

# Review: Afro-Colombian Dancing Reawakens the Joyce Theater

Sankofa Danza Afro returns to New York with “Accommodating Lie,” a curiously muted work about the display of Black Bodies



By Brian Seibert

Feb. 16, 2022

The motion is small, a little twisting in the hips. But like a tremor before an earthquake, it signals larger shifts. Soon, drums kick in and dancers explode into percussive action — shaking, undulating, whacking the air with the force of those drums.

Wonderful moments like this recur in “Accommodating Lie,” the hourlong work that the Afro-Colombian company Sankofa Danza Afro has brought for its return to the Joyce Theater this week. And those explosions of live drumming and dancing reawaken a stage that the Omicron surge had kept dark and quiet since late December.

But as the work’s title suggests, Rafael Palacios, the company’s director and choreographer, has more in mind. A program note characterizes the work as a “powerful call for awareness” that seeks to dismantle stereotypes “about and around” the Black body, addressing the sexualization and exotification of people of African descent across centuries of slavery and racism.



Maryeris Mosquera Batista, front, with members of the company. Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times

Several times, the dancers line up across the stage and a vocalist starts calling out prices in Spanish. It’s an auction, connecting this performance, this display of Black bodies, to the slave trade.

Yet the auctioneer’s voice, nested in drums, is so quiet and unemphatic that you could almost miss it. That’s characteristic of this production, whose message and delivery are both curiously muted.

Much of the symbolism comes through scenic design (by Álvaro Tobón), starting with the curtain at the rear of the stage, made of straw like that used in the skirts once worn by enslaved Afro-Colombian people. Through this barrier, the dancers enter and exit, the entangling strands occasionally clinging to their bodies. Some of them also wear those skirts, tugging at the twine to show how they chafe. Or a dancer might trail more rope, like a leash held by other performers who wind it around her in maypole fashion.



William Camilo Perlaza Micolta and Sandra Vanesa Murillo Mosquera. Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times

The dance proceeds in a series of episodes, slow and stretched out before they erupt, accompanied as much by quiet flute, lullabies and tick-tocking marimba as by batteries of percussion. A man who seems to battle unseen opponents roars and collapses. Another man picks him up, in a pietà-shaped cradle carry, then sets him back down before helping him rise again with a convulsive, windmilling, resurrecting dance.

Even such swells of intensity, though, feel a little underpowered or flickering. Even as the strength of the African diasporic connection to the drum is augmented with a hint of hip-hop, something seems tentative, perhaps withheld. Could this be part of the message, a refusal to go full out for an audience?

Or is that just Sankofa's style? The work does have a big finish. The full cast of eight dancers advances in ranks, throwing down their most emancipatory, drum-driven steps and then staring down the audience from the lip of the stage. The auctioneer starts up again, now with higher prices. Going once. Going twice. Sold.

#### **Sankofa Danza Afro**

Through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, [joyce.org](http://joyce.org).

May 27, 2021

## **Teatro Mayor celebrates 11 years in the wake of Sankofa Danzafró**



The Teatro Mayor receives the Sankofa Danzafró group with the work *Behind the South: Dances for Manuel*, a choreographic ensemble based on one of the most emblematic novels by the famous writer Manuel Zapata Olivella.

The piece by the group Sankofa Danzafró, directed by Rafael Palacios, will be presented this Thursday, at 8:00 p.m., at the Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo.

With this piece, with which the Teatro Mayor joins the commemoration of the National Afro-Colombian Day, which was celebrated in Colombia on May 21, Sankofa links dance with situations and circumstances surrounding the lives of Africans and their descendants, upon their arrival and adaptation to the new territory.



In this co-production between Sankofa and the Teatro Mayor, a succession of reckless predictions, miraculous births, anticipated tragedies, and libertarian rebellions are staged through dance and through an evocative and polyphonic dramaturgy.

During the play, the audience will be able to contemplate from an intimate look how the vicissitudes of men and women who were enslaved are intertwined with the intervention of their ancestors, their de,ad and the Orishas Yemayá, Elegba, and Changó.

Sankofa has specialized in the creation of Afro-contemporary dance, incorporating knowledge and insights from traditional and urban dances of Afro-Colombian origin.

For its part, the Teatro Mayor, a stage of the Mayor's Office of Bogotá through the District Institute of Arts, celebrates its eleven years of creation with the presentation of this work. The stage opened its doors on Wednesday, May 26, 2010, and since its inception, its main objective has been to establish a dialogue between the most outstanding cultures of Colombia and the world.

During the pandemic, more than 100 shows have passed through the Teatro Mayor and the Teatro Estudio, in which more than 1,000 national artists have participated. In addition, thanks to Teatro Digital, the free performing arts broadcast platform with Bancolombia, 58 broadcasts have been brought to the home of Colombians, which have been reproduced by 16,033,456 viewers.

<https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/articulos/05-27-2021-teatro-mayor-festeja-11-anos-al-paso-de-sankofa-danzafr>



# Rafael Palacios: "Dance has given me the courage to be black without the feeling of inferiority"

 [barcelona.cat / grec / en / blog / rafael-palacios-la-dance-has-given-me-the-courage-to-be-black-without-the-feeling-of-inferiority](https://barcelona.cat/grec/en/blog/rafael-palacios-la-dance-has-given-me-the-courage-to-be-black-without-the-feeling-of-inferiority)

January 27,  
2020



By Andreu Gomila

Rafael Palacios is a legend of Latin American dance. Twenty-three years ago, he founded Sankofa Danzafró, in Medellín, thanks to which he has managed to dignify the lives of many Afro-descendants in Colombia through the movement. It has also recovered the memory of its legacy and is today one of the most powerful companies on the continent.

## **What characterizes Afro-Colombian dance?**

Their struggles of existence and re-existence, their processes of self-enunciation and search for their own identity that was not detached from their African origins.

Afro-Colombian dance is the reflection of a people who, in the midst of the oppression and misfortune they had to live through in times of slavery, knew how to dance to weave community, to reclaim and demonstrate humanity, and above all to find meaning in life through art and creativity.

"Our way of dancing contradicts the stereotypes and imagery of eroticism and exoticism that modernity has foisted on black bodies"

## **What space does it have in Colombia? Has it cost you a lot for Colombian cultural institutions to recognize it as their own?**

During these twenty-three years we have built a space of dignity where our way of dancing contradicts the stereotypes and imagery of eroticism and exoticism that modernity has foisted on black bodies. We have been interested in unveiling the knowledge that the dancing black body has built and the individual and community healing processes that they forge.

All this has given us social recognition and an intercultural dialogue that positions Sankofa Danzafró as a company that proposes the construction of knowledge of the country and that contributes to social transformation.

