

THE PLACE presents

# OKAN

by Ella Mesma and Akeim Toussaint Buck





# ABOUT

**Okan** is a new production with martial dances at its core. Blending Salsa and Wing Chun, **Akeim** and **Ella** use these martial dances to explore themes around 'relating', while deconstructing notions of gender normativity and the interplay between opposing forces, resulting in a harmonious blend that transcends binaries.

The name **Okan**, meaning Oneness, Conscience, and Heart in Yoruba, was chosen to reflect the Yoruban roots of many of the dance styles used in the piece and their connection to Orixás, the gods of Yoruban traditions.

 [Click here to watch the sharing video](#)

 [Click here to watch the interview video](#)





# INSPIRATION

This innovative project started with an interview with **Thomas Talawa Presto**, director of **Tabanka Dance**, who introduced the codified system of body movement called **Talawa. Akeim** and **Ella** have collaborated with Thomas to create a duet that incorporates Salsa, Wing Chun, and other diasporic dance styles.

These Global Majority movement practices inspire the collaborative efforts of **Akeim** and **Ella** to investigate how ancestry, gender norms, and relationship dynamics come to life through movement.





# ARTISTS



## ELLA MESMA

**Ella** is a choreographer, coach, artist and creator. She also goes by Maya Gandaia and is the CEO of Maya Gandaia Ltd. **Ella** is a published author of *Journal To JOY*, the director of Ella Mesma Company and co-creates PowerUp! a podcast to help us all unlearn, rebuild and empower ourselves back to our true nature.

**Ella** is trained in Afro-Latin, breaking and contemporary dance and has performed for Breakin' Convention, Russell Maliphant, The Olympics Opening Ceremony, The Chomondeleys, and choreographed commissions for Dada Fest, Black Gold Arts, Manchester International Festival, Little Amal, Rural Arts, Bristol Old Vic and more. **Ella** makes work and supports with coaching to undo limiting beliefs, celebrate cultural and social identity and empower and inspire performers and audiences to come back home to themselves.



## AKEIM TOUSSAINT BUCK

**Akeim** is an interdisciplinary performer and maker, born in Jamaica and raised in England. After graduating from The Northern School of Contemporary Dance in 2014, **Akeim** began creating his own work in 2016. His intention is to create moving, thought-provoking, accessible and free-spirited projects. Exploring a variety of themes to challenge, enlighten and entertain audiences in a visceral way, calling on multiple art forms to weave a spectacle.

Audiences are invited to not just observe, they are implicit in the experience. The work aims to reflect on reality, looking at ongoing socio-political issues, with a humanitarian intention. **Akeim's** work has been supported by Yorkshire Dance, Leeds Playhouse, Leeds Inspired, Geraldine Connor Foundation, IRIE! Dance Theatre, Spin Arts, RJC, Deda, Fabric, Streatham Space Project, Serendipity, NSCD, Sadlers Wells and Arts Council England etc.

# CAST

## DAVID EVANS

**David** is a British-Kiwi dance artist with a background in salsa, breakdance, and contemporary dance. **David** combines these styles to bring about his unique approach to moving. **David** earned a Diploma in Dance with distinction from Trinity Laban in 2017. As an artist **David** makes mixed medium dance work for a range of spaces including site-specific, theatre, and galleries. He is the host of David's Dance Podcast, a podcast with guests from across the UK Contemporary and Hip Hop scene.

## FFION CAMPBELL-DAVIES

**Ffion** is a multidisciplinary artist and Associate Director of House Of Absolute. Sound and film producer, composer, instrumentalist, singer, poet and dancer, born and raised in Wales. Welsh speaking non binary woman of mixed Welsh Grenadian heritage. Completing their degree at London Contemporary Dance School and California Institute of the Arts.





# SCALE AND TIMELINE

The piece will originally be made for a duet, performed by dance artists **David Evans** and **Ffion Campbell-Davies** and able to tour to small-scale venues.

The main goal of **Okan**'s collaboration is to design a versatile piece that can be expanded into multiple duets and toured with a larger cast.

**Okan** is entering a Research and Development phase in Autumn 2023 with exciting collaborations, including sharing sessions planned internationally and taking part in an Artist Residency program at Armunia in Tuscany, Italy.

