



BLACK BEANZ

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Akron's African Boy Band "The Black Beanz" selected as one of Ohio's Top Ten Professional Youth Dance Teams at OhioDance Festival**

**May 9, 2022 (Akron, OH)** –The Black Beanz dance troupe out of Akron was selected as one of the Top Ten Ohio Professional Youth Dance Teams at the OhioDance Festival in Columbus April 28-May 1. It was the only dance team that not only featured male dancers, but was also self-taught without a dance teacher and featuring the youngest choreographer, Martin Kwitonda, the Beanz most experienced dancer and flipper, at age 14.

The Black Beanz burst on the entertainment scene of Ohio in 2021. The group of all-male African "Congo Flava" performers range in age from 14-16 years old. The unique Congo Flava dance genre, which began in Tanzania in the late '90s, combines traditional East African dance with hip hop, reggae, R&B...and recently, a little gospel.

Most of the seven dance troupe members began performing as early as the age of five in their refugee camp villages, discovering that their dancing brought in tips to supplement their family incomes.

Before they were discovered while dancing during lunch breaks as part of a summer outdoor youth work crew, their performances were limited to personal videos posted on TikTok, Instagram and Youtube.

"Because these guys were able to dance at our clients' worksites, our business nearly tripled last summer!" says youth director Tom Crain of Shanti Community Farm's Yard Corps program who also serves as the Beanz team manager. "They hired us for landscaping jobs just to see these guys dance! These young men have proven to be not only great artists and performers with their unique East African dance heritage, but also great immigrant youth ambassadors when making appearances on and off-stage."

Even during the height of the COVID pandemic, the Black Beanz fan base has grown steadily. With an Ohio Arts Association grant, they are adding costuming, drumming and singing to their performances, and also teaching "next generation" dancers at 6-9 years old—some of whom will also be performing on stage along with them. They have also started fan club merchandising by giving away printed T-shirts with their logo and a group shot featured, and signed postcards. The dance troupe now has a website, Facebook page and loyal followers on Tiktok, Instagram, Snapchat and Youtube.

Their most popular videos feature a dancing beach party during a snowstorm at Akron's Gorge Metropark and skating, snowboarding and sledding for the first time as recent new immigrants from

year-round tropical climates. The most recent video showing them dancing on Ohio State University's Frat Row for sorority girls with the police cheering them on has now surpassed them all.

Shanti Community Farms, a Northeast Ohio non-profit organization that works with immigrant youth and their families in agriculture, is the official sponsor. It recognized the unique talent of its Congolese youth workers and stepped up their staging, costuming and dance practices while gaining bookings for them at local summer festivals, events and parties. The youth named themselves "Black Beanz" to showcase their agricultural heritage—most of whom either lived or worked on farms while confined to their camps in Tanzania and Uganda after their families fled the civil war of their home country of The Congo.

"We can't wait to see what 2022 will bring as the weather warms up and the pandemic subsides allowing us to perform outdoors and welcome larger crowds," says Black Beanz dance captain Kamana Pasi, who at 16 years is the oldest member of the team.

For more information and to book the Black Beanz at your next event, visit the website at [www.blackbeanzakron.com](http://www.blackbeanzakron.com). Contact: Shanti Community Farms at 330-634-6489, [shantifarms1@gmail.com](mailto:shantifarms1@gmail.com).

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