It has never been easy, coloniality and the colonial matrix continue to overshadow our structural epistemologies through structural racism, however, we continue to move forward convinced that dancing is one of our most powerful and political expressions to envision the best possible horizons in our country and in the world .



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/snl6S6sNHf0>

## **What are its sources?**

The Sankofa dancers are young people of African descent who have learned and cultivated their respective traditional dances. Regions such as Tumaco, Chocó, Uraba, Guapi, Buenaventura, Puerto Tejada, among others, have nurtured what we do, it is that ancient knowledge that gives us the route to think about a contemporary Afro-Colombian dance, a rooted dance, that allows us not to forget about where we come from and it guides us where to go.

Afro-Colombian teachers, such as Francisco Tenorio, Esperanza Bioho, Madolia De Diego,

Ninoska Salamandra, Delia Zapata Olivella, and many more, were in charge of cultivating the cultural expressions of each region and it is thanks to them that we are still, remain and transcend .

On the other hand, my training in contemporary Afro dance with the teachers Germaine Acogny and Irene Tassembedo were the basis of African education that I could later bring to my country to start a dialogue with Africa and found Sankofa Danzaafro.

**I think it was formed in Paris. What did you learn there?**

I lived in Paris for almost six years, this allowed me to study western techniques such as classical ballet, jazz, contemporary and modern dance, but it was also the place where I trained with the Burkina Faso teacher Irene Tassembedo. Paris allowed me to discover and learn from Africa, live in the African Quarter and contrast the European world and the African world at the same time.

| "We seek that beyond the movement, the form, the costumes, the public connects with our message, with what we want to say, give away, tell and propose"

**What connections do you have with Africa? And with other Latin American countries, such as Brazil or the Antilles, where the presence of black slaves was very large?**

I was able to travel to eighteen African countries as a dancer and dance student next to my teacher Tassembedo, I am still in contact with her and we have carried out several projects in both Colombia and Burkina. Last year I worked with Germaine Acogny here in Colombia at a residence for the Young Creators of Chocó, a group with whom I work as a tutor in the Colombian Pacific.

As for Brazil, we have done internships with the Sansacroma group and this year we will host the Liga do Corpo company in March. We all agree that through dance our enslaved ancestors and, we, fight and find inputs and tools to position cognitive and social justice in our environments and thus weaken the social inequality that so suffocates us.

**He has said that they dance to be seen, not to be heard. What does it mean?**

"We dance, more than to be seen, to be heard!" This is our phrase. We seek that beyond the movement, the form, the costumes, the public connects with our message, with what we want to say, give away, tell and propose.

| "My dancers have the desire to transform the social reality that happens to us"

**Where and how do you 'recruit' the dancers?**

Most of them have seen us on-line or through networks and are interested in our way of doing things, they look for us and we receive them so that together we explore possibilities for joint work.



**What characteristics should a dancer have in your company?**

Discipline, perseverance, desire to share their knowledge and learn from others. Illusion to transform the social reality that happens to us.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/KVPEjcRws-4>

**What is the situation of the descendants of slaves in Colombia?**

It is difficult, we live in the areas with the highest poverty rates, lack of hospitals, educational institutions, sewers, appropriate infrastructure, unemployment. An endless number of deficiencies to which the State turns its back. Furthermore, our territories are stalked by armed and criminal actors who have turned rivers and jungles into corridors for drug trafficking, causing massive displacement, rape and death to our social leaders.

**What space has dance played in its positioning towards life?**

From the age of five I realized that this was how I wanted to play, then I clung to dance as a place to face the world, I discovered in it a way of creating discourse, hope, weaving community and identity.

Dance has given me the courage to be black without the feeling of inferiority that the colonial matrix has wished to impose on us, through it I have been able to build the meaning of my life alongside others who dance to celebrate life and battle in the face of adversity.

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# The Dartmouth

## Sankofa Danzafró tells story of Afro-Colombians through dance

by [Elizabeth Garrison](#) | 9/26/19 2:00am

Tonight and Friday night, the Sankofa Danzafró dance troupe will perform its show “The City of Others” in the Moore Theater at the Hopkins Center at 7:30 p.m. Through the art of dance and music, “The City of Others” tells the powerful story of young Afro-Colombians who are struggling to combat the historical legacy of slavery and racism in Colombia.

Sankofa Danzafró was founded in 1997 by director and choreographer Rafael Palacios with the mission of bridging the gap between Afro-Colombians and the African diaspora through art. The name Sankofa Danzafró comes from the African philosophy “Sankofa” which means “to return to the root.” By going back to traditional African culture and customs, the artists can navigate their current reality and find a sense of solidarity among each other.

“The City of Others” explores the lives of young displaced Afro-Colombians trying to overcome the challenges of discrimination and alienation in an urban environment. Palacios said he hopes “The City of Others” to challenge the way people think about slavery.

“It was made in 2010 in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of slavery in Colombia,” Palacios said “We wanted to commemorate the end of slavery, not just by talking about slavery, but also how today’s world is still influenced by its historical impacts.”

According to Palacios, the show is a collaborative piece inspired by the personal stories and backgrounds of the performers. The performance is broken up into a series of vignettes each featuring one of the performers’ own struggle with racism and discrimination in Colombia.

“I worked closely with the dancers to tell the story because they each have their own personal background and history,” Palacios said. “We came together and talked about how this history influenced their own lives.”

According to Hopkins Center publicity director Rebecca Bailey, this performance is a great opportunity for the community to learn more about Afro-Colombian culture and to interact with the artists themselves.

In addition to the performance, there will be a public talk with Palacios at the Top of the Hop at 6:30 p.m. before Thursday's performance. After the show, there will be a dance party with members of Sankofa Danzafro and the Mashrou' Leila dance troupe. Both of these events will give community members the opportunity to personally engage with the performers.

"It is an intra-cultural experience," Palacios said. "So, we are trying to build a social network and remove the boundaries between people of different cultures. We want the Dartmouth community to know a little more about our experiences in Colombia, and vice versa."

The performance invites audience members to interact with a difficult story that is transformed into a highly energetic performance, Bailey said.

"Afro-Colombians as a population are marginalized," Bailey said. "There is a gap in opportunities that are available to them, and they are disproportionately the victims of violence."

Bailey anticipates that "The City of Others," despite its difficult portrayal of diaspora and the lives of displaced young Afro-Colombians, will communicate that there is something beautiful in the experience of seeing this hardship turned into a dynamic performance of moving art.

According to Bailey, audience members will be exposed to a combination of Afro-Colombian musical and dance traditions.

