



THE LARGEST AFRICAN EMPIRE REVEALED

Art Form: Dance

Style: Traditional

Culture: West African

Technical Needs

- ❑ auditorium/stage area for performance
- ❑ electricity
- ❑ two microphones with stands

Meet the Artists

The Manding Empire Revealed is performed by **Ayodele**, a dance troupe founded by Freymond “Money” Taylor as a lasting tribute to his murdered friend and fellow dancer, Marlon Wade. As an accomplished performer and dancer, Money Taylor has performed on stage and television, including special appearances on Oprah and The David Letterman Show.

The organization **Marlon’s Way** seeks to educate students about the history of West Africa through music, dance, and theatre. In addition to their work with Urban Gateways, **Marlon’s Way** performs for inner city youth promoting peace, harmony, education and self-esteem building. Money and his group use poetry, dance, theatre and gymnastic movements in their work with young people.

About the Performance

This program features the music and dance culture of the Manding Empire, the largest in African history, and is centered in the mythical city of Timbuktu.

Today, the Mande-speaking descendants of this empire (once as large as modern day Europe) now span a number of countries in French West Africa, including Mali, Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, Burkina, Faso, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Significantly, the Manding music and dance repertoire dominates the national cultural troupes of these countries. Performer Money Taylor transcends colonial borders to profile the cultural intelligence of this great civilization.

Contextual Information

About the Manding Empire (1235-1468):

Out of the Sahelian region (a savannah region located south of the Sahara Desert) of West Africa rose an empire that would become the largest in African history. The great Manding Empire (also known as the Mali Empire) existed as early as 1000 A.D. but did not come into power until the 1200s on the strength of its founder Sundjata. A former royal magician and slave, Sundjata reigned over the Manding Empire from 1230-1255.

At its height, the Manding Empire controlled three regions—the Senegal region, the Gao region, and the Central Mande states—making it as large as modern day Europe. The Manding Empire was known for its wealth and influence. The interior of West Africa was characterized as an area of dense forests, mountains, savannahs and desert; but the Manding Empire managed to make the area profitable, becoming among the first to cultivate and weave cotton. King Sundjata made the empire even more powerful by controlling the mining of West African gold and monopolizing its trade with the Arabs across the Sahara.

The Manding Empire became even more powerful under the rule of King Mansa Musa, who worked to make the empire a cultural and political power. As trade increased between North Africa and the sub-Sahara, cities developed where the traders bought and sold their goods. During Musa's reign (1312-1337), the city of Timbuktu became the focal point. Musa paid for the building of large libraries and madrasas (Islamic universities). As a result, the city became the prominent meeting place for the finest scholars, poets, and artists from Africa and throughout the Middle East, who brought their songs, dances, instruments, costumes, and customs.

As the Mande-speaking people traveled they also took their songs, dances, and traditions to the far corners of this great Empire. Timbuktu's growing cultural wealth was matched by its natural wealth as the center of the gold and salt trade. Merchants bartered gold and salt for spices, leather goods, animals, food and clothing. After Musa's death, the Manding Empire began to slowly decline. The opening up of new trade routes in the Atlantic Ocean by the Portuguese ended

the empire's trade monopoly. The capture of Timbuktu by the Songhai in 1468 officially brought the Manding Empire to a close.

Vocabulary

Bambara: language native to the West African nations of Mali and Mauritania

Calabash: a type of tropical tree, or its fruit, which is a gourd. The fruit has a hard rind and is hollowed out and dried for use as a bowl, cup, or musical instrument

Doundoun: the bass drums in a *jembe* ensemble; its name literally means "lower drum"

Jali: a class of musicians and performers in West Africa.

Kora: an ancient West African instrument, similar in look and sound to a harp; a common instrument in the Mandinka music of Senegal and Guinea

Madradas: Islamic universities established in the city of Timbuktu by King Mansa Musa

Manding Empire: Africa's second and most powerful empire, which ran from 1235-1468; also known as the Mali Empire

Mandinka: language native to the West African nations of Senegal and Gambia; also the name of a music style from that area

Maninka: language native to the West African nations of Mali and Guinea; also the name of a music style from that area

Ngoni: traditional West African lute; an early ancestor of the banjo that was later invented by slaves in America

Sahel: Savannah region located south of the Sahara Desert