

# Kadiatou Conte

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Kadiatou Conte is the artistic director of the Balafon West African Dance Ensemble, which is composed of many of her students and colleagues from her years with the National Ballet of Guinea.

As a young girl born in Conakry, Guinea, West Africa in 1955, Kadiatou loved to dance and sing. In 1970, she was selected to join Les Ballet Africains, the national dance company of Guinea. She became one of the premiere dancers in Les Ballet Africains and Djoliba. From 1970 to 1985 she traveled and performed around the world for heads of state and sold out audiences in Moscow, France, Belgium, England, Brazil, Spain, Japan, Australia, the United States and nearly every country in Africa. As a performer, she served as a cultural ambassador for Guinea. While on tour in the United States, she fell in love with the people of the US, especially the African American community. She left the United States hoping to return one day to teach, young and old alike, the culture of her country.

In 1985, Kadiatou returned to the United States, coming to Washington, DC to fulfill her dream. Kadiatou, affectionately known as Mama Kadiatou, has become a major force in the African Arts community serving as a bridge between the Guinean and the Washington, DC community. She has worked with Melvin Deal and the African Heritage Dancers & Drummers, Kankouran and Assan Konte, Jali Djimo Kouyate and Memory of African Culture, Wo'se, and the Andrew Cacho Drummers and Dancers. Kadiatou has also worked with the legendary women's group Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Kadiatou has taught at Howard University, George Washington University, University of Maryland, Duke Ellington School of Performing Arts, and at private and public elementary schools throughout the region. Kadiatou currently teaches several weekly classes to enthusiastic students in Washington, DC and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

A consummate teacher and motivator, Kadiatou believes that dance makes one stronger physically and mentally, and is a source of healing and balance in one's life. Her belief in God and prayer has allowed her to touch the lives of many people of all nationalities and walks of life.