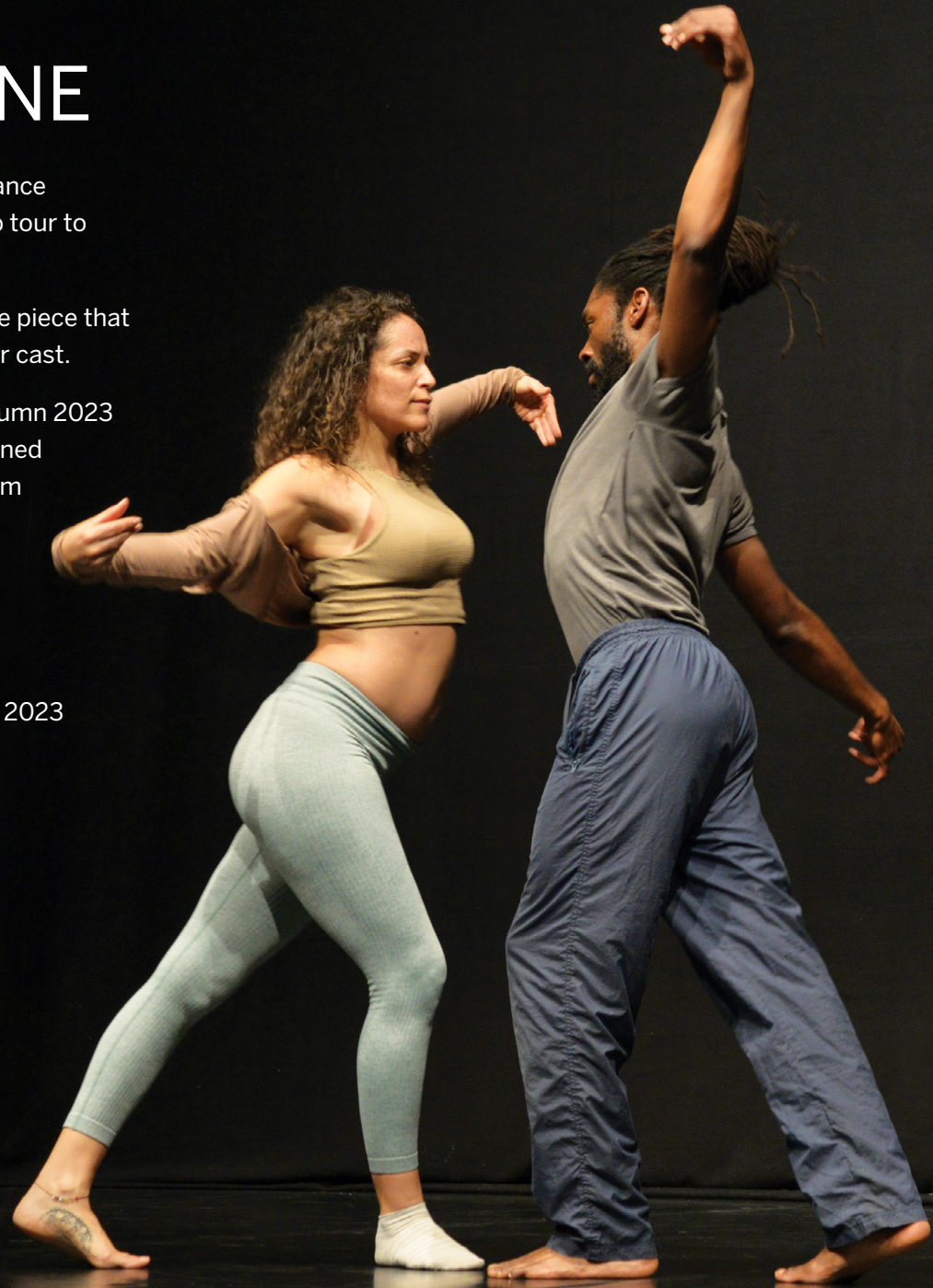
A technical rider will be available in Autumn 2024, in the meantime please get in touch with the producer for any questions related to scale and technical needs.

**Research and Development:** September 2023 - November 2023

**Creation and Technical Rider:** Autumn 2024

**Touring:** Spring 2025

**Touring party:** 3 to 4 (2 Dancers, 1 Technician, 1 Producer for some touring dates)



# CREDITS

Choreographers: **Ella Mesma** and **Akeim Toussaint Buck**

Dancers: **David Evans** and **Ffion Campbell-Davies**

Co-Produced and commissioned by **The Place**

This work is supported using public funding from **Arts Council England**

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Sharing images by **Youcef Hadjazi**

Headshot image of Akeim by **Leag Cole**



## ABOUT THE PLACE

The Place, London's creative powerhouse for dance development, has been leading the way in dance training, creation and performance for 50 years. In a changing landscape, our vision for the future remains steadfast: We are powering imagination through dance, championing new ideas, embracing risks and creating a dance ecosystem unlike any other in the world, with optimal conditions for dance artists and enthusiasts to realise their full potential. The Place is home to London Contemporary Dance School, an extensive theatre and artist development programme, education projects, a range of classes and courses and a nationwide touring model. As a pioneering dance organisation, we are committed to creating no-barriers access to exciting dance experiences and opportunities for everybody, offering a diverse and dynamic theatre programme for audiences, empowering artists and dance makers and giving young people access to the highest quality opportunities to touch their lives with dance.

[theplace.org.uk](https://theplace.org.uk)

