rehearsal room and we'll have a lot of fun trying things on! In the early stage I invited the dancers to bring in any pieces of their own clothing that they felt resonated with what they were making. I quite often do that with pieces because it's part of the collaboration of what is this thing to everyone. There's something about somebody moving in something that feels inspiring. We gather lots of material and edit back from that until we find something cohesive."

All of the costumes were ready-made and then tailored to each performer.
Annie gathered around fifty items, about ten options per person.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF THE QUESTIONS ANNIE ASKED THE CAST MEMBERS:

You are a group of real friends embarking on an unknown, unexpected experience, moving between senses and environments, what might you be wearing for this journey if you were prepared for it?

What might you not have expected to be wearing, if you were unprepared for it? (e.g. you got locked outside your house when you went to put the bins out, not wearing a coat or shoes)

What allows your senses to be alive and alert while wearing it? What piece of clothing can carry you through this experience?

We invite you too to imagine yourself as a performer in the work, navigating horrors imagined and real. What would you wear to carry you through this experience?

Annie explained her conceptual approach to the costumes and how they work as individual pieces and a group ensemble.

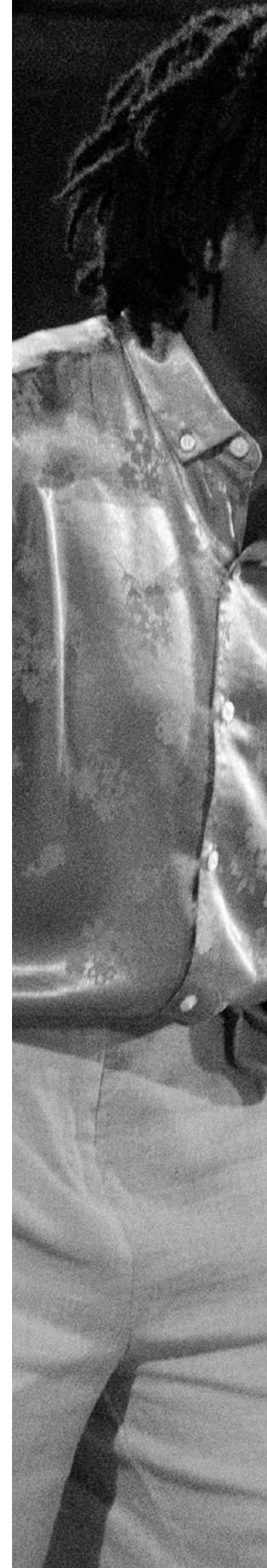
"The very first thing that I immediately thought when I encountered this piece, was to... enhance the sense of sensibility and listening. I was very much like this is about really listening and being really sensitive. And I feel very sensitively alive when watching it. So the costumes in the early stage, when you're quiet how do you hear clothes move? My hope for the costumes was that they are all materials that are sensitive materials, like silks, heavy linens...

And also there was something about feeling timeless in them. Very present in themselves but also feeling timeless, and that's part of being able to be open and listening. They're not from any one particular era. But there are these sort of echoes of other times in them. So they feel timeless but also present.

For example there's more of a dungaree look. There's a creamyish linen suit. One of them is a big loose shirt. And they all have stylings that could be from a number of eras. So the heavy black linen for example I was thinking of turn-of-the-century heavy big skirts. Or the big shirts could be from the 18th century or equally the 1950s or so now. Again that costume, I'd wear that right now.

So where these echoes of history come back and how, in different moments in time, for some reason it's important that we're wearing big shirts again and there's this echo with 18th century people [laughs] or something.

And that connection to something that goes back through history. We've all been wearing some forms of garments for 1000 years or more and there are these materials that have remained part of that. So there's that thread of lineage. This experience that's been common throughout in different ways."



Black and white four cast members laying hands
on each other and wailing / moaning / laughing

© John Morgan



MORE ABOUT SOUNDSCRIBE

This booklet has been envisioned and written by SoundScribe, a global majority collective of audio describers, BSL-interpreters, sound editors and consultants specialising in access for performance work. SoundScribe was founded by Elaine Lillian Joseph, and is now co-led with Shivaangee Agrawal.

Elaine (*ee-lane*) is a Black British woman born and raised in Birmingham. Her accent has a touch of the Brummie and much of the South after living in London for 8 years. Her heritage hails from the West Indies by way of Jamaica and St Kitts. She has a mahogany complexion and hair that changes most months. Sometimes she sports a kanerow bob with beads, sometimes she has long colourful braids. She wears glasses and likes big dangly earrings. Elaine is a committed advocate of audio description and captions and is keen for SoundScribe to make access fun and community-centred.

Shivaangee (*shiv-arn-ghee*) is a curvy brown person of Indian heritage, with a long curly mane that is shaved on the sides. They are about five foot six inches and work as an independent dance artist, with a practice that spans performance, choreography, advocacy and writing. Shivaangee is passionate about investigating the idea of access altogether, believing strongly that dance has a long way to go in letting audience members in. You can find out more about their work at their website www.shivaangee.com.

With over 10 years of combined experience managing access for performance work, we offer an embodied and creative approach that resists the pressure to create de-personalised (and boring!) audio descriptions. We think it's important to acknowledge and celebrate our subjectivities as people and artists, so we pay a lot of attention to the nuances of each artist's work and aesthetic, making sure to gather as much language and material as possible from the artists involved in the work. We can offer workshops to demystify our work and we get very excited about creative collaborations that bring out our performance experience!

We take pride in our vision to decenter whiteness and ableism in the work that we do, and re-center perspectives from marginalised identities. In each project, we consult with blind + visually impaired patrons and/or d/Deaf + hearing impaired patrons, and are committed to building a team of people who themselves have experiences of visual and hearing impairment. We want to continue doing this work for the rest of our lives, so we consider how to make our process sustainable for everyone involved, and how to build meaningful relationships with artists whose work we personally resonate with and want to experience more of.

Our team brings a breadth of experience across large projects, budgets and deliverables. If you would be interested in working with us, we would love to hear from you. Please get in touch via our email addresses:

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CREDITS

THIS BOOKLET HAS BEEN CREATED DURING THE 2023 AUTUMN-WINTER TOUR OF *IT BEGINS IN DARKNESS*, WHICH IS CREDITED AS FOLLOWS:

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This booklet has been designed by Luke Pajak, and the audio booklet has been sound-engineered by Gary Giles.

Colour, uneven line of five cast members facing away from audience, some mid-turn, darting a glance over their shoulders

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