

KanKouran Artistic Director - Assane Konte

Assane Konte, a national of Senegal, West Africa, is the Founder and Artistic Director, Choreographer, Costume Designer for KanKouran West African Dance Company. Mr. Konte began his dance training at age 12, and studied with many prominent traditional dancers and musicians throughout West Africa. These teachers/mentors, born in Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Senegal, were key to his development as a multi talented artist. His career as a professional dancer began at age 15 with the "Ballet Africaine de Diebel Guee" of Dakar, Senegal. During his ten years with the company, he electrified audiences with his performances, while simultaneously developing his own movement style. In 1978, following a tour in Cote d'Ivoire where he worked and performed as a guest consultant for a locally based dance company, Mr. Konte came to the United States to pursue a career as an independent performer and worked with numerous organizations, as musical arranger, and choreographer.

Subsequently, Mr. Konte's realization that he needed to develop his own dance company in order to accomplish his ultimate goal of introducing traditional African dance and drumming to wider audiences in the U.S. led him in 1983, along with his colleague, Mr. Abdou Kounta, master drummer from Senegal, to found the KanKouran dance company, Mr. Konte assumed the responsibilities of Artistic Director of the company. Since that time, his lifelong dedication to preserving and sharing Africa's rich culture through dance and music has made him a goodwill ambassador, promoting cross cultural appreciation and understanding in the many performance venues in which he and the company appear. For his tireless work, innovative choreography, and outstanding contribution to the community, Mr. Konte has been the recipient of several prestigious awards which include the Immigrant Lawyers Association's "Immigrant of the Year" award (along with other recipients including Madeleine Albright, Placido Domingo, and Abe Polin), and an award for "Outstanding Community Service" presented by WGMS, one of the most popular classical music radio stations in Washington, D.C.

In addition, Mr. Konte's awareness of African dance as a universal language has allowed him to reach out to other artistic traditions. As a result, KanKouran has performed with symphony orchestras, chorales, church based dance groups, tap- dance companies, ballet companies, theatrical productions and other drum and dance companies from around the world.

His choreography and costume designing have enhanced not only KanKouran's stage professionalism, but numerous local and national dance companies as well. Through his careful and meticulous choreography, Mr. Konte has taken U.S. based African dance to another level: at the same time he has challenged his company's dancers and drummers to achieve impressive levels of virtuosity and technical ability. Although Mr. Konte choreographs primarily for his own company, his ingenious creativity and spirit is always in demand at home and abroad. Consequently, he conducts programs in Poland, Hawaii, Japan, and St. Croix. Mr. Konte has held faculty positions in the dance department at several prestigious universities in the Washington, D.C. area, including American and George Mason Universities, and presently serves on the faculty at Howard University.