

MFA DANCE THESIS CONCERT



School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies
Leigh Wilson Smiley, Producing Director

MFA DANCE THESIS CONCERT

October 15 & 16, 2015

DANCE THEATRE

OCTAVIA'S BROOD: RIDING THE OX HOME

by Meghan Abadoo

NYAM CHIEM

by Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene

The performance will last approximately **2 hours with a 15-minute intermission**.
Video and/or audio recording of the production is strictly prohibited.

PROGRAM

OCTAVIA'S BROOD: RIDING THE OX HOME

Choreography	Meghan Abadoo
Sound Design	Sam Crawford
Costume Design	Tyler Gunther
Lighting Design	Rob Siler
Scenic Design	Diana Chun
Dramaturg	Khalid Yaya Long
Stage Manager	Tarythe Albrecht
Performers	Meghan Abadoo, Madison Moore, Sydney Parker, Jasmine Watkins, Asia Wyatt

INTERMISSION

NYAM CHIEM

Choreography	Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene
Composer	Zak Engel
Lighting Design	Connor Dreibelbis
Writer/Narrator	Nadav Heyman
Costume Design	Tyler Gunther
Scenic Design	Diana Chun
Projection Design	Ian McClain
Stage Manager	Sophia Lewin Adams
Visual Artist	Brennan Cox
Performers	Anwar Addae, LaTefia Bradley, Mustapha Braimah, Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene, Tamar Gasko, Jonathan Hsu, Chris Law, Theophilus Nimpson, Xinran (Rose) Qi, Chunhui (Allen) Xing

OCTAVIA'S BROOD: RIDING THE OX HOME

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Meghan Abadoo and Khalid Long, dramaturg.

Khalid: What is the story behind *Octavia's Brood: Riding the Ox Home*?

Meghan: Last year I attended a race and social justice conference called Facing Race with a host of artists, writers, activists and organizers. It was hosted by Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation. I attended as a member of the Dance Exchange; we presented a workshop on dance and social justice. While at the conference I participated in a collective sci-fi/speculative fiction writing workshop inspired by the visionary fiction of Octavia Butler. In fact, the title of my show, *Octavia's Brood*, is borrowed from the title of an anthology of short stories co-edited by Adrienne Maree Brown, my Facing Race workshop facilitator.

Dramaturg's Aside:

Octavia Estelle Butler (1947–2006) was an award-winning science fiction writer. According to historian Darlene Clark Hine, Butler was “the first African-American woman to gain popularity and critical acclaim as a major science fiction writer.” Though repeatedly rejected by publishers, Kindred (1979) became Butler's most notable work. Kindred tells the story of a black woman from 1976 Southern California who is transported back to the antebellum south, during the violent days of slavery before the Civil War. Butler has won a number of awards for her writing, including the Hugo Award for her short story “Speech Sounds” (1984) and a Nebula Award for her novella Bloodchild (1984). In 1995, Butler became the first science fiction writer to receive the MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant. When asked about her writing, Butler stated: “I'm not writing for some noble purpose, I just like telling a good story. If what I write about helps others understand this world we live in, so much the better for all of us. Every story I write adds to me a little, changes me a little, forces me to reexamine an attitude or belief, causes me to research and learn, helps me to understand people and grow ... Every story I create, creates me. I write to create myself.”

Meghan: Octavia Butler's work focuses on, or rather she envisions radical equity — more socially and racially equitable worlds. At this conference Octavia Butler's work was being described as visionary fiction, a term created by writer and activist, Walidah Imarisha. Visionary fiction describes fiction that seeks to create a just future while making use of speculative writing genres. Within the workshop we were asked to write a short story that came from a setting that we had collectively co-imagined. I took the opportunity to make a dance. I choreographed a 30-second dance study in response to my writing and shared it with the group at the closing of the workshop.

Khalid: Can we say that the 30-second dance study was the beginning of your thesis?

Meghan: Yes, it was the first time I attempted to choreograph in response to the inspiration I gained from Octavia's writing. A few years before that I read *Kindred* and really related to the protagonist, Dana. I then read another Octavia Butler novel, *Parable of the Sower* and also found myself relating to the protagonist, Lauren Olamina, a young woman guided by her deep sense of empathy and reverence for change. I had been struggling with how to navigate my own history as a Black woman. However, after engaging with Octavia Butler's novels, particularly relating to her visions of worlds in which Women of Color are central

figures, empathic warriors, even the prophets of new religions, I began to understand my own past. I also recognized that through my work, my art — dance — I could create worlds I envision, worlds that are socially just, particularly around issues of race and gender and class.