"What we think will be really wonderful for Dartmouth students is that it is really viscerally exciting to watch," Bailey said. "It is made out of dance forms that come out of African dance, Latin dance and this hybrid of Afro-Colombian dance and music — which is one of the most wonderful dance and music cultures in the world because it has given us a lot of great rhythms and dance forms. It also has a contemporary element; you'll see hip hop, which has now become a universal dance language."

Hopkins Center administrator Karina Sainz said that she thinks the show will defy viewers' expectations.

"The music and dance are a combination of traditional Colombian music with new-age influences," Sainz said. "Hopefully, viewers will experience that cross-cultural connection, especially up here in New Hampshire where you don't see much Colombian or Southern American music or theater. Maybe they can see that this type of music is not always traditional and can be very appealing to modern day viewers."



In addition to experiencing unfamiliar rhythms and dance forms, viewers can learn more about the everyday lives and struggles of young Afro-Colombians. “The City of Others” provides viewers with a glimpse of a reality they may be completely unaware of, Bailey said.

According to Bailey, Colombia, following Brazil, has the largest population of people of African descent in Latin America.

“So, hearing about that experience and the challenges and realities those young people face will be really interesting to students at Dartmouth as we contemplate our own country’s history with race and racism,” Bailey said.

After seeing this performance, viewers might realize that we have more in common with other cultures than we might think, Bailey said.

“Coming into the performance, people might not know how relatable the life experiences of young Afro-Colombians are to Americans,” Bailey added.

Bailey said the performance depicts people displaced from the countryside who are now working in city offices.

“We’re in a time where a lot of people have to leave their ancestral homes to go to the cities in order to find opportunities and it is really no different in Colombia,” she said.

<https://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2019/09/sankofa-danzafro-tells-story-of-afro-colombians-through-dance>



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## Sankofa Danzafró. The city of others

Dance , Modern



Photo: courtesy CDMX Theater System

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## Time Out says

Although art exists with and for the soul or, as the choreographer Rafael Palacios affirms, "it is unthinkable not to tie the social to the scenic", from time to time artists are born whose work is so sincere and authentic that it is even easier to perceive their work. The Afro-Colombian dance company Sankofa Danzafró, which Palacios founded in 1997 and directs since then, today is an example that you can dance for something beyond *jouissance*, that you can dance to claim a voice: Sankofa talks about ethnic discrimination and inequality, but also about anyone who feels alien or different in any part of the world.

For the first time we will see this group based in Medellín with the choreography *La ciudad de los otros*, created in 2010 by its director to celebrate 159 years of the abolition of slavery in Colombia.

In the piece, the collective and recognition of the other predominate through movements that decolonize the Afro-descendant body by removing it from the common place of eroticism and eccentricity; the result is a contemporary, urban and cathartic choreography far from the stigmas and stereotypes reproduced in the imagination. Humans hitting and jumping, sometimes on objects, to break walls, ideological barriers and fears.

In *the city of others* that virtue and the connection of its performers with what they are can be recognized; dancers from vulnerable and unfavorable contexts who found themselves through dance. It is a kind of evidence of what Ohad Naharin also looked for when seeing the personal possibilities of each one with his Gaga language, I'm worth the comparison. And it could not be otherwise, because in the name of the group comes penance: Sankofa means "return to the root." It is thus proclaimed by its creator, who in the nineties was a disciple of one of the key figures in modern African dance Irene Tassembedo and who in 2010 would be recognized by the United Nations Organization for the project Steps on Earth as "Good practice of Afro-descendant social inclusion in Latin America".

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01:22

**BY ALBERTO CERVANTES**

**PUBLISHED MONDAY 26 AUGUST 2019**



## Demonstrating racism through dance and body aesthetics

Rafael Palacios leads, through his choreographies, a crusade against racial exclusion, and in an interview with El Financiero, he points out how black dances have been emptied of their social, political, and philosophical meaning.



By Eduardo Bautista | August 13, 2019

Convinced that dance is not only seen but also heard, **Rafael Palacios** has shown through the aesthetics of the body that **racism is the great sore of America**. A wound that he says will only heal to the extent that societies accept that racist behavior has become so normalized that it goes unnoticed.

He himself has suffered this structural racism in **Colombia**, the second country in Latin America with the largest Afro-descendant population. That is why for 22 years he has been leading a **crusade against racial exclusion** from his dance company, Sankofa, which he founded after an extensive trip through Africa to draw on the ancient knowledge of his peoples.

From 2008 to 2016, she led **Pasos de la Tierra**, an educational project that brought together more than 2,000 people from the South Pacific of Colombia with the aim of **strengthening their Afro-descendant identity through dance**. The plan, recognized by the UN as a good practice for Afro-descendant social inclusion in Latin America, **kept young people away from armed conflicts** and contributed to the reconstruction of communities.

His choreographies, which reinterpret African dance roots from a contemporary language, have been recognized in France, Canada, Spain, Jamaica, Brazil, Burkina Faso, the US and China. She is now her turn to Mexico, where she will debut in September with La Ciudad de los Otros, at the Teatro de la Ciudad.

### **Have dances of African origin been stigmatized?**

Our fight in Sankofa is **to break down prejudices**. We cannot continue with those **sexist and erotically charged imaginaries** that reflect our expressions as grotesque or vulgar. Over the years, **black dances** have been emptied of social, political, and philosophical significance until they became caricatures. By moving away from these imaginaries, we recover the cultural and historical context in which they were created and, at the same time, we open paths for contemporary expressions. In Colombia, **dances like the mapalé** have become **erotic and exotic dances** that **paint blacks as a community that is only interested in orgies and sex..** This has also happened in other Latin American countries. I am firmly convinced that we can **rewrite the history of our community** through a body that seeks dignity and equality.

**When you hear that there will be a black dance show, you often think of something exotic that only a few practice now.**

There is a belief that what we do is folklore or tradition and they deny us that contemporary voice that we have. Through our dances we demonstrate the social processes that we live. In Colombia, **Afro people have created urban dances such as the salsa choke, the exotico, and the paso e perra**, which put a young storytelling and storyline in black communities. What is suddenly forgotten is that what we do is a discipline, like ballet. Maybe different from the eurocentric point of view, but it is. Indigenous communities can also be disciplined. We must avoid heteronormativity and the homogenization of knowledge.

**Perreo and reggaeton, which have an African origin, have also been victims of prejudice...**

Societies always find moments in history to be shocked by models that try to make all human beings equal. The party, the scandal and all those expressions that sometimes seem grotesque and that are **part of the reggaeton culture**, what they do is call the attention of a society that is excluding certain communities. What is demanded are the same opportunities that the privileged have. Care must be taken to stigmatize these types of expressions and affirm that they are useless. Maybe the older ones don't like his pejorative lyrics against women, but what would happen if these young people endowed reggaeton with a more social content? All artistic manifestations are questionable. Even tradition, which is not always good. Together, **young and old, we must find new ways to build the world**. Since their origin, black dances have been dances of rebellion. But over time they become meaningless.

