

About Balafon

Last Updated Tuesday, 19 February 2008

Balafon Arises! Delivering emotionally-charged performances to audiences of all ages, Balafon West African Dance Ensemble is easily emerging as one of Washington DC's and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's premiere contemporary African performance ensembles. Officially formed in 1997, Balafon is a creative partnership among several artists who masterfully blend the natural elegance of traditional West African dance and culture with amazing heroic athleticism. Balafon West African Dance Ensemble, incorporated in 2001, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. A Celebration of Culture

The mission of Balafon West African Dance Ensemble, Inc. is to provide an insightful, woman-centered perspective on West African tradition and culture as a source of healing and balance by providing quality education and entertainment to audiences of all nationalities and walks of life.

Guided by the artistic directorship of Kadiatou Conte, a native of the Republic of Guinea and formerly of the world-renown Ballets National Djoliba, the ensemble brings to the stage an exquisite celebration of classical West African song, music, and dance reflecting more than 30 years of experience in the world of African performance arts.

With its intricate display of choreography and stunning raiment, Balafon is a breath of fresh air on the contemporary African dance scene offering a unique perspective on West African tradition and culture … a definite must see!History of the Balafon

The balafon, also known as gyile or marimba, originated from West Africa in areas now called Ghana, Guinea and Burkina Faso. They are used at funerals, festivals and celebrations to provide both melody and rhythm.

The keys of the balafon are made from male shea butter trees that have been dead for several years — it must have lost most of its natural oils. The wood is cut into planks and dried over fires built into the ground. The planks are cut into keys with a short-handled axe. A sharp knife is used for fine-tuning; wood is cut from the middle to produce flat notes and from the end to create sharp notes. Gourds are then put under the keys to amplify their sound. What Others Have to Say

“Spectacular!” Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
See the full review of Balafon's October 2007 performance

“Exquisite.” The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC

2008 Individual Creative Artists Fellowship recipient, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
“Mama” Kadiatou Conte, Folk and Traditional Arts – Performing TraditionsA Partial Tour History

2007 YWCA Racial Justice Awards, Pittsburgh, PA
African Dance & Drum Conference, Atlanta, GA
African Heritage Remembrance, Silver Spring, MD
African Heritage Worship Service, Clinton AME Zion Church, Rockville, MD
Africare, Washington, DC
AIDS Vaccine Fundraiser, 19th Street Baptist Church, Washington, DC
Alliance for Community Media Conference, Washington, DC
American Academy of Physician Assistants, Alexandria, VA
Baltimore City Community College, Baltimore, MD
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
Birthday Celebration & Mozambique Flood Victims Benefit, Washington, DC
Black Religious Summit on Sexuality - Youth Summit, Washington, DC
Bowie State University, Bowie, MD
Burnt Mills Elementary School, Silver Spring, MD
Cafe Asia, Washington, DC
California University of Pennsylvania, California, PA
Caribbean Pan Yard, Washington, DC
Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA
Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD
Chihamba of Dancescape, Charlottesville, VA
Community College Baltimore County, Catonsville, MD
Conference on Global Social Change Philanthropy, Washington, DC
Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, OH
Dance Africa, Washington, DC
DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Washington, DC

Discover Me Youth Arts Festival, Bethesda, MD
DRS Laurel Technologies, Johnstown, PA
Emery Recreation Center, Washington, DC
Fitness Company, Washington, DC
Flint Hill School, Oakton, VA
Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL
Florida African Dance Festival, Tallahassee, FL
Folklife Festival, Washington, DC
Fundraiser for Dafur, Sudan, Cheverly, MD
Gaithersburg Marriot, Gaithersburg, MD
Galludet University, Washington, DC
Georgetown University Law School, Washington, DC
Georgetown University, Washington, DC
Ghana Embassy, Washington, DC
Grace Choir Gospel Album Release Party, Washington, DC
Grace Episcopal Church, Silver Spring, MD
Greater Southeast Community Hospital, Washington, DC
Harmony Hall Regional Center, Fort Washington, MD
Heritage Carnival of Prince George's County, Hyattsville, MD
Howard Community College, Columbia, MD
Howard University, Washington, DC
Ikea Grand Opening, College Park, MD
International Day Fair, Herndon, VA
International Festival, Washington, DC
Jabbok International Fellowship, Washington, DC
Jackson Road Elementary School, Silver Spring, MD
Joe's Movement Emporium, Mt Rainier, MD
Joy of Motion, Bethesda, MD
Kwanzaa Celebration, Springfield, VA
Liberia Council for Relief and Development, Chevy Chase, MD
Lincoln Theatre, Washington, DC
Lucent Technologies, Silver Spring, MD
Macy's at Pentagon City Mall, Arlington, VA
Maison Française, Washington, DC
Martin's Crosswinds, Greenbelt, MD
Maryland Science Center, Baltimore, MD
Mayor Anthony Williams Inauguration Celebration, Washington, DC
Mayor's Arts Awards, Lincoln Theatre, Washington, DC
Methodist Conference, Washington, DC
Metro Dance Awards, Washington, DC
Midwest African Dance Conference, Cleveland, Ohio
Montgomery College, Rockville, MD
NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC
Nativity Catholic Church, Washington, DC
Parren J. Mitchell Foundation, Greenbelt, MD
Prince Georges Plaza Mall, Hyattsville, MD
Publick Playhouse, Cheverly, MD
Reston Multicultural Festival, Reston, VA
Riverside Baptist Church, Washington, DC
Rock Creek Church Festival, Washington, DC
Rollingcrest-Chillum Community Center, Chillum, MD
Rose Valley Elementary School, Fort Washington, MD
Samuel Coleridge Taylor Elementary School, Baltimore, MD
Sheridan School, Washington, DC
Sleepy Hollow Nursing Home, Annandale, VA
Sogbety Diomande's West African Celebration, Mansfield, OH
Springfield High School, Erdenhiem, PA
St. Mary Magdalene Church, Wheaton, MD
St. Monica's Episcopal Church, Washington, DC
St. Paul's Center's Rock Creek Festival, Washington, DC
Starbucks, Washington, DC
Stone Ridge School, Bethesda, MD
Strathmore Arts, Bethesda, MD
Tallahassee Community College, Tallahassee, FL

The John F. Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts, Washington, DC
The Mitre Corporation, McLean, VA
The Writer’s Center, Bethesda, MD
There is Hope Scholarship Dinner, Oxon Hill, MD
Trinity College, Washington, DC
Unifest, Union Temple Church, Washington, DC
United Nations Headquarters, New York City, NY
Unity Festival, Washington, DC
University of Maryland, College Park, MD
University of the District of Columbia, Washington, DC
US Department of Labor, Washington, DC
Washington Ethical Society, Washington, DC
We Are One, Fairfax, VA
YMCA, Cleveland, OHTo schedule Balafon performances, workshops and classes …

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