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MIAMI JOINS MAJOR CITIES IN HOSTING ANNUAL DANCEAFRICA FESTIVAL

Photo:

DanceAfrica, a celebration of African dance and culture, appears annually in New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C. Last seen in Miami

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Review: Siempre



WRITTEN BY: CATHERINE HOLLINGSWORTH (/OUR-WRITERS /CATHERINE-HOLLINGSWORTH)

1997, the festival returns this year **ARTICLE RATING** thanks to the efforts of local dance group Delou Africa.

For years, Delou Africa has brought visiting artists to the Miami community in a similar annual festival, the African Diaspora Dance and Drum Festival of Florida. DanceAfrica Miami is a welcome extension to the African dance community that Delou has steadily built here.

DanceAfrica was formed in the 1960s under the artistic direction of Dr. Chuck Davis as a showcase for the rich artistic traditions from the African continent. Since its beginnings, it has offered a platform for master artists, performers and teachers. The festival serves as a temporary cultural hub with a wide variety of African-themed performances and events circling around it.

The centerpiece of this year's program is a performance by acclaimed dance company Forces of Nature. Performances, master classes, and family friendly events will also be offered.

We recently spoke to Njeri Plato, Delou's founder, about the festival and its 2016 return to Miami.

What sparked the return of DanceAfrica this year after such a long time away?

Our annual festival [the African Diaspora Dance and Drum Festival of Florida] is basically a mirror of DanceAfrica. In 2011, Dr. Chuck Davis came to our festival. He heard about it and people told him that it was very nice. So he wanted to come for himself and see. And he is the founder of DanceAfrica. From that day forth, he has been coming to our festival and we started to have conversations about Dance Africa come to Miami.

What does Dance Africa add to what you've already been doing?

It's an extension of what we have been doing. In the future and this time around, our concert has been enhanced by a headliner: Forces of Nature Dance Theater. Abdel Salaam, who is the artistic director and founder of Forces of Nature, is now the artistic director of DanceAfrica. So his presence and the company's appearance here is a very big deal. We

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have moved to a bigger venue at the Miramar Cultural Center. For other years it was held at the Little Haiti Cultural Center. We still have our Children's Village, and we are adding a fashion show at the Little Haiti Cultural Center this year.

Can you describe Forces of Nature's work?

Their 35th anniversary is this year. They represent the diaspora in terms of the genre of dances that they do. They not only work and do West African folklore dance, they also do contemporary and modern and other styles of dances.

It's wonderful that you are able to bring visiting artists from New York and other places.

We must always remember our local artists that represent Cuba, which is Sikan Afro-Cuban Dance Project. Representing Haiti, we have Nancy St. Leger Dance Ensemble. We have two children's companies this year: African Wototo Dance Theatre and also Children of Kuumba. And onstage will be all our guest artists from West Africa representing Mali, Senegal and Guinea this year along with Delou Africa Dance Ensemble.

And there will be workshops as part of this weekend as well?

Yes, at the Little Haiti Cultural Center. We will start our day on Saturday at 9:30 a.m. and it goes all the way up to 5:15 p.m. Then we head over to the Miramar Cultural Center. We have about 15 different types of workshops including dance, music, and shekere classes. Forces of Nature will be teaching a class also.

Do you hope to have DanceAfrica return annually as it in other cities?

That is the goal, and with the approval and endorsement of Davis, we hope to continue. We hope to get sponsors to really help us bring this alive. Not just having it one year like we did before in 1997, but keeping it going as Brooklyn Academy of Music has kept it going for the long run.

DanceAfrica Aug. 5-7, at Little Haiti Cultural Center and Miramar Cultural Center, addff.delouafrica.org.

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