

Delou: Uniting Africa and the Diaspora



African culture — in all its diversity — has influenced many communities and cultures that are represented in Miami. Just last month, Los Muñequitos de Matanzas exhibited Afro-Cuban culture through the dances of the Orishas, the deities of the Yoruba pantheon, and rumba; in February, Peru Negro and Eva Ayllón brought to life an invisible Peruvian culture and identity; and Brazz dance brought to the fore an Afro-Brazilian fusion, in the piece “Oxossi” in *Mistura Fina*.

This Saturday, Delou Africa will unite the motherland to the African Diaspora with the production *Wontanara*, at the glimmering Little Haiti Cultural Center, sharing the disparate cultures from West Africa and the new world.

Wontanara is a collaborative work created and produced by the Delou Africa Dance Ensemble and its musical counterpart, Delou Fatala. “The dance and music will depict passages of life,” such as Harvest, Courtship, Adversity, Agriculture, Strength, Celebration, and Spirituality, according to the description from the troupe.

Wontanara is a Soussou word, spoken in Guinea, West Africa, which means unity. “This production brings together the resiliency of the African experience through the vibrancy of the culture and arts — the drum, the dance the song — on stage,” says Chip Harriott, a choreographer and performer of Delou Africa.

The pieces will share the exuberance, sorrow, and joys of the African experience both on the continent and throughout the Diaspora. They will bridge African culture mainly from West Africa to the Caribbean through dance, music, and folklore.

The performance will also feature Children of Kuumba, a Hollywood-based children’s performance troupe under the direction of Anita Macbeth and Harriott. They will perform “Boot Dance” and “Can Dance,” based on the respective dance forms created by workers in the mines of South Africa. The dances show the resiliency of the South African miners as they worked in harsh conditions. Although giving their lives to cultivation of the raw materials and stones and being separated from their families, they still created sounds of joy through what they had — their bodies, their work boots, and their cans.

Delou will try and captivate the audience with the new choreographies “Landship” and “Yanvalou.”

“Landship,” a colonial dance from Bajan people in Barbados, will depict the journey that was taken from Africa to the island, mimicking the movements of a ship and its crew at sea.

“‘Yanvalou’ is a Haitian ritual dance of supplication, invocation and healing originating from Benin” explains Harriott. The undulations of the dance represent the union of the serpent and the ocean to represent fertility and creation.

The performance will also consist of Delou signature pieces: “Lendgen,” a dance of togetherness based on the grace and beauty of egrets in the Casamas region of Senegal; “Yankadi-Makru,” a courtship dance from the Soussou people of Guinea; and “Kakilambe,” a harvest festival piece from Guinea.

Delou Africa, Inc. was started in 2010 by Delou Africa Dance Ensemble (D.A.D.E.), a traditional West African Performing Arts Company which has been preserving African heritage in South Florida since 1987. D.A.D.E has expanded its brand to include more opportunity for participants to learn African traditions through dance, drum, music, and history.

Wontanara will be performed on Saturday, May 21, 2011 at 7:30 p.m., at the Little Haiti Cultural Center (LHCC), 212 to 260 N.E. 59th Terr., Miami. Tickets for adults are \$15.00 in advance, \$20.00 at the door, children, students and seniors \$10.00.

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