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# CITIZEN

BAM Harvey Theater  
Dec 14—17 at 7:30pm

Running time: approx. 65 minutes, no intermission

Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel  
Performance Group

Choreography by **Reggie Wilson**

Dance cinematographer **Aitor Mendilibar**  
Lighting designer **Christopher Kuhl**  
Costume designer **Enver Chakartash**

Performers  
**Yeman Brown**  
**Raja Feather Kelly**  
**Clement Mensah**  
**Anna Schön**  
**Annie Wang**

*Season Sponsor:*

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*Leadership support for dance at BAM provided by  
the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and  
The Harkness Foundation for Dance.*

*Major support for dance at BAM provided by  
The SHS Foundation.*

# CITIZEN

## ADDITIONAL CREDITS

Choreographic advisor **Phyllis Lamhut**

All performances of *CITIZEN* are performed in loving memory of our Carrie Wood and Thomas French.

## MUSIC

Rev. Olsie Cowan

Baaba Maal

Aster Aweke

Tchad Blake

The La Drivers Union Por Por Group

Fist & Heel Performance Group

The Singing and Prayer Bands of Maryland and Delaware

“Young Tikar Woman”

Gonga Sarki Birgui and Hamadjam Sarki Siyawa

Local musicians from the Border Area of the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso



I am excited to return to the BAM Next Wave Festival with a new dance.

It's amazing how life and current events change the perception and meaning of artwork. I began researching *CITIZEN* in spring 2014 during a visit to Paris. I was intrigued by a portrait of Jean Baptiste Belley. Who was this man? Who painted the portrait and why? Who was able to commission a full-figure portrait of a black man in 1797? Who decided to continue to save this portrait during the political upheavals? How was it determined that this painting should be housed at Versailles (the only image of a black person in the entire collection—a self proclaimed bastion of French heroes). Why was this painting not on public display? Why are there so few paintings of black folks in “history” who aren't enslaved, wild, or caricatured?

So many questions... about a black man's portrait. I was intrigued. At the time, France and Europe were experiencing protests and riots in centers of immigrants and minorities. Jump to America and a spike in police killings of unarmed black men. Black Lives Matter. Jump to Trump. It all seems like a bit of history repeating. But what is my individual character made of? Do I have the stuff to survive this time?

The peculiar American crucible of enslaving humans has had a particular impact on the African-American identity; the ongoing wrestling with basic human desires, relationships, and responses to—and about—the concept of “belonging to.” What does it mean to belong, and what does it mean to *not want* to belong? Why was it that the always inspiring Zora Neale Hurston did not follow her compatriots Josephine Baker, Richard Wright, Nina Simone, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, and countless others to France in the face of deep and persistent racism? What was the allure of Paris? What did black folks find there that was truly different from here, in America? How did this difference affect them, their art, and their craft? Is *exotique* another name for “other”?

Or what about Senegal-born Jean-Baptiste Belley who fought for Haitian independence from France; William H. Johnson, valet to Abraham Lincoln who nursed the president back to health after the Gettysburg Address and bears the US government-issued headstone with the title *CITIZEN*; and black Shaker leader Mother Rebecca Cox Jackson who prayed herself literate within a conflicted America. What did and do folks need to do to learn and exercise agency, and be free and truly independent? What do any of us—immigrant, refugee, outcast, common citizen—have to do? How do we get from here to there? It's just a dance. But then again... Take what you will and leave what you won't. Be blessed.

### FIST & HEEL PERFORMANCE GROUP

Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel Performance Group is a Brooklyn-based dance company that investigates the intersections of cultural anthropology and movement practices and believes in the potential of the body as a valid means for knowing. Its performance work is a continued manifestation of the rhythm languages of the body provoked by the spiritual and the mundane traditions of Africa and its diaspora, including the blues, slave and gospel idioms. The group has received support from major foundations and corporations and has performed at notable venues in the US and abroad.

