

## Belize to Broadway

### Belizean: Born and Bred

**Belize! The place where all of my seeds were planted.** Every single one of them. When I look back at my professional journey, I can pinpoint the very moment where I discovered and explored the skill that led me to those opportunities. All of those moments were nestled in the land of the free, by the Carib Sea, Belize.

I can remember sneaking away from my Mom's office at Radio Belize to watch the Belize National Dance Company take class with late Cuban Professor, Eduardo Rivero, at the old Bliss Center. I would slip in through a jagged opening in wire fence and peek through the glass panes in the door. Those evenings created the seed form of what I am living now. Another seed was my participation and observation the Festival of the Arts. The festival was one of the first times I had ever experienced the stage. Performing for the festival was the highlight of my year while I attended Wesley Primary Schools. By the time I got to high school (Wesley College), every chance I got to dance, act, play the drums and sing, I was first in line. **Eventually, dance took over my interests.**

**Dance club at Wesley College and dancing with Joseph Stamp - Romero led to my studies with the Belize National Dance Company and Dramatic Forces School of Dance.** My marching band experience at Wesley Primary School and Wesley College led me to the Dance direction of nationally known Minnorettes Marching Band. My yearly skits during drug prevention week in high school led me to earning the understudy role of the lead character, Anansi, in NICH's Belizean musical, "Mythical Rainforest"; and directing and choreographing four successful productions for the Rotary Club of Belize.

I had great experiences, but I knew, instinctively, that I desired more. I knew I was capable of being and creating beyond where I physically existed. **Through the connections of the Yeager family, I was able to take pivotal actions that resulted in a tuition scholarship to study Dance at Belhaven University in Jackson Mississippi.**



## Leap of Faith: Destination Belhaven University

Though I had a tuition scholarship, there were other expenses to cover before I could begin my studies. Room and board, books, student visa, plane tickets, and other related expenses amounted to more money than I had access to at the time. I am not sure whether it was faith or insanity, but I made it known, to all who could hear, that I received a scholarship and I was going to take it!

As the feedback rushed at me like a roaring stream, some good and some bad, I was calm and certain that I was making the right decision. Nothing would have changed my mind. Not even the disapproval of those closest to me. August to December 2006 was spent fundraising and lobbying for support to attend Belhaven. **Over those four months I received support from a myriad of places like Rotary Club of Belize, Belize National Dance Company, and most importantly: my family.** January 7th, 2007, I boarded a flight to begin my first semester at Belhaven College, now Belhaven University. I was amazed by the support I received, and I was exhausted by how hard I had to work to make it unto that plane. Ultimately, my excitement outweighed my exhaustion.

Walking through the campus to get to class, in a temperature that I never felt before, was enough to make anyone question their decision of moving from the tropics during the winter. I thought to myself, "chups! Nuh even freezah dis kole. Dah we wrang wid me?" (kisses teeth! Not even a refrigerator is this cold. What is wrong with me) Again, my excitement overpowered my climate and culture shock.

**My time at Belhaven was purposeful.** I was embraced by the faculty and staff. They demonstrated a genuine concern for my artistic and personal growth. Infact, it was (in part) because of their faith-based practices that I was able to develop a "strong like bull" faith. It was always in my instincts but without that practice, it would not have been manifested. Artistically, I was given the tools and then tested and pushed beyond my self-imposed limits. What stood out to me most was how they allowed me to maintain my Caribbean-ness while learning universal practices in Dance. **Though my culture may have been foreign to them, they allowed me to weave what was, with what is, as I reached for what I wanted to be: An International Dance Artist.**