Khalid: I know that Harriet Tubman is a major part of your thesis. Where does she fit into this thesis and how are you connecting her with Octavia Butler?

Meghan: This work combines my interests in the prophetic envisioning that exists within the stories of racial justice activists, Octavia Butler and Harriet Tubman. Two years ago marked the 150th anniversary of both the march on Washington and the Emancipation Proclamation. I attended the commemorative march and also began making a series of small group and solo dances. These dances were essentially odes to Harriet, and her unimaginable ability to return to the “fire” of slave territory over and over again, for a cause greater than her own personal safety or freedom. Despite being one of few widely acknowledged and celebrated figures of Black, female power in American history, Harriet Tubman’s story was accounted within a paradigm of otherness. Because she was not textually literate, her letters, pamphlets and stories were recorded by White, female abolitionists. Octavia Butler was an award-winning author who owned her stories, yet was a somewhat less well-known visionary that emerged following the work of the civil rights movement. I am intrigued by these intersections of otherness, ownership and story-telling wrapped up in the Black female body, and emboldened by the characters of these women’s stories: Harriet, Dana and Olamina.

Dramaturg’s Aside:

Harriet Tubman (1820?–1913) was known as a conductor of the Underground Railroad. As a conductor, Tubman returned to the South approximately 19 times to lead her family and hundreds of other enslaved people of African descent to freedom. According to Tubman, two things sustained her: the pistol at her side and her faith in God. One of her most challenging journeys was the time in which she traveled south to rescue her elderly parents. The trip proved successful. Earning the name, Black Moses, Tubman was also instrumental in the Civil War, serving the Union as a cook, a nurse and a spy. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass stated, “I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than Harriet Tubman.”

Khalid: In your work I get a sense of activism that is created through a comingling of history, memory and artistic merit — a blending of those ingredients in which you as a black woman artist are first acknowledging your entry into the world before taking on the world.

Meghan: Yes! (Laughter) Being an artist is hard. It’s not easy. Being black is hard. Being a woman is hard. Being a black woman in a predominantly white artistic medium — modern dance — is hard. Often I am the only woman of color, sometimes the only person of color in the room full of dancers. In the past few years I’ve begun a meditation practice called Zazen, where for now I’m essentially following the inhalation and exhalation cycle of my breathing in efforts to reach complete stillness. It’s within this stillness that I work through the internalized challenges of being a black, female, dancing body. It complements the work I do as a choreographer in the dance studio, where I confront these challenging situations through dance and storytelling.

MFA DANCE THESIS CONCERT: CHOREOGRAPHER'S NOTES (cont'd)

Dramaturg's Aside:

In Buddhist philosophy the human mind is often compared to a wild ox. The ox is considered to be one of the most useful beasts of burden, thus the ox was to be captured, tethered and essentially worn down. The Ten Ox Herding Pictures by Zen Master Kakuan (China 12th c.) are a sequence of ten illustrations depicting the levels of realization in Zen. The pictures depict a Zen initiate who is encouraged to directly experience his own mind through Zazen (sitting meditation), relinquish anxieties and desires, experience oneness with all and find ultimately great peacefulness.

Khalid: Any last words?

Meghan: Yes, I want to thank a few people. Thank you to Sydney, Asia, Madison and Jasmine. I am humbled by and so very grateful for your artistry. You are Octavia's Brood! Miriam, my thesis chair, for your love, compassion, encouragement, keen eye and comradery. Sara, Faedra, Sharon, Alvin and Karen for keeping me bold and honest. I cherish your advice and guidance. Sinclair for taking this thesis (and grad school) odyssey with me, with so much grace. My dramaturg, Khalid, for listening and helping me find my way. My designers, Sam, Tyler, Rob and Diana for your willingness to share your incredible art within this work. My graduate colleagues for keeping me in check. Cate, Cary and Tarythe for your magical abilities to just make things happen. Mom, Dad, Michelle, Mike and Mick, for being my biggest fans. Fiifi for being my one true and complete witness. Ella, for being you. Harriet and Octavia, for showing me the way...