**REGGIE WILSON** (executive and artistic director, choreographer, performer) founded his company, Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel Performance Group, in 1989. Wilson draws from the cultures of Africans in the Americas and combines them with post-modern elements and his own personal movement style to create what he often calls “post-African/Neo-HooDoo Modern dances.” His work has been presented nationally and internationally at venues such as BAM, New York Live Arts, and Summerstage (NYC); Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (Lee, MA); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco); UCLA Live and Redcat (Los Angeles); VSA NM (New Mexico); Myrna Loy (Helena, MT); The Flynn (Burlington, VT); Contemporary Arts Center (New Orleans); Dance Umbrella (Austin, TX); Linkfest and Festival e'Nkundleni (Zimbabwe); Dance Factory (South Africa); Danças na Cidade (Portugal); Festival Kaay Fecc (Senegal); The Politics of Ecstasy; and Tanzkongress 2013 (Germany). Wilson is a graduate of New York University Tisch School of the Arts (1988, Larry Rhodes, Chair). He has studied composition and been mentored by Phyllis Lamhut. Before

forming Fist & Heel, he performed and toured with Ohad Naharin. He has lectured, taught, and conducted workshops and community projects throughout the US, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean. He has traveled extensively: to the Mississippi Delta to research secular and religious aspects of life there; to Trinidad and Tobago to research the Spiritual Baptists and the Shangoists; and also to Southern, Central, West, and East Africa to work with dance/performance groups as well as diverse religious communities. He has served as visiting faculty at several universities including Yale, Princeton, and Wesleyan Universities. Wilson is the recipient of the Minnesota Dance Alliance's McKnight National Fellowship (2000—01). Wilson is also a 2002 Bessie award recipient for his work *The Tie-tongued Goat and the Lightning Bug Who Tried to Put Her Foot Down*, and is a 2002 John Simon Guggenheim Fellow. He has been an artist advisor for the National Dance Project and board member of Dance Theater Workshop. In recognition of his creative contributions to the field, Wilson was named a 2009 United States Artists Prudential Fellow and is a 2009 recipient of the Herb Alpert Award in Dance. His evening-length work, *The Good Dance—dakar/ brooklyn*, had its world premiere at the Walker Art Center and its New York premiere at the 2009 BAM Next Wave Festival. In 2012, New York Live Arts presented a concert of selected Wilson works, *theRevisitation*, to critical acclaim and the same year he was named a Wesleyan University Creative Campus Fellow, received the 2012 Joyce Foundation Award for his new work *Moses(es)*, and was named a Doris Duke Performing Artist. In 2013 *Moses(es)* had its NY premiere at the BAM Next Wave Festival and continues to tour.



Anna Schön and Yeman Brown. Photo: Ator Mendilbar

**AITOR MENDILIBAR** (photographer, dance cinematographer) is a New York-based cinematographer. He comes from Basque country where he received degrees in computer science, telecommunications, and audio-visual production. He moved to New York in 2012 to study documentary filmmaking at New York Film Academy where he produced and directed four short films. He has since worked as a cinematographer for documentaries, TV shows, web series, short movies, music videos, promotional videos, live dance and music performances, and more.

**CHRISTOPHER KUHL** (lighting designer) is a lighting, scenic, and installation designer for new performance, theater, dance, and opera. Recent work includes: *Dog Days* (LA Opera); *The Object Lesson* (BAM, Edinburgh Festival); *The Institute of Memory* (The Public Theatre, REDCAT, T:BA Festival); *Straight White Men* (Young Jean Lee's Theatre Company, The Public Theater, Kaaithater, Centre Pompidou), *ABACUS* (BAM, Sundance Film Festival, EMPAC); and *Quartier Libres* with Nadia Beugré (New York Live Arts, Walker Art Center). He was also the production manager and lighting director for Ralph Lemon's *How Can You Stay In The House All Day And Not Go Anywhere?*. He has also had the pleasure of working and making art at the the Chocolate Factory, Fusebox Festival, Jacob's Pillow, Carnegie Hall, and Santa Fe Opera. He has received two Bessie awards, and Ovation, Sherwood, Drammy, and Horton awards. He is originally from New Mexico and is a graduate of CalArts.

**ENVER CHAKARTASH** (costume designer) is a costume designer and stylist for theater and film. He is a company member of The Wooster Group where he has designed costumes for *Early Shaker Spirituals and Early Plays* (directed by Richard Maxwell). In addition Chakartash is a frequent collaborator with Tina Satter's Half Straddle. With Half Straddle credits include

costume design for *Ghost Rings*, *Ancient Lives*, *House of Dance*, and *Seagull (Thinking of You)*. He most recently designed costumes for Tony Oursler's 5D feature film, *Imponderable*, currently screening at MoMA, New York. With Young Jean Lee's Theater Company he designed costumes for *Straight White Men*, presented at The PublicTheater, and the short film *A Meaning Full Life*, which screened at the 2016 BAMcinemaFest.

