

KanKouran - History

KanKouran West African Dance Company was founded in 1983 by Artistic Director Assane Konte, and former Director of Music, Abdou Kounta, both from Senegal, West Africa. Incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1984 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, the company was founded for the purpose of contributing to the extension of the arts by introducing the essence of traditional African dancing and drumming to audiences in the U.S. in order to promote intercultural understanding through education and the performing arts. In 1992, Medoune ("Dame") Yacine Gueye, an outstanding drummer from Senegal, assumed the position of Director of Music.

KanKouran is home to three performing companies: the Senior, Junior, and Children's groups. The company, whose members were born in the United States, Africa and the Caribbean, is dedicated to preserving and sharing the culture of Africa. KanKouran has established itself as an organization offering a wide range of educational and cultural programs. KanKouran functions much like a traditional African community, where given the communal nature of African culture, each individual understands his or her role in maintaining the oneness of the community to the benefit of the entire community, and each individual is encouraged to contribute and participate to the extent of that person's talents and abilities. As a result, due to the all-inclusive nature of the company, KanKouran appeals to a wide range of audiences of various ages, races, and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's outstanding reputation has spawned numerous alliances/collaborations with organizations and institutions throughout the United States and abroad. On the local and national levels, these include: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Smithsonian Institution, National Symphony Orchestra, Lincoln Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, California Center for the Arts, Howard University, Model Secondary School for the Arts at Gallaudet University, American University, George Mason University, University of Pittsburgh, and Virginia Technical Institute. On an international level: Silesian Dance Theater and the Dance Festival Krakow in Poland; Maui Dance Council, Hawaii; Japan Cultural Arts Center, Tokyo; and Island Center for the Performing Arts, St. Croix.

Over the years, KanKouran has been fortunate to achieve overwhelming success for professional presentations and has received numerous prestigious awards as a result. Most notably, the company has been the recipient of the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities "Outstanding Artist in an Artistic Discipline Award", and the company's Artistic Director was named "Outstanding Immigrant of the Year" by the Immigration Lawyers Association.

KanKouran's success is perhaps best judged by the large number of company and community members who have moved on to other academic, professional, and entrepreneurial pursuits, and who credit KanKouran with instilling within them the discipline, pride, commitment to self and society which have made their life pursuits meaningful as well as successful. They are proud to have undergone the KanKouran experience under the direction of Assane Konte.