NYAM CHIEM

Nyam chiem is a Tiv word loosely translated in English as “nightmare,” a derivative from the phenomenon sleep paralysis. It is a condition I have had all my life. This is an exploration of finding of meaning through the unspoken words found in movement, gestures, words and dance.

The piece is a site-specific and situated work inviting the audience into the mind of “this” human going through an episode of sleep paralysis. Using the nuances of the phenomenon — fear, panic, agitation, confusion, repose, realization and disorientation — this work presents a visual narrative of translating all of these into an entertainment that speaks to the condition as simple, normal and a part of our complex human existence, thus debunking the negativities attached to the experience.

As a young choreographer, I am constantly fascinated by the themes of the surreal and phenomenological experiences through history and folktales; these are derived from my origin as a Nigerian from a complex region of different cultures, traditions and religion. Hence my work and ideas tend to tilt toward such worlds. I am constantly intrigued by the search and research in the embodied practices of dance creation and choreography.

This creation would not have been physically, mentally and emotionally possible without the help of my choreography research professor, Sharon Mansur, from whom all the research ideas began; the infinite amount of love, care, wisdom and assistance from my very special thesis chair professor Karen Kohn Bradley and the rest of my committee members Miriam Phillips, Adrienne Fang, Sara Pearson and Jared Mezzocchi; and my dancers-collaborators. I also am truly grateful to the Director of the School, Leigh Wilson Smiley, for her guidance and constant support through the process. The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center provides the opportunities for graduate students in the arts to hone in on our arts and get the world-class support we need to grow as artists.

And my collaborators (not dancers-collaborators): Jonathan Hsu, Chris Law, Mustapha Braimoh, Allen Chunhui Xing, Latifah Bradley, Tamar Gasko, Theophilus Nimpson, Nadav Heyman, Xiran (Rose) Qi, Tyler Gunther, Diana Chun, Connor Dreibelbis, Ian McClain, Zak Engel, Aiden Walsh, Mark Costello and Sophia Lewin Adams for their dedication and immeasurable artistry and contribution to the piece. Also a huge appreciation for my co-thesis mate who has been very helpful to me not only as a classmate but also a friend, Meghan Abadoo.

To these I say “Thank you.”

— Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene, choreographer

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Meghan Abadoo (choreographer/performer *Octavia's Brood*), third-year MFA candidate in dance. She is a choreographer and teacher based in Mount Rainier, Maryland. Her performance credits include company member and guest artist with Gesel Mason, Nita Liem, David Dorfman Dance, Urban Bush Women and Liz Lerman. She has taught as a guest artist at Brown University, James Madison University, East Carolina University, Dickinson College and the University of Virginia, and is an adjunct artist with the Dance Exchange. She is also an intergroup dialogue facilitator who loves to read, swim and bounce to the beat with her daughter in the comfort of her own kitchen.

Anwar Addae (performer *Nyam chiem*), third-year dance major. Training: Broadway Dance Center, Millennium Dance Complex.

Tarythe Albrecht (stage manager *Octavia's Brood*) graduated from the University of Maryland, *summa cum laude* in 2010. Select stage management credits: *The Great One-Man Commedia Epic* (Faction of Fools); *Macbeth* (Prince George's Community College); *Visible Seams* and *Way In* (UMD). Albrecht has also worked for UpRooted Dance, Maida Withers Dance Construction Company, Round House Theatre, Wolf Trap and Washington Savoyards, among others.

LaTefia Bradley (performer *Nyam chiem*), first-year MFA candidate in dance. She currently resides in DC but is originally from Arizona. Much of her movement vocabulary and values come from her training at Arizona State University where she received her BFA in dance education in 2012. During her time at Arizona State, her choreography was featured in the undergraduate showcase, "Arizona's Got Dance" in 2012 and she was awarded a certificate of excellence in dance education in 2012.

Mustapha Braimah (performer *Nyam chiem*), first-year MFA candidate in dance. He is a scholar artist from Ghana, a choreographer, musician, percussionist, actor and a multi-talented dancer. He holds a BFA in choreography from University of Ghana, and an MA in international studies from Ohio University, focusing on music and dance in Africa and African Diaspora. He is a member of Azaguno Inc., a multi-ethnic ensemble that focuses on research, preservation and performance of African, Caribbean and Latin American music and dance.

