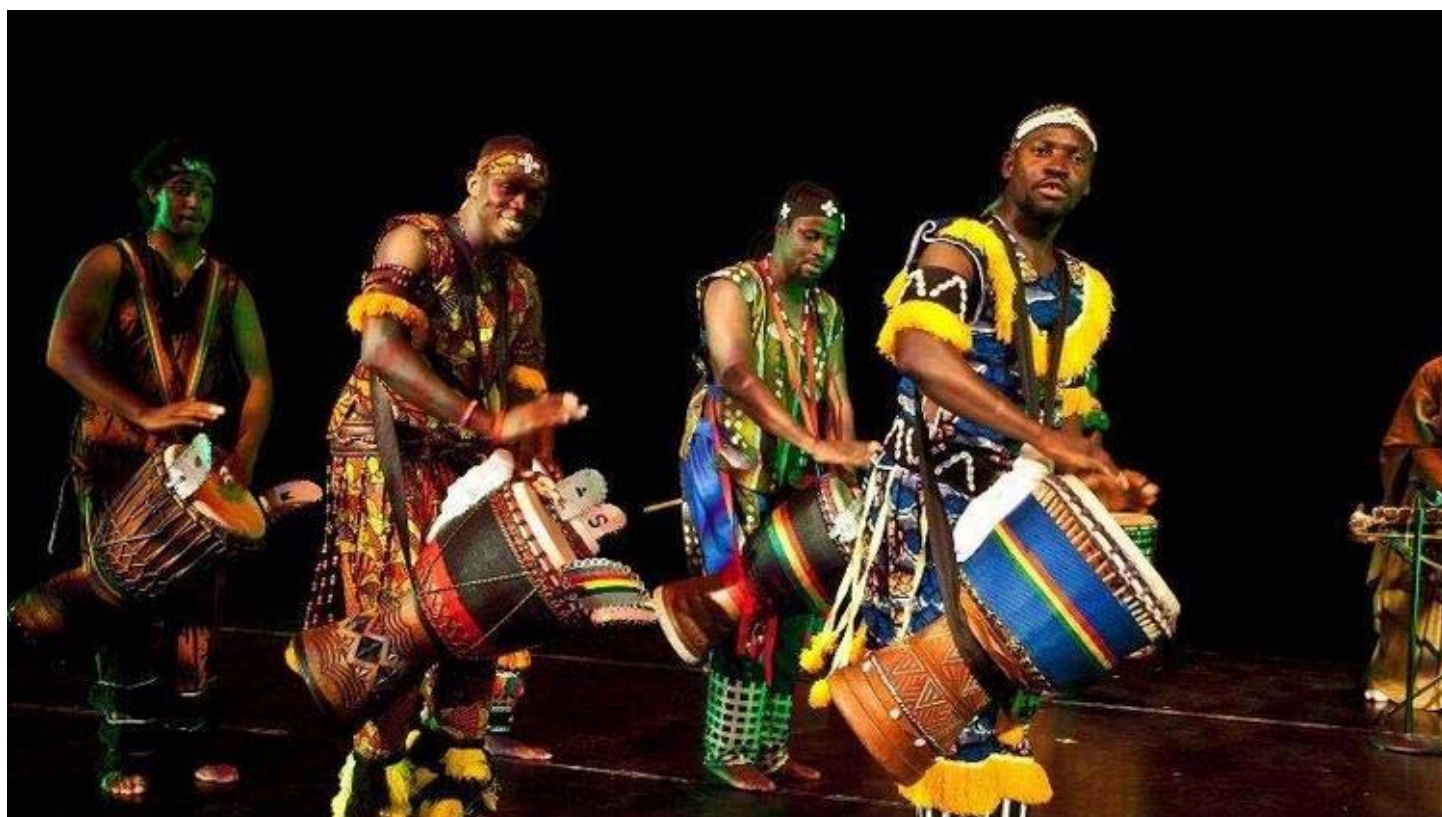


African dance festival attempts to unite cultures, counties



Delou Africa is bringing the culture of the African diaspora Aug. 6 to Miramar Cultural Center. (Delou Africa / Courtesy)



By **Barbara Corbellini Duarte . Contact Reporter**

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In 2010, Njeri Plato started the African Diaspora Dance and Drum Festival of Florida as a way to bridge the gap between African and Western cultures. This year, she'll bridge a gap between counties by bringing the festival to Broward for the first time.

"Our festival brings people together, and for one common cause, to express culture," Plato says. "It has no boundaries. It's very universal. We want to bridge gaps in that way, too, bringing communities together, bridging counties together."

ADVERTISING

The seventh edition of the festival will take place Aug. 5-7 at Little Haiti Cultural Center and at Miramar Cultural Center. It will feature dance and music workshops and performances, a fashion show, a children's area and a marketplace. The biggest dance show will take place in Miramar on Saturday, featuring African diaspora dance styles from Cuba, Haiti, Brazil and the United States, as well as traditional folkloric dance from Guinea, Mali and Senegal.

This year, the festival is under the umbrella of DanceAfrica, one of the largest African diaspora festivals in the country. DanceAfrica was founded nearly 40 years at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Its founder, Charles "Chuck" Davis, has been coming to Plato's festival since its second year.

This collaboration will bring New-York-based Forces of Nature Dance Theatre to Plato's event. The company combines contemporary, traditional West African, ballet and hip-hop styles.

"It gives more value. It enhances it, and it just brings more to the table," Plato says of the collaboration with DanceAfrica. "It's been several years that we have been talking about it. He's very much pleased about how we're running our festival and what we're doing in the community."

Plato's commitment to spreading knowledge of the African diaspora in South Florida started long before her festival. When she moved from Brooklyn to Miami in 1981, she searched for dance studios around town and found mostly hip-hop, modern and ballet classes.

Plato, who's originally from Trinidad, says she felt as if African culture weren't receiving the recognition it deserved.

"In hip-hop, the things they do in acrobatics, if you go to Africa, that's what they do," she says.

So in 1987, she started her own company, Delou Africa Dance Ensemble, which is now part of her nonprofit, Delou Africa.

"We believe that Africa is at the root of everything," Plato says. "That's exactly why I started this organization, because at the time, I didn't see where we fit in society. I didn't feel like we were getting enough credit, and that's why we're here, moving forward with it."

Besides organizing the festival, Delou Africa offers African music and dance classes at Little Haiti Cultural Center throughout the year, as well as cultural workshops, such as African maskmaking.

"I believe that if you don't know your past, you're not going to know your future, because your past is what molds you to where you're going in life," Plato says. "And that's what Delou represents. Delou Africa means, 'Return to Africa.'"

African Diaspora Dance and Drum Festival of Florida will take place Aug. 5-6 at Little Haiti Cultural Center, 212 NE 59th Terrace, in Miami, and at Miramar Cultural Center, 2400 Civic Center Place. The dance gala will begin 8 p.m. Saturday in Miramar. Admission is \$20-\$45. Call 305-978-3866 or go to MiramarCulturalCenter.org or ADDDFF.DelouAfrica.org.

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