



CELEBRATION DANCES OF WEST AFRICA: PART I & II

Art Form: Dance

Style: Traditional

Culture: West African

Technical Needs

- ❑ Auditorium/stage area for performers to dance and sing
- ❑ 2 microphones and stands
- ❑ Clean floor
- ❑ Separate dressing areas for male and female performers

Meet the Artists

Soli Performing Arts Company is made up of five artists: Vella Davis-Pearce, formerly of Najwa Dance Corp and Kopano Performing Arts Company; Allunafaye of Najwa Dance Corp; Tallafaye of West Africa and Josh, Master Musician. Soli is a West African word meaning big dance and our goal is to entertain, educate and stimulate interest in our African heritage through a musical, theatrical and dance repertoire that embraces both traditional and modern South African and West African arts as well as authentic Caribbean music and song.

In addition to the performance, Soli is committed to the education of young people. It has initiated and developed programs at various schools in Chicago, and has worked with social service agencies and other dance companies in the city. Soli is working hard to leave their footprint in the sand and is made up of self-motivated dance educators prepared to entertain and teach as individuals and as a team.

About the Performance

Celebrate the native cultures of Africa with traditional dancing, drumming and proverbs that have guided Africans for many years. Genuine African attire and native instruments highlight **Soli's** wonderful program.

Contextual Information

It is said that one should go to East Africa to see the wild life and ecology, and to West Africa to see the people and indigenous cultural arts. Originally, much of West Africa was contained in kingdoms, the three most important spanned a reign between the 9th and 16th centuries. The first of these great kingdoms, Ghana, (not related to present day Republic of Ghana) was destroyed in the 11th century and replaced by an even greater kingdom, the Empire of Mali. Ruled by the powerful Muslim king, Mansa Musa, the Empire of Mali and its largest city, Timbuktu, were strategically placed on the Trans-Saharan trade route and became an extremely important center of commerce and trade in West Africa. As a devout Muslim, Mansa Musa set out to make his required pilgrimage to Mecca in 1320. As a result of his generosity and strong personality, the Empire of Mali appeared on the first European map of West Africa.

Traditional African religions, which still are widely practiced in West Africa, are pantheistic - that is, they acknowledge the existence of more than one divine being. They recognize that a divine force inhabits everything in the universe - water, plants, animals, rocks, the earth itself - and believe that a soul is never truly gone. West Africans worship their ancestors and engage in elaborate ceremonies and great celebrations of music and dance to facilitate the soul reaching heaven.

According to the traditions of West African culture, there are no separations between music, dance, and theatre. All the disciplines are expressions of spiritual and familial beliefs, and these events are celebrated in specific ways. Each social occasion, whether it be a birth or death or marriage, has its own type of music and dance. Some dances and music may only be performed by women or warriors or hunters. The griots, who have preserved the art of storytelling in West Africa for many centuries, combine all the disciplines in their ancient art. All the instruments used by the griots must be made with local materials, such as animal skins and horns, shells, etc. In the tradition of West African storytelling, both the audience and storyteller must participate enthusiastically, using devices such as proverbs, riddles, and call and response.

Vocabulary

Bouba: (BOO-BA) long flowing robe worn during lamba

Call and response: musical pattern from West Africa in which a leader sings a short verse and people sing it back accompanied by percussion instruments

Candomble: Afro-Brazilian religion based on a hybrid of both Catholic and West African practices

Colonization: the process by which a country takes over another land; from the early 16th century until the end of the twentieth century, most countries in Africa were under European rule

Cowrie shells: a form of money in West Africa in years past, cowry shells are used for divination in many African religions, and are also used in decoration of houses, costumes and masks

Djan: dance performed throughout West Africa

Dununba: dance from the Cassamance region of Senegal; it is performed by young people to show strength, agility and endurance

Griot: (GREE-O) traditional storytellers who pass down the history and culture of their people; originally, they performed exclusively for the important court and social functions

Islam: one of the world's major religions, it has over 800 million followers; it was founded in 610 A.D. in the area that today we call the Middle East

Lamba: dance of royalty performed in Mali and Guinea for social occasions like weddings

Mecca: the holy city of Islam, located in Saudi Arabia, near the Red Sea; all followers of the Islam religion must make a pilgrimage to Mecca

Muslim: an adjective used to describe one who practices the religion of Islam

Nubia: (NOO-BEE-A) ethnic group descended from the people of Kerma and Kush, residing in the upper Nile valley

Proverb: a short statement expressing a truth or moral

Sahel: the long strip of savanna grasslands between the Sahara Desert and the forest areas of West Africa, home to the great kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Songhi, Borau, Dafur, and the Funji; the name means “edge of border lands” in Arabic

Yoruba: (YOR-BAH) one of the major ethnic groups in West Africa

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