

## Edisa Weeks Extended Bio

Edisa Weeks is a Brooklyn, NY-based choreographer, educator, curator, and founder of DELIRIOUS Dances. She creates interactive, multimedia work that merges theater with dance to explore our deepest desires, darkest fears, and sweetest dreams. Described by the New York Times as having “a gift for simple but striking visual effects,” her work has been performed in a variety of venues including the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, chashama theater, Works & Process at the Guggenheim Museum, Harlem Stage, Inside/Out at Jacob’s Pillow, The Kennedy Center, MANCC, The Mermaid Parade, Mount Tremper Arts and The Yard. She has also performed in swimming pools, senior centers, sidewalks, storefront windows, and various living rooms, including living rooms in Berlin, Germany, as part of Haus der Kulturen der Welts 50th anniversary celebration. She is the recipient of a 2022 Creative Capital Grant, and a 2024 MAP Foundation grant.

Edisa grew up in Uganda, Papua New Guinea, and Brooklyn, NY; and has a BA from Brown University where she was an independent major in Non-Western Performance Studies. She received an Alberto Vilar full fellowship to attend New York University’s TISCH School of the Arts where she obtained an MFA in choreography. She has had the joy of performing with Annie–B Parsons Big Dance Theater, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Co., Dance Brazil, Homer Avila, Jane Comfort, Jon Kinzel, Muna Tseng, Reggie Wilson Fist & Heel Performance Group, Sally Silvers, Spencer/Colton Dance, among others. In addition, she performed in the 2016 “Bessie” award-winning performance by The Skeleton Architecture.

Edisa was nominated for an inaugural Antonyo 2020 award in Best Choreography for *Novenas for a Lost Hospital* (2019) by Cusi Cram, Dir. Daniella Topol, at Rattlestick Theater; she choreographed for *The Transfiguration of Benjamin Banneker* (2020) by Theodora Skiptares at La Mama Theater; appeared in the movie *Rachel Getting Married*, Dir. Jonathan Demme; and has been on the cover of several magazines including Wired and La Fotografia.

Edisa has taught at the Alvin Ailey School, Bard College, Brigham Young University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Milwaukee University, Princeton University, Saint Ann’s High School, and Queens College/CUNY. She is on the Board of Directors for Movement Research; has been a panelist for the New York State Council on the Arts, the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage; and served on the Bessie Committee which recognizes outstanding dance and performance in NYC from 2014-2018. She has also served multiple times as an adjudicator for American College Dance Association Conferences. In her work as an artist, educator, and mentor, Weeks is committed to creating equitable, inclusive and diverse teaching and working environments; and motivating people to help establish a more just society and nation.

Edisa is currently researching and developing the following projects:

### *WASTELANDIA*

Through craft-making, discussions, visual art, theater, and dance, the audience is taken on an interactive journey to experience a land that can be sculpted, destroyed, and rebuilt again with more plastic. *WASTELANDIA* examines our dependence on fossil fuel, and advocates for being better stewards of the earth. *Wastelandia* will premiere at Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island in September 2025.

*WASTELANDIA* (the life rite) is part of *3 RITES: Life, Liberty, Happiness*, which asks why life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, were included as unalienable rights in the United States Declaration of Independence. *3 RITES* interrogates, how are the rights being upheld, and how do they manifest in the body.

Through *3 RITES* Edisa is seeking to reckon with America's past, present and potential future, by engaging people in the ideals that are a core part of America's foundation and generating a dialogue about what needs to be done to ensure these ideals apply to everyone. Edisa believes that art revitalizes the everyday to reveal something new about ourselves; and that revelation has the power to change the world.

### *I Got Gold, It Shines in Dark Places*

In 2020 when George Floyd and Brianna Taylor were murdered, Edisa began wondering how as a choreographer she can engage with the protests that were happening across the nation, and help address injustices in America. What emerged is *I Got Gold, It Shines In Dark Places*. For the work Edisa is commissioning four singer/songwriters to write two songs each, which will be performed by a choir and six dancers. The work is a practice in Sankofa (a Ghanaian concept of going back in history to bring an idea forward) as four of the songs are inspired by the work of Civil Rights activist James Forman, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and The Freedom Singers. The other four songs are based on an issue in American society that needs to be addressed (universal health care, decriminalizing sex work, reparations for Black Americans, undoing toxic patterns). *I Got Gold* will premiere in 2028.

Edisa grew up singing *Kumbaya*, *We Shall Overcome*, and *This Little Light of Mine*, however the songs, while resonant, was the "album" for the civil rights struggles of the 1960's. The songs don't have the same power 60 years later. For example *Kumbaya* was originally an appeal to God to come and help those in need, however the song has come to imply being unrealistic, overly optimistic, and the compromising of goals in the expectation of some distant savior. We need new songs, new calls for actions, and new dances that reflect our current movements and struggles.

Accompanying activities include workshops (what's needed in your community; how can that be advocated for via dance and song) and discussions (why call for decriminalization vs. legalization of sex work). Another goal is to create a songbook, so

the songs can have a life long after the project is over. The dream is for the songs to be a part of the ongoing civil rights discourse in America and be sung at rallies, protests, campfires, churches, and community choirs across the nation and world.

Through *I Got Gold* Edisa is advocating for an America that is not afraid to tackle difficult conversations. An America that will take an honest look at its exploitative and oppressive history and policies, in order to forge an America that is truly just, equitable, democratic, and great.

### Roots Parties

Since 2017, DELIRIOUS Dances/Edisa Weeks have been hosting Roots Parties, where we invite people to join in the journey of making 1,865 roots for the *3 RITES: Liberty* performance installation. 1865 represents the last year of legalized chattel slavery in America. The roots parties are like a mash-up between a sewing bee and barbershop talk, where people can enjoy a meal and participate in a community discussion connected to liberty in America. Previous discussions have covered prison reform and the closing of Rikers jail, legalizing marijuana, watershed rights, financial literacy, food deserts, and childhood play as a liberating act. As of 2022 the discussions have focused on prison abolition and conversations have addressed: the expungement of prison records, Rikers Public Memory Project; the decriminalization of sex work with Sex Workers Outreach Project; and the Free Ashley Diamond Campaign.

### Accordion Booklets

The 3 RITES accordion booklets started during the pandemic when residencies and performances came to a screeching halt. What is wonderful about accordion booklets is that they “dance” by expanding, contracting, and changing shape.

The booklets feature writing by authors Jasmine Johnson and Thomas F. DeFrantz; playwright James Scruggs; Roots Party participants; and Edisa Weeks. They also are a container for images documenting the 3 RITES creation process between 2015 and 2022. Each accordion booklet is handmade and has two sides. There are four booklets in the series:

- *Roots Party \ leaving don't mean gone*
- *Life \ Movement To Suffocate*
- *Happiness \ Happiness is Happiest When Shared*
- *Liberty \ For All* (in development)