

The Miami Herald

Posted on Fri, Aug. 10, 2012

African Diaspora Dance and Drum Festival at the Little Haiti Cultural Center

By Sabrina Rodriguez
The Miami Herald



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Daniel Gibbs, 13, of Fort Lauderdale, left; Yejide "Jiji" Major, 9, of Lauderhill; and Anya McNab, 10, of Miramar, learn West African drumming at last year's Delou Africa Inc.'s Inaugural African Diaspora Dance & Drum Festival of Florida, at the Little Haiti Cultural Center.

Experience the rhythmic drums and the brightly colored costumes of West African culture at a musical festival this weekend at the Little Haiti Cultural Center.

The Third Annual African Diaspora Dance and Drum Festival of Florida will feature traditional dance, drum, and music Friday to Sunday.

"We want to bring the community together as a celebration of diversity," said Njeri Plato-Dioubate, the festival's executive director.

She notes that many in South Florida can trace their heritage to West Africa, especially those of Caribbean descent.

The cultural center is at 212-260 NE 59th Terr.

Since its start in 1987, the Delou Africa Dance Ensemble has made it a mission to preserve African heritage in South Florida.

Plato-Dioubate hopes people of all ages will turn out.

"I would like the families that attend reach a self-awareness and cultural awareness to know that Africa is rich with tradition and full of life stories," said Plato-Dioubate.

The festival offers 24 workshops focused on this year's theme, Bridging Cultural Gaps.

Throughout the festival weekend, 15 international choreographers and musicians will host workshops for the public.

The first day of the festival will kick off with a symposium along with a workshop about the djembe, a musical instrument, and Haitian folklore dance.

Native African vendors will sell their wares in the marketplace throughout the festivities.

Children can take part in free events like storytelling, face painting and dance and drum workshops.

One of the dance ensemble's goals is to reach out to children with musical programs and workshops.

"We are trying to plant the seed within the community so that we can have our own children's dance ensemble," said Plato-Dioubate.

On Saturday night, a concert will feature well-known performers from Haiti, Cuba, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Guinea.

Concert tickets range from \$10 to \$15.

Ibrahima Dioubate, the company's griot — a storyteller who recounts oral tradition — and musical consultant, is responsible for the

influx of African artists because of his contacts on the continent.

He is also the leader of Delou Fatala, a musical company that focuses on performing traditional West African instruments.

"It was easy to have performers come together because they each complement each other," Dioubate said. "We develop music and dance to connect the dancers with a dialogue that they can relate to."

As a special recognition during the events, Dr. Charles Davis, founder of Chuck Davis Dance Company and the African American Dance Ensemble, will be awarded the 2012 Delou Africa Inc. Cultural Community Outreach Award.

"We would like for the people in the community whether a dancer, musician or layperson to come and be a part of the festivities and celebration so that they can recognize that yes, they have a heritage," Davis said. "It isn't necessarily African or Latino heritage. It's anyone."

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