



West African Drumming and Dance

An invigorating virtual performance filled with the rhythms of West Africa, featuring Assistant Professor of Music **John Dankwa** and Assistant Professor of Dance **Iddi Saaka**, joined by students in West African music and dance classes.

Friday, December 4, 2020

FREE online event | www.wesleyan.edu/cfa



Wesleyan University

Center for the Arts Middletown, Connecticut | www.wesleyan.edu/cfa

WEST AFRICAN DRUMMING AND DANCE CONCERT

8:00 PM, December 4, 2020 - Virtual Performance

IDDI SAAKA

Choreographer/Assistant Professor - Dance

JOHN WESLEY DANKWA

Lead Drummer/Assistant Professor – Music

JOCELYN PLEASANT

Lead Drummer/PhD Student - Ethnomusicology

CLASS ACCOMPANIST: **Keizo Fish**

COURSE ASSISTANT: **Shirley Sullivan**

TOGETHER WITH THEIR STUDENTS IN WEST AFRICAN DRUMMING AND DANCE CLASSES

~ THE PROGRAM ~

KETE ADINKRA (PRELUDE)

Kete is an Asante court dance, mostly played during royal funerals and other important social occasions. The two styles, Adinkra and Adaban, presented by the Wesleyan West African drumming class is among the vast repertoire of Kete rhythms played among the Asante. Kete Adinkra is to be played as the prelude, with Kete Adaban to be played as the postlude to the concert.

TOKOE *Performed by West African Dance I class DANC 260-01*

Originally an initiation dance performed by the youth of the Ga Adamgbe people of Southern Ghana. Today it is also performed on other social occasions such as naming and marriage ceremonies and funerals

KUNDUM *Performed by West African dance II class DANC 360-01*

Kundum music and dance, which is performed as part of the annual Kundum festival of the Ahanta and Nzema people of Western Ghana originated in a situation of famine and hunger around 1700. Although traditionally a harvest music and dance, Kundum can now be seen on all social occasions. Kundum is performed in 3 sections: The first is domo, a slow movement, in which dancers evoke beauty, majesty and gracefulness with stately postures of tilted bodies. The second section ewulalá, (literally meaning "pumping") inspires fast and masculine movements. The third section edudule, consists of vigorous torso to torso movements, strutting movements of the body

SAKADI *Performed by West African Dance I class DANC 260-01*

An original choreography by Iddi Saaka to celebrate the vibrancy and high energy of West African dance. The drum music is an original composition by Iddi Saaka

DJOLE (INTERLUDE) *Performed by West African Music and Culture (Beginner) Students*

Djole is a celebratory rhythm that is now played all over West Africa. It was originally a mask dance played on siko drums of the Temine people of Sierra Leone. However, it has since been adapted to djembe and dunun. This piece is an original arrangement by J. Pleasant.

BAMAYA *Performed by West African dance II class DANC 360-01*

This is a traditional dance of the Dagomba of northern Ghana. The origin of Bamaya is two-fold: one version has it that, once there was drought in Dagomba land and all the traditional priests of the land were asked to seek the intervention of the gods. Through rituals it was revealed by the gods that the drought was as a result of maltreatment of a woman by her husband in the community and that to propitiate the gods the men in the community must dress up as women and dance in the open. This not only disgraced but compelled the men to adopt greater humility, as a result of which it rained, bringing an end to the drought.

The other version has it that once a man was hungry but did not have money to buy food. He made up his mind to steal food in the market and since he did not want to be identified, he disguised himself by dressing like a woman. He went into the market and stole a fowl but was caught. The people then made a dance called bamaya in remembrance of this event. Today Bamaya is performed on social occasions.

KPANLOGO *Performed by West African dance I class DANC 260-01*

A dance created by Otoo Lincoln at Sakumo Tsonshi area of Accra in the early 1960's. The Kpanlogo dance is a youthful recreational dance form of the Ga people of southern Ghana. It is a fisher-folk dance, with most of the gestures and intricate footwork reflecting messages and depicting the fishing trade. The messages also touch on many social issues such as courtship and marriage. It is a dance that is used to express emotions at celebrations and funerals as well as at other gatherings or durbars

KUKU *Performed by West African dance II class DANC 360-01*

Kuku is a dance that originates from the Manian ethnic group of Guinea. This dance was originally performed by women returning from fishing expeditions as a way to celebrate the harvest. Today it is performed on all celebratory occasions including weddings and naming ceremonies

KETE ADABAN (POSTLUDE)

Kete is an Asante court dance, mostly played during royal funerals and other important social occasions. The two styles, Adinkra and Adaban, presented by the Wesleyan West African drumming class is among the vast repertoire of Kete rhythms played among the Asante. This piece is Kete Adaban, with Kete Adrinka having been played as the prelude to this concert.