Claudia Brownlee (assistant costume designer), junior theatre major. Creative and Performing Arts Scholar, member of Phi Theta Kappa, W.E.B. Dubois Honor Society. Alumna of Duke Ellington School of Arts, WDC (2011); Fashion Institute of Technology, NYC – Associate's Degree: Fashion Design (2014).

Diana Chun (scenic designer), second-year MFA candidate in scenic design. Outside credits: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (2012, design assistant, Washington State University), *Mary's Wedding* (2014, design assistant, Playmakers Rep). Upcoming: *Regina* (2016, scenic design, UMD School of Music). Training: Washington State University (BS Arch, 2013). She is excited to be working alongside the talented Sinclair and Meghan.

Sam Crawford (sound designer *Octavia's Brood*), completed degrees in English and audio technology at Indiana University in 2003. A move to New York City led him to Looking Glass Studios where he worked on film projects with Philip Glass and Björk. His recent sound designs and compositions have included works for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company (Venice Biennale, 2010), Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion (*Pavement*, 2012) and David Dorfman Dance (BAM's Next Wave Festival, 2013). He also plays lap steel and banjo in various groups, including Bowery Boy Blue (Brooklyn) and Corpus Christi (Rome).

Connor Dreibelbis (lighting designer *Nyam chiem*), second-year MFA candidate in lighting design. UMD credits: *Così fan tutti* and *Projects for the Living*. Outside credits: Lighting design: *Moon Over Buffalo* (Mt. Gretna Theatre), *Camelot* (Mt. Gretna Theatre); scenography: *Der Stein* (Theater Paderborn), *Peer Gynt* (Theater Paderborn), *Um die Ecke* (Theater Paderborn). From 2012–2014 resident designer and design assistant at Theater Paderborn in Paderborn, Germany.

Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene (choreographer/performer *Nyam chiem*), third-year MFA candidate in dance. Credits: *TNT for the brain* (choreographer); freelance artist; *Blasted* (choreographer, creator); *I'll take my chances* (choreographer); *National Art Festival Nigeria Edo State* (choreographer); *Oba Ovoranwren No'Gbaisi* (assistant director, choreographer); *Azaghidi (When Gods Die)* (assistant director, choreographer); *Confinement* (dance exploration, dancer and choreographer); *Silence in progress* (dance exploration, choreographer and performer).

Zak Engel (composer *Nyam chiem*) is a composer/designer for film, theatre and television. His work in film and television won Gold at the 2014 PromaxBDA awards, and is currently featured in multiple international advertising campaigns. Last July, he premiered his score for the feature film *The Inquisition of Camilo Sanz*. In 2013, Engel scored Jared Mezzocchi's stage adaptation of *The Little Prince*. His work has been featured on Nickelodeon, ESPN, MTV and VH1, and has represented the likes of *Under Armour*, *X Games* and *Transformers*. Engel currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York as owner of Zak Engel Music & Sound.

Tamar Gasko (performer *Nyam chiem*), junior theatre major and leadership studies minor. UMD credits: *The Lost World*. She is a member of The Weekday Players (*Stop Kiss* and *OWP*) and Avirah, UMD's Israeli dance troupe. *Nyam chiem* is her first dance thesis.

Tyler Gunther (costume designer), third-year MFA candidate in costume design. UMD credits: *The Lost World*, *Pleated* and *My Tempest*. Outside credits: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* at Adventure Theatre. Upcoming productions:

Tartuffe (UMD) and *Regina* (Maryland Opera Studio).

Nadav Heyman (writer/narrator *Nyam chiem*), Israeli-born writer, dancer and choreographer. His written work has been commissioned by Juilliard, Boston Conservatory and Cornish College of the Arts. As a founding member of Ate9 dANCEcOMPANY, Heyman trained under Danielle Agami and the Gaga movement language. He left the company in 2013 to pursue his own work, primarily through film. He lives in Los Angeles.

Jonathan Hsu (performer *Nyam chiem*), dance and kinesiology double major. Creative and Performing Arts Scholar. Culture Shock DC (2012–2015, core dancer), PEARSONWIDRIG DANCE THEATER (2013–present, apprentice), VF Dance Theater (2010–2013, core dancer/captain).

Jumoke Kadiri (assistant stage manager), junior theatre performance major.

