

Alexandra D'Elia

*A Dança Portuguesa* Third Year Arts Award Outcome Report

Over one year ago, University of Virginia Miller Arts Scholars awarded me with a Third Year Arts Award to fund a video project called *A Dança Portuguesa*. The funds that were awarded to me covered airfare to and from Portugal, dance classes, an iPhone Olloclip camera lens, a GorillaPod stand, two hard drives, and public transportation costs in the city. The purpose of the project was to take dance classes at a studio in Lisbon and create a video exhibiting the styles of dance that I studied. Looking back on the project now, there is no way I would have been able to accomplish the project or take those dance classes without the help of Miller Arts Scholars and I am very grateful to the program for its generosity and funding.

There are aspects of my project that changed since my original proposal was submitted. For example, my proposal included research on a dance studio called *STEPS* where I planned on taking dance classes for this project. After attending a few drop-in classes, I realized that the classes were very small and not as challenging as I had hoped. I did more research while I was there; asking locals where the best dance studios were, and I learned of *Jazzy Dance Studios* which is the largest and most popular dance studio in Lisbon. *Jazzy* has three different locations and one of the locations, *Jazzy Santos*, was just a 20-minute walk and ten minute trolley ride from my dormitory. *Jazzy Santos* offered an incredibly large variety of classes and the teachers that taught there were well-known not only in Portugal, but also internationally. The classes were huge which allowed me to dance with almost 20 different partners every class. So, instead of taking classes at *STEPS*, I took classes at *Jazzy Santos* for four months.

As I continued taking classes I decided to hone in on three specific styles of dance: Kizomba, Kuduro and Semba. This decision was made due to scheduling and personal interests. These three styles of dance are Angolan dance styles. I found personal interest in these styles because my family is Portuguese from Angola. Also, never in my life had I done partner dancing before. Kizomba and Semba are both partner-style dances. Semba, especially, is quite sensual and intimate. I quickly had to break out of my comfort zone to immerse myself into these styles. Kuduro is an Angolan hip hop dance, characterized by a lot of isolation, popping, locking, and quick feet movement. Another style of dance I have little-to-no experience in is hip hop. So, once again, I found myself having to break out of my stiffness to experience this style to its fullest. Overall, I learned a lot about the styles, the histories of them and cultural and societal contexts in which they were created, and of course, their individual techniques.

While taking classes and preparing for interviews, I made some editorial decisions about the video. I decided that I would not be in the video. I wanted to record the professionals doing their crafts to make the video truly professional and artistic. I also decided that the narrative of my video would be entirely in Portuguese in order to keep with the cultural authenticity of the dance styles. Although my teachers can speak English, I interviewed them in Portuguese. I also incorporated my own voiceover narrations in Portuguese. Throughout the entire video I have English subtitles. This way, the video is understandable and accessible to both an English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking audience.

I also made a big decision while editing to change the name of my video. I have now titled it, *As Danças Angolanas*, which translates to “The Angolan Dances,” since the three styles that I decided to focus on are all Angolan dance styles.

Here are some photos from my shoots:



The Olloclip allowed me to shoot this interview with a wide-angle lens, making it possible to get all four subjects (my four Kizomba and Semba teachers) in a single shot.

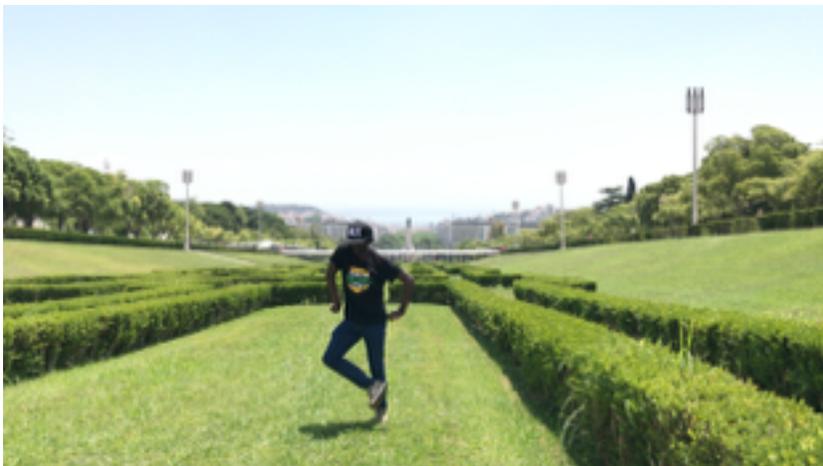
My teachers, Miguel and Susana, dancing Kizomba in Praça do Comércio.





My teachers, Paolo and Lanna, dancing Semba in Praça do Comércio.

Fábio Jorge, my Kuduro teacher.



Fábio Jorge dancing Kuduro at Marques de Pombal.

Side note: I lucked out because right before I went abroad I was able to upgrade my phone to an iPhone 7, which has an incredible camera. All of the interviews and shoots were taken on my iPhone, and the quality is incredible. Kudos, Apple!

In conclusion, the project was an incredible experience that I will always be proud to say I was able to accomplish thanks to Miller Arts Scholars. This project brought me closer to my family's history and heritage and taught me so much about Angolan culture and history. I have fallen so in love with these styles and their stories that I am currently choreographing a piece for the Dance Department's Fall Dance Concert that incorporates six different styles of dance: Kizomba, Semba, Kuduro (which I studied in Lisbon) and Capoeira, Forró and Samba de Gafieira (which I studied in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil in 2015).

I thank the Miller Arts Scholars, donors, and the Colbert family for making this experience possible and allowing me to further my education in dance, media studies and foreign affairs.