~Profiles~

Iddi Saaka is a versatile and award-winning dancer, dance teacher, choreographer, and drummer from Ghana who specializes in West African dance and music forms and contemporary dance. Saaka holds a Diploma in Dance from the University of Ghana and an MFA in Dance from University of California, Los Angeles. He has choreographed and performed internationally in several venues including the World Festival of Sacred Music, the Skirball Center, Dance Arts Academy and the Music Center in Los Angeles, Suzanne Dellal Center for Dance and Theater in Tel Aviv, Israel and the National Theater of Ghana. He has also performed for the president of Israel; Moshe Katsav and all African ambassadors to Israel. Saaka is an Assistant Professor of Dance at Wesleyan and a recipient of Wesleyan's prestigious Binswanger Prize for Excellence in Teaching award in 2019. Prior to teaching at Wesleyan, Saaka served as Visiting Instructor of Dance at University of California, Los Angeles, University of California, San Diego and the University of Ghana.

John Dankwa is an Assistant Professor of Music at Wesleyan. He is a scholar, teacher, composer, and performer. John's performance specialization covers West African drumming, flute, xylophone, and traditional trumpet playing. His compositions cover a range of styles including African art music, gospel music, and the West African popular Highlife music. He has directed many ensembles and church choirs in the US and Ghana. As part of his service to the community, Prof. Dankwa runs drumming and singing workshops in schools and churches around the New England area, creating opportunities for many people to experience the beautiful musical traditions in West Africa. He has shared the concert stage with several renowned groups such as the So Percussion, Georgia Spiritual Ensemble, and the Griffin Choral Art, to mention a few. In addition to directing the Wesleyan West African Music Ensemble, Prof. Dankwa is currently the music director of the Association of Ghana Methodist Church Choirs in the US and Canada.

Jocelyn Pleasant is a drummer, multi-percussionist, educator, and bandleader, currently based in Middletown, CT where she is pursuing a PhD in ethnomusicology. Her primary research focus is West African drumming and music, where her M.A. thesis focused on the djembe drum and dance community of Washington DC. Jocelyn's performance credits on drum set and percussion are extensive and showcase her versatility and ability to play many genres of music. Her band, The Lost Tribe, performs music that combines West African rhythms and songs with jazz, funk and other genres. As an educator, Jocelyn has been on staff with many schools and programs including the Artists Collective (Hartford, CT), Green Street Arts Center (Middletown, CT), Center for Creative Youth (Middletown, CT), Institute for the Musical Arts (Goshen, MA) and (most recently) The Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts (Hartford, CT), teaching theory, percussion, and African/Cultural Rhythms to students of all levels.

West African Dance I Students: Meiwen Chen, Tracy Cooper, Arnaud Gerlus, Luca LaFayette, Shayna McCarthy, Roshin Mirani, Charlotte Mittenthal, Tanvi Punja, Dulce Rubio, Kiki Vetoulis-Acevedo, Vanshika Virmani

West African Dance II Students: Emily Bloomfield, Georgia Garrison, Karli Gigstad, Lilah Hixson, Alma Pres, Britanya Williams

West African Music and Culture (Intermediate) Students: Selena Delgado, Chaltu Rashid, Abdullah Salia, Sydney Ochieng, Ernest Braun, Sarah Gbadebo, Nate Antoine, Marvin McNeill, Thao Phan, Pablo Puente

West African Music and Culture (Beginner) Students: Keanu Bryan, Kendal Fass, Dewellyn Howard, Yizhaung Lin, Yaje Nshanji, Malcolm Roesser, Benjamin Russman, Sophia Song, Benjamin Stagoff-Belfort

~ *Special Acknowledgements* ~

A special thanks to Chelsie McPhillimy, who made extraordinary efforts in video-editing and collaborations. Without her work, the final product you see today would not have been possible. Additionally, we truly appreciate John Elmore and Hanna Oravec for their assistance in the organization of this production and many others throughout this trying semester! Special thanks also go to Hari Krishnan – the chair of the Dance Department for his steadfast guidance, motivation and unflinching support throughout the semester. Finally, we have much gratitude to Michele Olerud for her consistent and positive presence in the dance department and Shirley Sullivan, the Dance Production Coordinator and Course Assistant for both of the dance courses.

DANCE DEPARTMENT FACULTY/STAFF

Pedro Alejandro, Associate Professor of Dance (on leave)
Patricia Beaman, Artist-in-Residence
Milka Djordjevich, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance
Doug Elkins, Visiting Associate Professor of Dance
Maho Ishiguro, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance
Katja Kolcio, Associate Professor of Dance/Director of the Allbritton Center
Hari Krishnan, Professor of Dance/*Chair*
Chelsie McPhillimy, Technical Director, Dance
Michele Olerud, Administrative Assistant
Eiko Otake, Visiting Artist-in-Residence
Marcela Oteíza, Associate Professor of Dance
Shamel Pitts, Visiting Instructor in Dance
Joya Powell, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance
Iddi Saaka, Assistant Professor of Dance
Nicole Stanton, Provost & Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/Professor of Dance

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