



## Millicent Johnnie

Millicent Johnnie is a culture bearer, choreographer, scholar and world citizen. A child of South Louisiana and daughter of dance she follows in the footsteps of her immediate ancestors as well as her dance heroines. Her parents, jazz and blues musician, Donald Briggs and, historian and scholar, Geneva Johnnie enrolled her in ballet at the age of 5 and soon after put the biographies of Alvin Ailey and Katherine Dunham within her reach. Her own grandmother lived to dance, Alma Briggs, a Zydeco dance queen, took her last breath on the dance floor. By her teenage years she was hosting a TV show on Acadiana Open Channel called *Those Tender Years*; met by protests and objection by the local KKK, they subjected her to ongoing harassment and threats. Ms. Johnnie traces her commitment to social justice and professional determination to this early opposition. At 15, she attended the International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference in North Carolina and shared a taxicab with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women. Eventually, she would join UBW as a resident choreographer and tour as the ensemble's rehearsal director. This is only the opening scene to Ms. Johnnie's commercially and critically successful career as an American choreographer.

The Louisiana native went on to earn both her BFA and MFA in dance at Florida State University. Millicent's work as a dance anthropologist started in the small town of Kaplan, LA and continued in the cities she grew up between, Lafayette and New Orleans. From there she began tracing back the path of the African Diaspora through the Caribbean, South America and the continent of Africa. She remains connected to her roots and continues on her course to bridge the connection to her personal and ancestral past with her gift of dance. Ms. Johnnie has served as a choreographer for the New York City Opera working with award-winning composers Bernice Johnson Reagon and Toshi Reagon. In addition, she has worked with the U.S. Cultural Ambassadors of Music- UNIVERSES, Grammy Award-winner Bill Summers, Los Hombres Calientes, and notable directors Peter Sellars, Rhodessa Jones, Robert Wilson, Chey Yew and Liesl Tommy, to name a few. Johnnie received commissions from companies like: Cleo Parker-Robinson Dance, Hubbard Street II, Alternate ROOTS (Uprooted: The Katrina Project) and the Sarasota Dance Company. Her work has been presented on award-winning stages including: The Public Theater in New York City, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the National Black Arts Festival, Bam Harvey Theater, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Gammage Theatre, and internationally in South Africa, Brazil, and India.

Johnnie has received numerous awards and nominations for her work including: Prague International Dance Festival Award ("Best Choreography"), First Place International Dance Title for Hip Hop Choreography (Wrath, Phlava Hip Hop and Jazz Dance Company). Times-

Standard Beti's Choice Award (2010 -"Best Director" and "Best Musical"—"Rent" produced by Ferndale Rep), and Theatre Bay Area Award (2015 -"Best Choreographer"—"Party People" produced by Berkeley Rep). Her work has been funded nationally by: New England Foundation for the Arts; National Dance Project (NDP)—Bamboula (Cleo Parker Robinson Dance) 2014, Creative Capital Project Grant in the Performing Arts—Cry You One (Mondo Bizzaro) 2013, National Theater Project (NTP)—Cry You One (Mondo Bizzaro) 2012, NTP—The Burning (Progress Theater) 2012, NTP—Party People (UNIVERSES) 2011, Multi-Arts Production Fund (MAPP)—Cry You One (Mondo Bizzaro) 2011.

In September 2015, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble launched its 45th Anniversary Season with the premiere of "Bamboula: Musician's Brew" recipient of the National Dance Project, choreographed by Johnnie. This interdisciplinary work is set to compositions by jazz greats "Big Chief" Donald Harrison and Charles Vincent Burwell, whose music was performed; live by The Isaac Points Jakarta Band. Bamboula will tour for the 2016/17 season.

Her Creole heritage has taught her the beauty and necessity of versatility; Johnnie's success in the concert dance world is complimented by her impact and demand in the commercial arena working with artists: Usher Raymond, Chrisette Michele, Bill Summers (Los Hombres Calientes), Lord Jamar (Brand Nubian), Tekeitha Wisdom (Wu-Tang), celebrity photographer Jonathan Mannion and staging opening acts for artists like Dave Chappelle (Tallahassee Civic Center) and Angélique Kidjo (National Black Arts Festival). She choreographed the feature film, *Scary Movie 5*, directed by Malcolm D. Lee and produced by David Zucker, which opened in summer 2013 and more recently served as a choreographer for Walt Disney Creative Entertainment's *Disney Frozen* creative development workshops (Disneyland).

This December, Johnnie presented her mentor Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Artistic Director of the Urban Bush Woman, with Dance Magazine's "Lifetime Achievement Award." As The New York Times has put it, "As far as dance celebrities are concerned, the annual Dance Magazine Awards is as close as they come to a star-studded event." Mikhail Baryshnikov presented the award to Kain; Millicent Johnnie to Zollar, Julie Kent to Gomes, Martín Santangelo to Barrio and Valda Setterfield to Vaughan. While she is proud of her own accomplishments, it is these moments to acknowledge her legacy that make her feel most successful.

Millicent Johnnie's kinesthetic language is robust; a patois of African, American and European—from classical to hip-hop and folk. The infinite variations she offers through the work she creates whether; on large scale stage productions and operas, in academia, for commercial film and television, on world renown ensembles like Cleo Parker Robinson Dance and UBW, or just a little diddy she does in her living room, her movement is layered with soul, athleticism and grace! Like the gumbo her people are so famous for, it starts with the roux of her training and is seasoned just right with her research and experience; providing a feast for your eyes and fuel for your rhythmic heart.

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