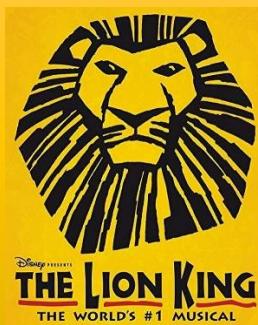


## I Fell in Love with the Bird: Awassa Astrige/ Ostrich (Asadata Dafora 1932)

I vividly recall sitting in a Dallas Black Dance Theatre show at Jackson State University's Rose E. McKoy Auditorium, while I was a student at Belhaven University. This experience was a pivotal moment in my life. Gracing the stage were men and women that exuded both grace and athleticism. The perfect synergy of the two. From where I was sitting, I could have seen the sweat on their brows and heard the subtle breathes as they defied the laws of gravity and inertia. A blend of drama, romance, sensuality and cultural jubilation filled the auditorium as the show progressed. **I thought to myself, "why do I feel like I know these people?"** Their movements looked exactly how I felt. It was like we spoke the same language but without words. Suddenly, my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a singular drum that permeated the darkness in the theatre. Its sound waves arrested every thought that meandered in my mind. The stage curtain opened, lights slowly warmed the stage, and at its perfect illuminance entered an outward expression of my soul: Awassa Astrige/Ostrich.

The kingly male dancer entered the stage with his heart first. His sculpted arms moved with an ebb and flow that reminded me of the Caribbean Sea. His ever-undulating spine, carried by his sure footing, commanded the stage. Eventually the whole theatre belonged to him. His entire body glistened above and below the majestic feathers that royally draped from his hips. I don't think I was breathing during that enchanted moment. There it was, the very essence of me, my dance, my story, my spirit; encapsulated in a little less than six minutes. **Not only was this work of art etched in Black Dance history, but it also made an everlasting imprint on my heart.**

One master class, scholarship and a two-week intensive (with the company) later, I was a member of the Dallas Black Dance Theatre. Among the many amazing performances, I've had with the company, performing Awassa Astrige/Ostrich was the most rewarding. To date I have been blessed with the opportunity to perform this timeless work in USA, Belize, Haiti and Jamaica.



## The Uncharted Plains: Instincts and Discernment

"That's it!", I whispered to myself as I exited the stage after my first time performing Awassa Astringe/Ostrich. I felt a moment of completion. A moment of peace, and a moment of accomplishment. Most of all, I was washed in a spirit of gratitude. After that moment, I danced with the company for one more season. When the end came, I still felt that moment of completion. **I was at peace and so I decided to move on. To what exactly? At that time, I had no idea, but I had developed the habit of honoring my instincts and discernment (the twins) over my comprehension.**

A week after leaving Dallas Black Dance Theatre, I accepted an offer to be the Associate Artistic Director of Dance for what was to be a new and vibrant performing arts conservatory in Plano Texas. I was excited to exercise a marriage of my various passions. Two of them being teaching and choreographing. Teaching has always been a passion of mine. My early collegiate studies were focused on Teacher education. **Though I transitioned to Fine Arts, my undercurrent was always that of an educator.**

I must admit that the job turned out to be much bigger than I had anticipated. Not only was I teaching and choreographing, I was also leading in the administration department. By the beginning of the following year, I was leading an amazing faculty and staff and managing a business with a two-million-dollar budget.

As I reflect on my time in that capacity, I am in awe about the power of our instinct. To every challenge that preceded a victory, I knew exactly what to say, how to say it and what to do and when to do it. I was subconsciously fearless and relentless with my leadership. It was all instincts. I believe that it was in that season where I became aware and intentional about tuning in to instinct and instead of simply thinking, discerning.

The twins chauffeured me through a rocky terrain: bumpy slopes and dirt roads. Once in a while we would come to a smooth path that provided fresh air and a scenic view that eased the tension from the journey. These terrains stretched from Washington, D.C with a pit stop in St. George Utah and an extended stay in Kingston Jamaica. **Each stop provided a balm that I needed for the next part of the journey.**

As I am preparing to settle down in New York, a destination pinned by my habitual leap of faith, I continue to express gratitude for my peaks and valleys. The divine occurrence of both prepared me for what I am about to do. **With great excitement, I am preparing to join dance ensemble in Broadway Company of THE LION KING.** It was a forgotten dream. I didn't mean to forget it but it just happened and that's ok. **I now know that when we have a desire in our hearts and we submit ourselves to the process, God will fulfill them in ways that the greatest intellectuals cannot conceive. "We can set our goals, but God sets our destiny."**