**Reggaeton began as a popular expression, but today it is a large-scale commercial phenomenon that does not distinguish social classes...**

That will continue to happen. When cultural manifestations come from the most excluded parts of society, they are, initially, defense mechanisms and preservation of their own identity. At

first they are rejected, they scandalize, but soon brutal capitalism appropriates them and makes money with them. It looks for the phenotypes that are most liked, that generate the most morbidity, and sells them. **The new colonialism appropriates the knowledge of others.** Capitalism knows how to do it very well: when it sees that there is a very powerful cultural manifestation among the most vulnerable, it appropriates it and sells it to everyone. Thus, the people who created a culture are replaced by people who sell a product.

### **Has the same thing happened with hip-hop?**

No, because *hip hop*, from its intrinsic rebellion, has managed to be a universal and commercial language in many ways, but it maintains those flexible cultural traits that **allow it to continue being a local expression**. This music is not built in the same way in Colombia as it is in Mexico, the United States or China. Hip-hop has been able to reveal, through painting, dance and music, the historical circumstances in which the communities that create it have lived, regardless of borders.

<https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/culturas/evidenciar-el-racismo-a-traves-de-la-danza-y-la-estetica-del-cuerpo/>



# 'Dance was our voice when we were denied the word'

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## Culture

Rafael Palacios, director of Sankofa Danzafró, exposes the cultural value of dance. The Afro-descendant group will open the Africa in America Festival with the play 'The City of Others'

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- 'Dance was our voice when we were denied the word'



- 'Dance was our voice when we were denied the word'



- 'Dance was our voice when we were denied the word'

To the rhythm of the traditional, but without losing sight of the modern, Sankofa Danzafró proposes a reunion with Afro-descendant origins through theater, singing, contemporary and urban dance and African rhythms.

Sankofa Danzafró, Afro-Colombian Cultural Corporation founded in 1997 as a space dedicated to dance training and creation, will officially start the Africa in America Festival with the presentation of the contemporary piece 'The City of Others', on Monday May 13 at the Athenaeum of the City of Knowledge, at 7:30 pm

'Dance is a voice in favor of equity. It helped us survive in times of slavery. It was our voice when we were denied the word. It became a narrative, a memory and a hope for the future,' says dancer and choreographer Rafael Palacios, director of Sankofa.

Sankofa is a word of African origin, it comes from Ashanti (Ghana). 'Sanko' means that he is behind and 'fa' that takes from him: look at the past to create the future, and not forget.

In other words, 'it means going back to the roots and, as a philosophy, knowing the past, understanding the present and moving forward with firm steps towards the future. Under this word and principles we created our corporation 22 years ago ', describes Palacios.

Through various pedagogical and staging projects, the corporation has wanted to build a bridge between black communities in Colombia, in search of an ancestral substrate to support the creation of works that stem from the roots of Afro dance, but that they develop within the framework of the everyday, the traditional and the contemporary. For this reason they propose a poetics of dance as an option for social bonding and positioning of Afro-Colombian culture.

In its quest to strengthen cultural identity, Sankofa works hand in hand with private and state organizations. 'The Mayor of Medellín took us into account to celebrate the 159th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. For the date, Sankofa invited Afro-descendant dancers to create a staging. We wonder what it means to celebrate these 159 years', details the director of the group.

The dancer and choreographer exposes that in the elaboration of the work the current condition of Afro-descendants in the city of Medellín, Colombia prevailed, but not 'the nostalgic past in which we were enslaved'. 'And thus the City of Others is born, narratives of 20 artists where we talk about opportunities, the doors that are closed to us and the contributions we make to build cities and nations,' Palacios points out.

'The City of Others betrays the lack of opportunities for human beings that for generations have been marked by ethnic discrimination and social inequality. Black communities and other marginalized people, always observed through the same lens, demand a political power that transcends in authentic forms of coexistence, that the City of Others be a city for everyone ', he details.

This work is a choreographic bet based on Afro-Colombian language and urban dance that evokes sensitivity, the enjoyment of movement and music.

"It is a very powerful piece because it tells of stories of struggle and where each dancer interprets himself on stage demanding equity, respect for his culture, but above all worthy intercultural dialogues," says Palacios.

With a wide repertoire of works, Sankofa has obtained various recognitions such as the 2008 National Dance Prize to the master Palacios for the work 'San Pacho... blessed!' and Mention of the United Nations as Good practice of Afro-descendant social inclusion in Latin America 2010 with the Project Steps on Earth, which is carried out with dancers in the Pacific Region in agreement with the Training for Trainers Program of the Ministry of Culture 2008-2013.

# 'La danza fue nuestra voz cuando se nos negó la palabra'

 [laestrella.com.pa/cafe-estrella/cultura/190513/voz-nego-danza-nuestra-palabra](http://laestrella.com.pa/cafe-estrella/cultura/190513/voz-nego-danza-nuestra-palabra)

## Cultura

Rafael Palacios, director de Sankofa Danzafró, expone el valor cultural del baile. La agrupación afrodescendiente inaugurará el Festival África en América con la obra 'La Ciudad de los Otros'

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- 'La danza fue nuestra voz cuando se nos negó la palabra'



- 'La danza fue nuestra voz cuando se nos negó la palabra'



- 'La danza fue nuestra voz cuando se nos negó la palabra'

Al ritmo de lo tradicional, pero sin perder de vista lo moderno, Sankofa Danza Afro propone un reencuentro con los orígenes afrodescendientes a través del teatro, canto, danza contemporánea y urbana y ritmos africanos.

Sankofa Danza Afro, Corporación Cultural Afro Colombiana fundada en 1997 como espacio dedicado a la formación y creación en danza, iniciará oficialmente el Festival África en América con la presentación de la pieza contemporánea 'La Ciudad de los Otros', el lunes 13 de mayo en el Ateneo de la Ciudad del Saber, a las 7:30 p.m.

'La danza es una voz a favor de la equidad. Nos ayudó a sobrevivir en tiempos de esclavitud. Fue nuestra voz cuando se nos negó la palabra. Se convirtió en narración, recuerdo y en



esperanza para el futuro', asegura el bailarín y coreógrafo Rafael Palacios, director de Sankofa.

Sankofa es una palabra de origen africano, proviene del Ashanti (Ghana). 'Sanko' significa que va detrás y 'fa' que toma de él: mira al pasado para crear el futuro, y no olvidar.