**YEMAN BROWN** (performer) was born and raised in Tallahassee, FL. Brown's passion for performing began as a child, where he performed in many local theaters and his church, Metropolitan Cathedral of Truth. After studying musical theater in middle and high school, Brown went on to receive his BFA from the Florida State University School of Dance. At Florida State, he performed works choreographed by Gerri Houlihan, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Dan Wagoner, and Alex Kettle. He also served as a soloist for the Tallahassee Ballet Company under the direction of Rick McCullough. In 2011, Brown studied at the Ailey School as a summer fellowship scholar and performed works by Stephanie Batten Bland and Judine Somerville. In 2012, he went to the American Dance Festival where he performed works choreographed by Houlihan, Mark Dendy, and Reggie Wilson. Soon after, he was invited to join Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel Performance Group while it was in residency at the Maggie Alsesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) in Tallahassee. As a residential apprentice, he participated in the early developmental stages of *Moses(es)*. In 2013 he moved to Brooklyn, NY and feels blessed to have the opportunity to work with such beautiful artists who inspire him beyond belief. He hopes that every being in the entire world knows that they are fearfully and wonderfully made, and anything can happen if they dare to believe.

**RAJA FEATHER KELLY** (company manager, performer) is a performer/choreographer living and working in NYC. Kelly has been a member in the companies of David Dorfman Dance, zoe | juniper, Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion, Christopher Williams Dance, and Colleen Thomas Dance, among others. Currently Kelly creates collaborative projects with Tzveta Kassabova and BS Movement. An English and dance major (Connecticut College) with a deep interest in both verbal and nonverbal forms of expression, Kelly founded his dance-theater company the feath3r theory after writing a novel of the same name. His five-year (and counting) Warhol-inspired projects have garnered him critical acclaim in the US and abroad. Kelly was a 2014 LMCC Workspace Recipient, and a commissioned artist in residence at Dixon Place Dance, NYC.

**CLEMENT MENSAH** (performer) was born and raised in Ghana, West Africa. He moved to the Netherlands at the age of 11. After graduating from CIOS (sports academy) he went to Amsterdam School of Arts and graduated in 2008. He received a fellowship to study at the Ailey School in 2007 and became a member of the Student Performance Group there while apprenticing with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 2008. He has also been part of the Francesca Harper Project and danced with Elisa Monte Dance Company from 2008—10, performing nationally and internationally. Mensah joined the Matthew Westerby Company in 2009 and led the hugely successful Project Poetry Live in partnership with the Litchfield Performing Arts, CT. He has taught workshops and master classes at institutions and schools such as Dance Wave in Brooklyn, the Ailey School, the Theater School in Amsterdam, Codart in Rotterdam, and was an artist in residence at Dancers' Workshop, WY and Bennington College, VT as well as teaching and assisting teachers at the Center for Advance Training (CAT) at Trinity Laban. After

receiving his MA degree in dance performance at Trinity Laban School of Contemporary Music and Dance in London, he joined Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel Performance Group in the fall of 2011. Mensah, a former member of Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE, A Dance Company, has performed with the Limón Dance Company as a guest artist. He joined Battery Dance Company at the beginning of 2013 and is happy for this wonderful opportunity.

**ANNA SCHÖN** (performer), a native of the Bronx, received her BA from Barnard College in European History and Dance. She is thrilled to be in her seventh season with Reggie Wilson/Fist & Heel Performance Group. She also dances for the Metropolitan Opera, zoe | juniper, Mark Dendy, Christiana Axelsen/Tundra, Gabriel Forestieri/Project LIMB, Sydney Schiff/Perpetual Metamorphosis, and has been a paid apprentice for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company for 2012—13 season. She has had the pleasure of working with Aszure Barton and Artists (BUSK), Jennifer Muller/The Works, Daniel Gwartzman Dance Company, Alison Jones Dance, Malcolm Low, and Gabri Christa. In her spare time Schön tutors Hebrew and Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. Thank you God, family, friends, and Kehila (community) back home for always believing in me and my dreams.

**ANNIE WANG** (performer) trained at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and the Boitsov School of Classical Ballet. She has worked with Carrie Ellmore-Tallitsch, Nicole Stanton, Pia Vinson, Dance Elixir, MADArt Creative, and Boitsov Classical Ballet Company. Her choreography project, Hyperspace Dance, has been presented at the 92Y, Chocolate Factory Theater, Alvin Ailey studios, WestFest, Showroom Gowanus Gallery, and Hot Wood Arts Gallery. Wang holds a degree in computer engineering and is searching for non-trivial ways of incorporating technology into dance.







L-R: Clement Mensah, Raja Feather Kelly, Annie Wang, and Anna Schön. Photo: Aitor Mendilibar

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