

## LES BALLETS AFRICAINS

The African Ballet of the Republic of Guinea

Italo Zambo, Artistic Director

Hamidou Bangoura, Technical Director

Mohamed Kemoko Sano, Choreographer

Thursday Evening, October 17, 1991, at 7:00

Friday Evening, October 18, 1991, at 8:00

Power Center for the Performing Arts

Ann Arbor, Michigan

### *Female Dancers*

Manana Cisse	Marie Bangoura	Hawa Conde
Diely Kanni Diawara	Mayeni Camara	Fadima Traore
Naitou Camara	Macire Souare	Mariama Toure
Mouminata Camara	Maimouna Diawara	M'mah Toure

### *Male Dancers*

Sekou II Conde	Aboubacar II Camara	Sekou Sylla
Bangaly Bangoura	Mamadouba Camara	Papa Cherif Haidara
Yamoussa Soumah	Mamadouba Soumah	Aboubacar Bangoura
Moustapha Bangoura	Hamidou Koivogui	Amadou Dioulde Diallo

### *Musicians/Dancers*

Gbanworo Keita	Laurent Camara	Mamadi Mansare
Fode Kalissa	Seny Toure	Mohamed Sylla
Koca Sale Dioubate	Younoussa Camara	Mohamed Lamine Sylla

Ibrahima Gueye, *Administrator*; Ibrahima Conte, *Regisseur*; Tim Speechley, *Company Manager*; Marc Napoletano, *Tour Manager*; Tim Moore/Papypvore, *Graphic Design/Print*; Rikki Stein, *Pan African Arts Management*

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# PROGRAM

## RHYTHMS OF AFRICA

In every sphere of African society, the drum is used to evoke an atmosphere of participation and shared experience at all social, spiritual, commemorative, or celebratory occasions. "Rhythms of Africa" demonstrates the diversity of percussive styles to be found in Guinea's various regions, together with influences from neighboring countries such as Senegal, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone.

The instruments used are the Soko from the Mandingo civilization; the Sinte from Maritime Guinea; the Djimbe (in Malinke) or Sambanyi (in Soso); the Krin from Maritime Guinea, also known as the Kengyi in the Forest region; and the Doun Doun, which, as its name implies, provides the bass input and is fashioned, these days, from a 55-gallon oil drum.

## AFRICAN DAWN

In Mandingo society, the Griot and his 21-string Kora are revered as the living library of his people's proud history. Many of the most distinguished Griot families have passed their knowledge down in an unbroken line from the thirteenth century.

Accompanied by the Balaphone and the Peuhl flute, their songs celebrate the noble lineage of Mandingo emperors and heroes.

*Lamba* — A Mandingo dance from the royal court.

*Mamaya* — A gracious dance performed by male courtiers.

*Yankadi* — A dance from maritime Guinea performed by women.

*Makourou* — A courtship dance from the Maritime region.

## MALISSADIO

Malissadio is a famous legend in Mandingo society, particularly amongst those who live along the banks of the great Bafing River. There is a great drought; the river has dried up, and the people are dying of thirst. In desperation, a pregnant woman appeals to Mali, the spirit of the river, who appears in the form of a hippopotamus. He accepts the offer of her unborn child in exchange for rain, and once again, the land becomes fertile and prosperous. A girl, Sadio, is born amidst great celebration.

Time passes, and Sadio grows to maturity. She learns that she belongs to Mali, whom she grows to love dearly. A young hunter, also in love with Sadio, kills Mali, and horrified, Sadio hurls herself into the river and drowns. The villagers prevent the hunter from joining her, and he is left to find a way to make retribution for his dreadful crime.

*Konkoba* — A Mandingo dance to motivate the cultivators before beginning the preparations for planting.

*Kassa* — A celebratory dance after the hunt.

*Coucou* — A dance of the forest fisherwoman.

*Sörsörmé* — A celebratory dance from the Maritime region (Baga tribe).



## INTERMISSION

### THE BELL OF HAMANA

In the Hamana region of Haute Guinea, a lone woodcutter comes upon a giant tortoise trapped on its back. After gently righting the tortoise, the woodcutter proceeds to cut a tree. Offended by this desecration of the forest, the spirits of the forest appear in the guise of animals and attack the woodcutter. Suddenly the tortoise, the master of the forest, appears, and the spirits withdraw. Repaying the earlier kindness of the woodcutter, the tortoise gives him a great bell, the Bell of Hamana — a clear message to all peoples of the world to live in harmony with their forests.

*Daro* — The Bell Dance — A dance from Haute Guinea performed by women at baptisms.

*Kargnan* — From the Sahelian Savanna in the northeast of Guinea, performed by men on occasions of great celebration.

*Mindiani* — A puberty dance performed by young maidens who are specially trained to perform it only on special ceremonial occasions.

*Soko* — A dance performed by young uninitiated men.

*Doundounba* — A dance performed by the strongest and fittest people of the region. A medley of several dances — Kawa, Soliwulen, Konden, Doundoun. Performed in celebration of a good harvest.

### FINALE

A spectacular fresco of Guinean culture from the country's four natural regions: Maritime Guinea, Fouta-Djallon, Haute Guinea, and the Forest Region.





**I**n an illustrious career spanning almost four decades, the African Ballet of Guinea has been a living demonstration of Africa's prodigious cultural heritage, its vitality and authenticity assured by a continuing connection with the daily life of all African peoples. Created in 1952 by the distinguished Guinean choreographer, Keita Fodeba, the African Ballet of Guinea was to become, after independence in 1958, the national ensemble of the Republic of Guinea. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Ballet undertook an astounding itinerary, sometimes remaining on tour for up to two years at a time. On one extraordinary marathon, they appeared in 165 capital cities, presenting 695 performances in 730 days, traveling by plane, train, and by road.