Dicho de otra forma, 'significa regresar a la raíz y como filosofía conocer el pasado, entender el presente y avanzar con pasos firmes hacia el futuro. Bajo esta palabra y principios creamos nuestra corporación hace 22 años', describe Palacios.

Mediante diversos proyectos pedagógicos y de puesta en escena, la corporación ha querido construir un puente entre las comunidades negras en Colombia, en la búsqueda de un sustrato ancestral como respaldo en la creación de obras que parten de la raíz de la danza afro, pero que se desarrollan en el marco de lo cotidiano, lo tradicional y lo contemporáneo. Por ello proponen una poética de la danza como opción de vínculo social y posicionamiento de la cultura afrocolombiana.

En su afán por robustecer la identidad cultural, Sankofa trabaja de la mano con organizaciones privadas y estatales. 'La Alcaldía de Medellín nos tomó en cuenta para celebrar los 159 años de la abolición de la esclavitud. Para la fecha, Sankofa invitó a bailarines afrodescendientes para elaborar una puesta escena. Nos preguntamos qué significa celebrar estos 159 años', detalla el director del grupo.

El bailarín y coreógrafo expone que en la elaboración de la obra imperó la condición actual de los afrodescendientes en la ciudad de Medellín, Colombia, mas no 'el pasado nostálgico en el que fuimos esclavizados'. 'Y así nace La Ciudad de los Otros, narrativas de 20 artistas donde hablamos de las oportunidades, de las puertas que se nos cierran y de los aportes que hacemos para construir ciudades y naciones', puntualiza Palacios.

'La Ciudad de los Otros delata la falta de oportunidades para los seres humanos que por generaciones han sido marcados por la discriminación étnica y la inequidad social. Comunidades negras y otros marginados, observados siempre con el mismo lente, reclaman un poder político que trascienda en auténticas formas de convivencia, que La Ciudad de los Otros sea ciudad para todos', detalla.

Esta obra es una apuesta coreográfica desde el lenguaje afrocolombiano y la danza urbana que evoca la sensibilidad, el disfrute del movimiento y la música.

'Es una pieza muy potente porque habla de historias de lucha y donde cada bailarín se interpreta a sí mismo en el escenario exigiendo equidad, respeto por su cultura, pero sobre todo diálogos interculturales dignos', precisa Palacios.

Con un amplio repertorio de obras, Sankofa ha obtenido diversos reconocimientos como el Premio Nacional de Danza 2008 al maestro Palacios por la obra 'San Pacho... ¡bendito!' y Mención de las Naciones Unidas como Buena práctica de inclusión social afro descendiente en Latinoamérica 2010 con el Proyecto Pasos en la Tierra, el cual se desarrolla con los cultores de la danza en la Región del Pacífico en convenio con el Programa Formación a Formadores del Ministerio de Cultura 2008- 2013.

## Sankofa Danzafro: art as a way against racism

“Society needs to recognize the 'other' as a diverse person,” says dancer Yndira Perea.



The company will perform at the Teatro de la Ciudad. (Special)

Viridiana Contreras  
Mexico City /05.09.2019

Inequality, discrimination, and racism are some of the themes addressed, through African and Afro-Colombian rhythms, by the Colombian company Sankofa Danzafro in La Ciudad de los Otros.

"We are excited to offer a reflection on Afro women and men in a city that is not ours," Yndira Perea, dancer and co-founder of the group, said in an interview, which will be presented at the Teatro de la Ciudad Esperanza Iris on September 13 at 8:30 p.m. and on September 14 at 7 p.m.

The City of Others was created by director Rafael Palacios, who was called by the Medellín mayor's office because they were going to pay homage to the 159th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Colombia. "A call for Afro-Colombian dancers was held in Medellín and 20 artists were chosen, with whom we began the creation of the work," explains Yndira.

The dancer said that the staging has great sociopolitical content, which seeks to generate a reflection on the Afro theme, so that part of its tradition is known but also how these days are handled.

For the dancer, in addition to psychological and social change, "society needs to recognize the other as a diverse person. Everything starts with respect for the other person. And, on the other hand, ignorance allows the strengthening of inequality. That is why we have to make our contribution and help change people's minds, because early education is important, telling about what happens in our territories and traditions".

Sankofa Danzafró's proposal includes current rhythms such as salsa choke and hip hop, and traditional rhythms, such as Bullerengue and Currulao.

#### AND ALSO CREATE SPACES FOR REFLECTION

Sankofa Danzafró has dedicated itself to the investigation, creation and transformation of Afro dance, indicated Yndira Perea. "The proposal has contributed a lot to create spaces for deep reflections on the subject."

<https://www.milenio.com/cultura/sankofa-danzafró-el-arte-como-via-contra-el-racismo>

# The Boston Globe

## Sankofa Danzafró redefines ‘The City of Others’



ROBERT TORRES

**Yndira Perea Cuesta performed a solo dance in “The City of Others.”**

**By Jeffrey Gantz** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**NOVEMBER 04, 2018**

The set for “The City of Others” looks innocuous enough: 11 identical gray chairs. It’s only when 12 performers take the stage that you realize this work — which Colombian company Sankofa Danzafró presented in a Celebrity Series engagement at New England Conservatory’s new Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre over the weekend — is going to burst at the seams. Even at just 50 minutes, “The City of Others” has enough kinetic energy to light up all of Boston. It’s nonstop action — but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t leave room for thought.

Artistic director Rafael Palacios founded Sankofa Danzafró in Medellín in 1997. Sankofa is a word from the Akan people of Ghana; its three syllables mean “return,” “go,” and “look, seek, and take.” The company translates this into Spanish as “volver a la raíz,” or “return to the root.” Colombia, it turns out, has the second-largest population of African



descent in Latin America, so for Palacios and his dancers, the goal is to retrieve and hold onto their African heritage while still being Colombian. That dualism is also implicit in the title “The City of Others” (original Spanish: “La ciudad de los otros”). You’re always an individual in a city of others, but here you can feel like an African in a city of Hispanics. How do you turn “the city of others” into “the city of us”?

The dancers — seven men, five women — come on in dress shirts and ties, dark trousers, and bare feet, as if they were office workers with a dress code they were violating by the omission of shoes. Eleven of them sit in the chairs, which are initially arranged to suggest office cubicles. One lady starts to sashay about, and work, or whatever it is, gives way to dancing.

The second tableau finds everybody standing with fists raised, hanging onto the straps of a subway train. One by one they find seats, and to singing and the pounding of an onstage hand drum, William Camilo Perlaza Micolta begins a solo that’s so explosive, so ecstatic, he looks ready to shed his skin. To the rhythm of a second drum, a series of courtship duets start up, with the ladies swiveling and the men strutting. Shirts may come untucked, but the footwork stays right with the beat. Yndira Perea Cuesta, her dreadlocks flying, bookends the section with a solo that’s the equal of Perlaza Micolta’s.

