



## The Diana Ross Dream: a tribute to Black belonging

### Description

## Aisha Sasha John's work enthralled Théâtre La Chapelle audience

By Faith Langston

October 20, 2022

Choreographer, dancer and accomplished poet **Aisha Sasha John** was the recipient of the Overkill Award for her work-in-progress, *HEAT*, at Festival Images 2019, which hailed her "willingness to redefine, to expand, and to provoke." A challenging reputation to uphold, John expressed her artistic goals for ***The Diana Ross Dream*** in these terms, "This work hopes to be a work about being, operating from the belief that the sensual imperative of arrival is rhythm."



Aisha Sasha John

John wishes that, in and through our listening, “(We will) meet ourselves and each other in beauty.” How to achieve such lofty goals? How to dance a dream? The lush rose mauve stage, the dedicated work of **Karine Gauthier** and **Sam Skynner**, is a good beginning. The intriguing costumes – brocade cloaks, armbands (conceived by **Nyda Kwasowsky** and **Devon Snell**) – and Aisha Sasha John’s shaven head suggest traditional aboriginal culture. But lest we think we can pin down a time or place, John’s low-cut camisole top offsets this notion with a distinctly urban touch.

The first piece of *The Diane Ross Dream* begins with what is vaguely reminiscent of a tribal dance. John and Snell aptly move through the ebb and flow of emotions, conflict and acquiescence. Who will finally possess the territory? Can the enormous sheepskin rug on stage be equitably shared? Are we destined to remain isolated in our bubbles? It is depressing to note that the preverbal sounds, which evolve into language, seem to devolve into non-communication, and words finally become blather. Still, despite this all too familiar situation, another kind of peace and understanding is possible. The soundtrack **New Chance by Amy Manusov (Victoria Cheong)** provides a soothing, meditative background.

Is John’s performance really about Diana Ross? Aisha Sasha John writes about her connection with the singer. “In the summer of 2015, I went to sleep with a question and woke up to the memory of a vivid dream of Diana Ross on Broadway, dancing in the centre of a sea of other Black dancers, everyone wearing magnificent rose-gold costumes of various materials. The vibe was exuberant, spirited, celebratory, and joyful. It felt like an instruction – like a call. A true call to creation.”



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These days, it's easy to forget that desegregation only came about in 1962, just as The Supremes (earlier known as The Primettes) were beginning to make their mark in the music world. Their star rising rapidly, they became the most successful American singing group ever. Their breakthrough opened the door for African American rhythm, blues and soul musicians.

It can be said that *The Diana Ross Dream* succeeds as a commemoration of Black belonging. In John's words, "We'll be creating a tone, one composed of the possibilities of Black relaxedness, Black pleasure, Black laughter, Black vessel hold, and Black being-together: what are the creative and energetic consequences (including the movement qualities) of our distinct and variegated Black togetherness?"

It was evident that the enthralled audience at the Théâtre La Chapelle picked up the vibe.

*The Diana Ross Dream* played at Théâtre La Chapelle from September 28 to October 1, 2022

Images: Kinga Michalska

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**Faith Langston** is a Concordia graduate with a long-standing interest in theatre, who works as a literacy tutor.

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