Chris Law (performer *Nyam chiem*), second-year MFA candidate in dance. Though the bulk of his movement extends from training in hip-hop dance, he has also obtained a BA degree for studies in modern dance. Additionally, he and his wife, Ama Law, often collaborate under the alias of "Project ChArma" to perform duets, teach workshops and battle at jams. Culture Shock D.C. alumni.

Sophia Lewin Adams (stage manager *Nyam chiem*), senior theatre production and marketing dual degree. UMD credits: *The Lost World*, *Spring Awakening*, *Molière Inromptu*. Other work: *Alpine Theatre Project*, *Pussy REP* at Capital Fringe, Pointless Theatre Company. Upcoming: *The Flick* at Signature Theatre. Member of Sketchup.

Khalid Yaya Long (dramaturg), PhD candidate in theatre and performance studies. Long served as the dramaturg for UMD's production of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (spring 2014) by Anna Deavere Smith and also served as production dramaturg for Rep Stage's (Baltimore) premiere of Dominique Morisseau's *Sunset Baby* (spring 2015). Long's dissertation examines black feminist aesthetics

MFA DANCE THESIS CONCERT: ABOUT THE ARTISTS (cont'd)

through the life and works of Glenda Dickerson.

Ian McClain (projection designer), junior theatre studies major focusing in video design. UMD credits: *Collidescope*, *Good Kids*, *The Lost World*, NextNOW Festival (projection designer); *UMoves 2014* (lighting designer). Outside credits: Assistant video designer for *Healing Wars* (Arena Stage) and *A Little More Alive* (Barrington Stage). Member of Kreativity Diversity Troupe and Weekday Players.

Madison Moore (performer *Octavia's Brood*), senior anthropology major. UMD credits: *New Dances*, *All-Niter Showcase*, *Rip the Floor Competition*. Training: NJ Ballet Junior Company, Columbia High School's Special Dance Company, Alvin Ailey Junior Division. Artistic Director of Prima Dolls Dance Team and Phunktions Hip-Hop Dance Company.

Theophilus Nimpson (performer *Nyam chiem*), fourth-year chemical engineering major. He has no previous dance experience. Training: West African Dance with Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene and modern dance with Curtis Stedje and Robin Neveu Brown.

Pooja Patel (assistant stage manager), second-year theatre major. Hillman Entrepreneur's Scholar. Owner and choreographer of Jhalak Dance Academy.

Sydney Parker (performer *Octavia's Brood*), senior dance major. UMD credits: *Dichotomy*, *Spring Awakening*, *iContact*, *Sharing a Dance With You*, *Drape*, *Rooted*. Stringer Foundation Performing Arts Scholarship Recipient. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated member, Sexual Health & Reproductive Education peer educator, ticket office representative at The Clarice.

Xinran (Rose) Qi (performer *Nyam chiem*), training in classic dance and choreography from Shanxi Academy of Arts, China. Performances include *Forbidden Fruit Under the Great Wall*, *Opera Warriors* and *Dancing Miracle*.

Rob Siler (lighting designer *Octavia's Brood*), second-year MFA candidate in lighting design. Design work has been seen at Weathervane Repertory Theatre, Ocean State Theatre Company, Riverside Theatre, Ballet Vero Beach, American Ensemble Theatre, Fusion Dance Company and Riverside Children's Theatre, among others. UMD credits: *The Human Capacity*, *Not Leading Lady Material*, *Variation on Residue*, *Good Kids* (Asst. LD), *Collidescope* (Asst. LD). Special thanks and love to his wife, Colleen, and his parents.

Jasmine Watkins (performer *Octavia's Brood*), senior dance major. UMD credits: *Here They Stood* (ensemble), *The Lost World* (student/dinosaur), *New Dances*, *UMoves*. *Octavia's Brood* is her first dance thesis.

Asia Wyatt (performer *Octavia's Brood*), third-year applied mathematics (AMSC) PhD student. UMD credits: *Wake Up!*. Training: Covington Regional Ballet, Spelman College Dance Theatre, Taurus Broadhurst Dance. Undergraduate institution: Spelman College. Women in Math President, AMSC Student Council Member and Gates Millennium Scholar.

Chunhui (Allen) Xing (performer *Nyam chiem*), first-year MFA candidate in dance. Training in Chinese dance and choreography from Shanxi Academy of Arts, China. Performances include *Forbidden Fruit Under the Great Wall*, *Across, China* CCTV national televised New Year's show and *Dancing Miracle*.