In his program note, Palacios states that “The City of Others” was commissioned in 2010 and “created from our personal experiences of racism and oppression in our daily lives in Medellín.” The chairs conjure a waiting room at one point and perhaps a prison at another. Racism is represented by aggressive dancers who knock one another down with their shoulders. Toward the end, three large plywood panels are brought out; lit to look like coffins, they form barriers, enclosures. Tilted at a 45-degree angle, they’re an obstacle for the dancers to climb and surmount.

But with its limited narrative, “The City of Others” can’t fully explore the kind of experiences Palacios is talking about. What the piece offers instead is the exuberance — and sometimes the anger — of an inclusive dance style that, fusing Latin and African and hip-hop, tells its own story. And creates its own community: No matter how disparate or individual their choreography, the dozen performers manage to express their unity. By the end, when they lift Perlaza Micolta and María Elena Murillo Palacios aloft, they’ve created a city of dance.

#### “THE CITY OF OTHERS”

Performance piece choreographed and directed by Rafael Palacios. Performed by Sankofa Danza Afro. Presented by the Celebrity Series of Boston. At: New England Conservatory Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre, Saturday Nov. 3. Remaining performance: Nov. 4. Tickets \$50. 617-482-6661, [www.celebrityseries.org](http://www.celebrityseries.org)

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2018/11/04/sankofa-danza-fro-redefines-the-city-others/DvG200xRTTCqccqrEWBzUP/story.html>

# ford

## City of Others

In the realm of dance and social change, Sankofa Danzafró is making its powerful choreographic voice well-heard, one continent at a time. The Afro-Colombian company, founded by Rafael Palacios in 1997 on the Pacific coast of Colombia, brings its internationally acclaimed 2010 production “The City of Others” to the [Celebrity Series of Boston](#), to be performed in New England Conservatory’s (NEC) newly completed Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre on November 3 & 4. Performed by a cast of 20 dancers, “City” addresses social issues of wealth disparity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and racism in Colombia in an impactful mix of dance, music and minimal stage sets.

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*Sankofa Danzafró performing at Battery Dance Festival, New York. Photograph courtesy of Sankofa Danzafró*

“‘The City of Others’ is based on my own experiences and the dancers’ experiences with regard to racism in Colombia,” choreographer Rafael Palacios told me in a recent conversation, “and the struggles to resist and therefore debilitate it.”

The word “Sankofa” translates as “to return to the root.” This concept is deeply prevalent in Palacios’s work, using the past as a lens through which to look at the present and future. When asked how this concept applies to “The City of Others” and Sankofa Danzafró’s work as a whole, Palacios noted that the company’s mission “is to question the overall knowledge [and] to build a voice of self-awareness, which will allow us to reveal the ‘epistemologías’ of the African diaspora in the world. This concept applies to ‘The City of Others’ as a concept that gives us solutions and resolutions to establish cognitive and social justice in the present.”

Many may be surprised to learn that Colombia is home to the second largest population of African descent in Latin America. Palacios describes the resulting Afro-Colombian dance form as a full-sensory experience. “Afro-Colombian dance and music are artistic, spiritual, and philosophical expressions, through which the Afro-Colombian community is been able to transcend and build its own identity, technically and physically. Afro-Colombian dance and music are powerful and sophisticated expressions, including currulao, bullerengue, mapalé, among others, which communicate with ancestral African dances. We do this because we want [to] compliment the history between Africa and Colombia, our origins.”

Gary Dunning, executive director of Celebrity Series of Boston, was struck by “the visual power of the dancing” when he saw Sankofa perform at the Association of Performing Arts Professionals, APAP, in New York. “Sankofa has a very easy to identify Afro-movement style that I knew would be familiar to our audience; you could see where the roots were. At the same time, it blends with Latin American movement and sound. We’ve presented companies working in that area, but this was a particularly unique style. While their roots are in Africa, their home is in Colombia. It’s different than our audience has seen.”



Sankofa Danzafró performing at Battery Dance Festival, New York. Photograph courtesy of Sankofa Danzafró

For Dunning, Palacios's work will give Celebrity Series' audiences a refreshingly new experience, too. "[At Celebrity Series] We've been presenting dance for many decades," Dunning recounted. "In recent years we've concentrated on contemporary ballet, post-modern dance, and we've been presenting them in the Shubert Theatre [on a larger scale]....but our artistic footprint was missing the 'downtown loft' companies." The question for Dunning became, "Can we show some of the newer choreographers who are, in a sense, taking dance in their own direction?" With NEC's new 225-seat black box theatre now in play, this question expanded to "can I bring my audience to a new experience—not in a proscenium setting—and can they see dance in a new way that is not being shown in a touring capacity in Boston?"

With dynamic companies [Ephrat Asherie Dance](#) and [Dance Heginbotham](#) also in the mix, Dunning felt that Sankofa would be the perfect complement, and would shift the focus to those working in a "contemporary small-scale manner all around the world." Dunning expects the intimacy of NEC's new theatre to harmonize with these works. "Even lighting takes on a different tone," said Dunning, who acknowledges works shown in the Shubert, while beautiful, are subject to an expansive environment, and read as "very presentational." In contrast, the black box theatre will provide a more "visceral experience" of seeing dance up close, whether feeling a dancer's landing ripple across the floor or hearing a musician's breath between chords.

This human element will surely heighten viewers' appreciation of "The City of Others," which Palacios believes can instigate social change in Colombia, Boston, and beyond. "Denouncing injustice is always the first step to social transformation, anywhere in the world," he began. "To speak of what affects us as a community is to point out a problem that not only affects us, but society as a whole. Our stories not only serve as a complaint. Our motto [is] 'We dance more than to be seen, to be heard!' This motto invites us to reflect and take action as a whole, to achieve a better humanity."

Dunning agrees with this sentiment and expanded, "Often [as the presenter] we have to make the effort to put it out there and hope for the best that people will be stimulated on their own." It is his hope that presenting "The City of Others," and the Celebrity Series' ongoing work, will prompt audience members to "try different things. Having an audience that has a broad cultural experience—that is able to engage the work and understand it from their own perspectives—[will ultimately] help Boston to have a richer cultural fabric as a whole."

