

# ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

*Awassa Astrige/Ostrich* (1932)  
(Ailey Company Premiere – 2014)

*Choreography:* Asadata Dafora  
Recreated by Charles Moore  
Restaged by Ella Thompson-Moore  
*Music:* Carl Riley  
*Costumes:* Catti  
*Lighting Design:* Craig Miller

Sierra Leone-born choreographer **Asadata Dafora** blended his vision of a traditional African dance with Western staging in **Awassa Astrige/Ostrich**. This groundbreaking 1932 solo, set to Carl Riley’s score of African drumming and flute, was one of the first modern dance compositions to fuse African movements with Western staging. With arms flapping like wings, torso rippling and head held high, a warrior is transformed into the proud, powerful ostrich — the king of birds.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s Antonio Douthit-Boyd in Asadata Dafora’s *Awassa Astrige/Ostrich*. Photo by Paul Kolnik

“After the audience buzz died down and the lights dimmed, you heard the slow beat of an African drum for Asadata Dafora’s *Awassa Astrige/Ostrich* (1932)—**and you’re transported half way round the world...**with his undulating arms, thrusting chest, and proud head, took us to an African grassland. **Totally satisfying.**”

*Dance Magazine*

“But Carl Riley’s music — rhythmic African drumming and slow flute melody — adds its own coolly double-layered atmosphere; and **the choreography makes the ostrich inward and complex...**”

*The New York Times*

“With each step, his supple spine curved forward by a foot, mimicking a bird’s serpentine neck. When he squatted down in a deep, second-position plie, going up on his toes and holding the pose for 10 thigh-burning seconds, **the crowd went crazy.**”

*The Washington Post*

## Asadata Dafora

**Asadata Dafora (1890-1965)**, a native of free town Sierra Leone, West Africa, was 40 years old when he came to New York in 1929. Earlier, he had been in Europe teaching African dance while studying music, and for a time, sang at La Scala. However his true interest was always the rich heritage of African art and culture. Not only did he study the folklore of his own country, but he traveled extensively throughout Africa seeking additional knowledge. His unique talents burst upon the New York entertainment scene with a short run of the Opera *Kykunkor*, subtitled the Witch Women. *Kykunkor* not only shattered many myths concerning the potential of Black ethnic materials as themes for concert dance, but proved that black dancers could be successful on the American concert stage. He later worked with Orson Welles and John Houseman on a celebrated Federal Theater production of *Macbeth* set in Haiti. His company *Sholoka Oloba*, was made up of 25 Africans and African Americans whose dancing was acclaimed by critics and audiences. Dafora is recognized as the first to present African dance on the concert stage, influencing many future artists like Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham.



**Charles Moore**

**Charles Moore (1928-1986)** studied and performed with Professor Opoku and Seth Lapzekpo of Ghana and with the two most important exponents of African dance in the United States- Asadata Dafora and Katherine Dunham. He was a member of the Dunham Company for eight years and hers is the strongest influence in Moore's own work. His long and successful performing career included Broadway and concert stages around the world, with Alvin Ailey, Donald McKayle, Geoffrey Holder and others. Moore was a master teacher and taught in Bonn Germany, Bridgetown Barbados, the Bahamas, and The University of The West Indies, Jamaica, The Principality of Lichtenstein as well as the American dance festival in Durham, North Carolina, and in cities across the United States.

***Awassa Astrige/Ostrich***

**Music Credit Information**

Percussionist: Ron McBee

Flautist: Jimmy Cruz

Recording Produced by Russell J. Cowans IV

Recording Engineer: Rachael Wardell

Assistant Engineer: Joel Wilhelmi