Keita Fodeba was to become the Guinean Minister of the Interior, but in the upheaval during this troubled period, he ultimately lost his life. During the uncertainties of the times, cultural interests had to take a back seat, and apart from one or two brief tours, the company remained at home. In the late 1980s, however, the situation stabilized, and in 1988, a long-term strategy was developed for Guinean culture, both at home and abroad. Bailo Telivel Diallo was appointed National Director of Culture, and a new artistic director, Italo Zambo, brought his skilled guidance to bear on Les Ballets Africains. A first visit to Europe was arranged, allowing the company to be seen by an international gathering of festival programmers in Paris, and in 1990, the Ballet made an 80-date tour of eight European countries. During the summer of 1991, the company revisited Europe, followed by this current tour of the United States with 75 engagements. Further plans are under way for extensive tours in 1992-93, including visits to Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, and the Far East. Les Ballets Africains was also recently featured in a one-hour television special broadcast throughout Great Britain.

Meanwhile, Guinea's Department of Culture is completing plans for the creation of a headquarters for Les Ballets Africains that will include a school of music and dance and a theater, specially designed to be mobile. This will enable the presentation of first-class performances anywhere in Guinea or in the surrounding countries. Several national

groups will be under one roof as the Institute of Music, Dance and Theater, a model that can ultimately be applied in other African countries. Funding for this ambitious plan will be provided by various international agencies, such as the United Nations Development Fund and the European Economic Community, with the continued support of the Government of the Republic of Guinea.

**Italo Zambo**, Artistic Director, was born in Dakar in 1939 of a Congolese father and Cape Verdian mother. He auditioned for Les Ballets Africains in Dakar in 1955 and first came to Guinea in 1957 as a member of the troupe. He has been with Les Ballets Africains ever since, except for a year of French military service and a period as artistic director of the National Senegal Ballet in the early 1960s. His film credits include *Ben Hur* (1959), in which he led the slave dance, and the Guinean television production *Minuit* (1988), as co-producer and a principal actor/dancer. He is also a favorite of Guinean television audiences as a comic mime.

**Hamidou Bangoura**, Technical Director, was born in 1941 in Conakry to a family from Coyah (50 kilometers from the capital). As a teenager, he danced with a neighborhood dance troupe before joining Les Ballets Africains in 1960. He served as artistic director between 1965 and 1975 and was Director General from 1980 to 1986. Twice awarded the Gold Medal for Best Artist by the Guinean government (1965 and 1968), he was also decorated by President Mobutu of Zaire in 1969.

**Kemoko Sano**, Choreographer, and Hippopotamus in *Malissadio*, was born in 1942 in Macenta, in the Forest Region where Guinea borders on Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and was an athletic coach before becoming director of the dance troupe of the Prefecture of Macenta. He was paralyzed by a fall in 1964, during a performance in Paris as an acrobatic dancer with Les Ballets Africains, but recovered later the same year after his return to Macenta. He also served as Director General of Ballets Djoliba from 1973 to 1986 and in 1987 founded a junior troupe, Les Merveilles d'Afrique.







### The Kora

**L**es Ballets Africains was the first group to introduce the Kora to the world. The Kora's western equivalent is the harp, and its accompanying instruments are the Balafone (similar to the xylophone) or the Peuhle flute.

The Kora is a derivative of another instrument called a "koli," a 3-7 stringed instrument also known as a gabou, that originates from Guinea Bissau, southwest of Guinea. The Kora is made from three basic materials: a calabash (gourd), which is the body, wood, and hide. Traditionally a 21-stringed instrument, the newer instruments now use up to 24 strings.

The tuning of the Kora is created by different positioning of leather rings around the strings. It produces a sound that is soft and clean, lending itself to the atmosphere of a royal court, for which it was created. This has led to the Kora being described as majestic and mysterious.

The Kora was originally used for praises and for the chronicling of Guinean oral history, and its mastery has been passed from father to son in an unbroken line from at least the thirteenth century. The earliest master of the Kora was Jelima Deole, whose first composition was dedicated to singing the praises of Fariba, the warrior. The first Kora soloist of Les Ballets Africains was Bakar Cissoko, followed by Ba Kouyate; it is now Fode Kalissa, who has been playing since the age of seven.

### The Republic of Guinea

**G**uinea can be divided into four natural regions: Haute Guinea, Maritime Guinea, Forest Region, and Fouta Djallon. These areas constitute some of the most varied scenery in West Africa, from humid coastal plains and swamps to the fertile and forested hills and plateaus of the interior. Guinea's population of seven million is mostly Muslim and consists of a number of ethnic groups, the three principal ones being the Sousou from the coast and the Mandike and Fulani in the north and central regions. The main languages are those of these three groups, with French being the official national language.

Until 1984, it was very difficult to obtain visas to enter Guinea, and the country was virtually closed to tourists and journalists. Only recently has it begun to open up to the outside world and encourage visitors. The main reason for its isolation was largely due to the late President Sekou Touré's stand against French colonialism, preferring total independence to General Charles de Gaulle's offer of membership in a French Commonwealth. The French reaction was swift and harsh and the cost heavy, but Guinea survived, and Les Ballets Africains is a symbol and reflection of the nation's resilience in the face of adversity. Aided by the continuous encouragement and financial support of Guinea's Ministry of Culture, the company has rightfully earned the title of Guinea's "roving ambassador."