[https://fjordreview.com/blogs/all/sankofa-danzafro-city-of-others](https://fjordreview.com/blogs/all/sankofa-danzaфро-city-of-others)

## REVIEW: ‘The City of Others’ crosses time, borders through dance

By KITTY GUO  
October 26, 2018



*On Wednesday night, Gloria Kaufman International Dance Center hosted “The City of Others,” a performance by acclaimed Afro-Colombian dance group Sankofa Danzafro. (Photo courtesy of Visions and Voices)*

Passersby would be forgiven for wondering whether the Gloria Kaufman International Dance Center had turned into a nightclub Wednesday at 3 p.m. and again at 7:30 p.m. Sankofa Danzafro, an Afro-Colombian dance group from Medellín, Colombia, performed a piece called “The City of Others,” that explored the struggles people of color in urban communities face, replete with thumping, rhythmic music.

In Akan, a Ghanian language, Sankofa means “to return to the root,” and “The City of Others” fully embodied the word’s etymology and philosophy. In addition to the high-energy techno beats inspired by Latin and hip-hop music, a portion of the choreography was set to Vallenato music, a popular genre of Colombian folk music where the plaintive, mournful crooning of one of the dancers was accompanied by djembes, a West African goblet drum, and maracas.

he choreography also seamlessly integrated the traditional and the contemporary. Age-old dances such as the Bullerengue, the Currulao and the Abozao transitioned into the kind of moves found on the dance floor at a frat party.



The heavy emphasis on history and lineage was incongruous with the dancers' costumes, which were the standard business casual attire one might find in a corporate environment — ties and button down shirts tucked into slacks. They alluded to the daily 9-to-5 grind, a routine familiar to city dwellers. However, the dancers' feet remained bare, suggesting a tie, however faint, to their ancestral roots.

The most impressive aspect of “The City of Others” was the dancers' stamina; they were able to maintain their intensity for a full hour. The group was small, comprising only 12 dancers — five women and seven men. But the energy demanded of them by the choreography was that of a full corps. The program, which was full of leaps, stomps and kicks, involved expansive, expressive gestures. There was no half-hearted going-through-the-motions, no listlessness or signs of fatigue; each performer gave 110 percent, all the way through to the final bows. In a venue as small and intimate as Kaufman's space, the dancers' strength and spirit were infectious. At the end, the audience stood up to unleash a thunderous round of applause.

Afterward, Kaufman Vice Dean Jodie Gates, Sankofa Danzafró artistic director Rafael Palacios and two dancers, who took the stage still in costume and struggling to catch their breath, held a Q&A session. Through a translator, Palacios, who spoke in Spanish, relayed his inspiration for the choreography — the hostility, loneliness and discrimination he experienced living in Medellín — and how he wanted to examine the treatment of African diaspora communities living in Colombia as second class citizens.

It's clear from Sankofa Danzafró's popularity (The New York Times called the show a “revelation”) that their mission and message has resonated with audiences beyond Medellín, and that marginalized people from all walks of life can relate to its message of rising up, claiming the political and social power that has been denied to them for so long, and declaring — this is everyone's city.

<https://dailytrojan.com/2018/10/26/review-the-city-of-others-crosses-time-borders-through-dance/>



(/media/k2/items/cache/6ddb2450462828abf9aabc88d6bfb7fe\_XL.jpg)

Monday, February 05 2018

## Rafael Palacios, the teacher of contemporary Afro dance

*The city of others* has been, until now, the famous work of Rafael Palacios, a dancer from an early age and a master of contemporary Afro dance technique.

**By: Vanessa Márquez Mena**

viveafro@gmail.com (mailto:Katy17861@gmail.com)

Rafael has a slow, low, somewhat shy tone of voice. Seeing it, one does not imagine that all the wisdom of a dance that comes from Africa is transmitted through its slim body, because precisely **Sankofa** (<http://sankofadanzaafro.com>) means "going back to the roots". He does not appear to be his age either, he mixes himself among the young dancers and he looks like one more than 26 or 27 years old.

The story of 'Rafa' as he is known by close beings, does not start from his birth but from the love story of his parents. Some young people from different ethnic groups and regions who, regardless of the social prejudices of that time, decided to unite their lives. **His father is from Munguindó in the middle of the Selva del Chocó**, to get there, you have to cross a long journey of six hours through the Atrato river and **his mother is from Ituango, Antioquia**. Both arrived in Medellín in search of work and study, and for 'Rafa' that courage of his parents was the base to educate them.

"I say that there is a lot of courage and there is a lot of awareness of seeing the other as a human being and not as racialized bodies ... All that they faced was the basis for raising us, for giving us a type of courage and not settling for the difficulties that we meet in life".



**Sankofa is a dance company that was born in 1997, but its founder, Rafael Palacios Callejas started dancing from the age of 5 thanks to his father** who was the dance teacher at the institution where he studied. Later, in high school, he continued to dance Colombian traditional dance and by the end of school he already knew that he wanted to be a professional dancer.

He started a new life in Bogotá, there he studied at the National Ballet of Colombia, with Esperanza Biohó at the Colombia Black Cultural Foundation and then, as fate always has his move to put him in the perfect place, he met Germaine Acogny, director of the Mudra school -Afrique and with it the contemporary Afro dance technique.

"I asked him where he could learn the technique (...) he told me that if he wanted to learn it, he had to go to France. I saved money, got my tickets, the Visa and went to France behind it. I also met Irene Tassembdo who was finally the teacher who formed me, with Irene I spent five years studying contemporary Afro dance and also in her company I traveled through 18 countries in Africa with a show of which I was a part".

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Five years have passed since 'Rafa' arrived in Paris, he devoted himself to studying classical ballet, jazz and contemporary Afro. He came to Colombia with all the desire and motivation to teach what he learned, to found his corporation and to debut as a choreographer. He then began to teach a technique and train dancers of a dance that until now was unknown in Colombia "I started the company with five people: Luisa Maturana, Yndira Perea, Yadira, Paola, Erik de Cartagena, who already lives abroad. We did some early work that the public actually accepted very well. "

Since those beginnings, Yndira Perea Cuesta (one of the first dancers) has been hand in hand and with total fidelity to Sankofa, has been in the corporation for 20 years and is now the director of another cultural process: *Wangari Danza afro* . Others, such as Camilo Perlaza and Feliciano Blandón, arrived shortly after and still continue, because for them 'Rafa' is their father.

This is how Sankofa was projected with great success, Rafael wanted to bring the voice of Africa to every corner, to break with the caricature of the erotic and exotic continent, he assumed that challenge with great momentum and with a clear message "not everything is in Europe or in Let's look at Africa, the United States, which has a lot to tell us. "

*"We don't dance to be seen but to be heard" Sankofa.*

Those types of movements, the aesthetics and philosophy of contemporary Afro dance began to make their appearance not only in Medellín but worldwide. Rafael created the work *San Pacho bendito* with which he was the winner of the 2008 National Dance Prize, later, *The city of others* , which was released in 2010 in the month of Afro-Colombianism.

**In October 2017, Sankofa turned 20 years old, and his gift was precisely the recognition by the University of Antioquia and the Ministry of Culture at the National Awards, to that, *The city of others* , which we could call the work cusp of Rafael Palacios.**

### Sankofa Danza Afro



*The city of others* was a work created from the experience of the group of dancers in relation to being Afro in Medellín, it is in this way that it deals with topics that not only occur in this city, looking for a house or renting it, getting a job, enter university, ride a bus, hand over a resume, etc. The city became a complaint mechanism, a way of speaking about contemporary racism.

Since that May 21, 2010, the play was premiered at the Pablo Tobón Uribe Theater, which is still in force and has been able to travel to countries such as Brazil, New York, Canada, China, Uruguay, Peru and Paris. "We believe that it is a work that still It has a lot to say, despite all these years that have passed, the public connects in any country we go to, any city in Colombia. Talking about immigration, about oppressed societies, or the so-called minorities, is a current issue, it is a political position that we have to assume in order to continue approaching the body and dance with its knowledge in a political way ".

**Rafael is a cultural manager who develops various projects with communities and with different entities. After finishing her professionalization in dance at the University of Antioquia, she continues her studies in Southern Epistemologies with CLACSO and the University of Colima.**

Her days are full of work, rehearsals, and lots of reading. Authors like Toni Morrison remind him of his wife, who as a good chocoana has many stories to tell, others like Quijano, Mignolo, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Ángela Davis and Manuel Zapata Olivella allow him to reflect on how the body and art can dialogue to transmit forceful messages.

"There are many people who speak about the Afro theme in the world, what we need is more eyes and more discipline to be sharing that knowledge. Believe yourself a very talented dancer who depends only on your body and virtualism, is an empty dancer, is a dancer who at a given moment has nothing to say to the public other than his physical qualities," he concludes.

\* Photographs: Fernando Hurtado.

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## THE GUEST OF RFI

### Rafael Palacios presents the Colombian dance company 'Sankofa' in Paris

By **Jordi Batallé**

Broadcast on 12-04-2017 Modified on 12-04-2017 at 11:49



The choreographer Rafael Palacios at the RFI studios Photo: Jordi Batallé

This Saturday at the *Café de la danse* in Paris and within the framework of the Don Quijote Festival, the show *La ciudad de los otros* was presented by the Colombian company *Sankofa Danza* directed by the dancer and choreographer Rafael Palacios. Combining contemporary dance, urban dance and African rhythms, Sankofa proposes a reencounter with the origins of Colombians of African descent, without losing the train of modernity of dance.

**Rafael Palacios** was born in Copacabana, Colombia in 1969.

Dancer and choreographer, researcher of expressions of Afro-Colombian dance. His training in African dance and his career as a dancer in Europe and Africa, were the basis for the creation of the Sankofa Company,



Sankofa show poster© Sankofa

which has a wide repertoire of works that have been presented in Colombia, Canada, Jamaica, the United States and different countries in Europe and Africa.

In 2008, he was awarded the National Dance Prize of the Ministry of Culture with the work San Pacho Bendito; In 2009, together with his company, he carried out a creative internship in Burkina Faso, Africa. He has served as teacher of the Training Program for Trainers of the Ministry of Culture 2007-2012, in connection with his Project Steps on Earth, which in 2010 receives the recognition of the UN as a Good Practice of Afro-descendant Social Inclusion in Latin America, by the work developed with the dance communities of the municipalities of Tumaco, Guapi, Puerto Tejada, Buenaventura, Quibdó, Apartadó, San Andrés and Providencia. Among his recent creations are The City of Others (2010), Expiration Date (2011), Bunde for a Black Angel (2011) and Dirty in the Eye (2012).



# The New York Times

## Review: The Battery Dance Festival Evokes Courtship Rituals Amid Flying Hats



**Battery Dance Festival** Yndira Perea, center, and other dancers from Sankofa Danzafró, a troupe from Medellín, Colombia, that made its New York debut at Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park in Battery Park City on Tuesday. Credit Paula Lobo for The New York Times  
**By Siobhan Burke**

Aug. 19, 2015

The Battery Dance Festival, presented by the Battery Dance Company in Lower Manhattan for 34 years, has become known for its international roster. This year artists from India, Norway and Poland are among those appearing along the Hudson River — routinely backed by stunning, if blinding, sunsets — at Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park in Battery Park City.

Tuesday brought the festival's first-ever South American guests, with the electrifying New York debut of the troupe Sankofa Danzafró from Medellín, Colombia. It shared an evening of Colombian dance with Pajarillo

Pinta'o Dance Company, a New York troupe founded in Germany by the Limón Dance Company soloist (and Pina Bausch moonlighter) Daniel Fetecua Soto.

Sankofa means “reach back and get it” in Akan, a Ghanaian language, and it describes what both companies do: carry traditions into the present, whether fully intact or fused with something new. The down-to-earth performers of Pajarillo began with a medley of Colombian folkloric dances, upbeat courtship rituals (for the most part) in which straw hats, handkerchiefs, and candles, respectfully bestowed and exchanged, served as tokens of affection or more. (The riverside breeze sent hats flying, a cause for improvisation.)

With their weaving patterns, waving skirts (for the women) and kneading, close-to-the-floor steps, these dances had an inviting formal simplicity that was lost in “Amalgama,” a more contemporary concoction with a live band. (Pablo Mayor, on piano, composed the jazz-folk music.) Still, any chance to watch the statuesque Clement Mensah, an arrestingly silky mover, is welcome; he and Julia Kelly played giddy lovebirds whose separate daily routines (brushing teeth, tying shoes) merged into one.

The evening’s revelation was Sankofa’s “La Ciudad de los Otros” (“The City of Others”), an episodic work about urban struggle and resilience combining elements of hip-hop and Afro-Colombian dance. Could an indoor stage have contained this company’s energy? The seven dancers and four musicians worked seamlessly together, with breakout moments for both singers and dancers. (The music transitioned from live to recorded, building to thumping techno.)

Costumes of collared shirts and ties suggested a workday grind or pressure to conform. That uniformity made departures from it all the more powerful, like violently shuddering solos for the spidery William Camilo Perlaza Micolta and the troupe’s leader of sorts, Sandra Catalina Mosquera Moreno. The stage was not the only platform: Chairs, plywood planks and other dancers created multilevel terrain for all to navigate. Ending in a tight formation, they even stuck together for the bow.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/20/arts/dance/the-battery-dance-festival-evokes-courtship-rituals-amid-flying-hats.html>