

# *Kusum Africa*

Friday and Saturday, March 1–2, 2002, 8 pm  
Zellerbach Hall

Choreography and Story Created by  
CK Ladzekpo, Nii Yartey, Malonga Casquelourd, and Kemoko Sano

Produced by East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, Jordan Simmons, artistic director  
Jay Moss, production manager/technical director  
David Tawiah Akushey Amoo, set design and production  
George Tsatsu Kartey, lighting design  
CK Ladzekpo, Nii Yartey, Malonga Casquelourd, and Kemoko Sano, music composition and arrangement  
Grace Djabaki Djabatey, costume design and production  
The Companies, additional costumes  
Jill Schinberg, stage manager  
Phil Stockton, backstage manager  
Mary Ann Zahorsky, chief audio engineer  
Michael Levin, Andres Cediel, and Witt Monts, videographers/documentation  
Linda Chang, curriculum/study guide  
Miko Lee, public access workshops

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## AFRICAN MUSIC AND DANCE ENSEMBLE

CK Ladzekpo, artistic director

DRUMMERS  
CK Ladzekpo  
Kwaku Ladzekpo  
Gideon Allorwoyie  
Moddy Perry  
Trevino Leon  
Jordan Simmons  
Seth Tager  
Kwaku Katamani  
Chris Brague  
Kalafya Brown

DANCERS  
Betty Ladzekpo  
Caprice Armstrong  
Tiffany Graham  
Mawuli Ladzekpo  
Nailah Hepburn  
Letitia Powell  
Alicia Chatman  
Isabeth Landeros  
Amber Todd  
Petraya Lowe

Keith Norman  
Joni Haastrup  
Alfred Ladzekpo

Rebecca Maestre  
Robin Smith  
Mashante Brown

#### NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY OF GHANA

Francis Nii Yartey, artistic director

##### MALE DANCERS

Kofi Ahiavor  
Eric Mensah  
Samuel Adjei Sowah  
Joe Mensah  
Abukari Meriga Salifu  
Rawlings Ebo Dumako

##### FEMALE DANCERS

Peace Elewonu  
Caroline Yeme  
Veronica Numo  
Bridget Afrakuma Oppong  
Mariama Gariba

##### DRUMMERS

Mashud Neidow  
Jacob Atsu Sogah  
Emmanuel Osei Awuku  
Prosper Kwesi Dagadu  
David Tawiah Akushey Amoo

##### RESERVE MALE DANCERS

Lucky Kofi Agbemezia  
Thomas Asare

##### RESERVE FEMALE DANCERS

Patience Saforo  
Evelyn Akowiah  
Mercy Simon

#### BALLET MERVEILLES DE GUINEA

Kemoko Sano, artistic director/choreographer

Soumah Yamoussa  
Sano Mamady  
Kaba Alpha Kabine  
Bangoura Yalani  
Bangoura Mariama  
Camara Mariama

Dioubate N'Touma  
Kaira Mabinty  
Bangoura S – Fode  
Toure Lamsana  
Kouyate Aboubacar  
Sylla Mangué  
Bangoura Ismael

Alseny Soumah  
Moussa Camara  
Naby Bangoura  
Mangué Sylla  
Manadi Sano  
Mohamed Kaouyate

#### FUA DIA CONGO

Malonga Casquelourd, artistic director

##### DANCERS

Yahsmeen Abdusami  
Ayodele Ankoanda-King  
Shauna Badger  
Tina Combs  
Kim Davis  
Regine Grier  
Janeen Johnson  
Lugusu Malonga  
Muisi-Kongo Malonga  
Renee Puckett

##### AFIA THOMPSON

Nikko S. Thompson  
Serge Mambou  
Moumbolo Alain  
Borrina Mapaka  
Yelessa Antoinette  
Regine Ndounda  
Cady Ndounda  
Kuwa Apará  
Kahende Apará  
Chymese Shaw

##### DRUMMERS

Malonga Casquelourd  
Massengo Constant  
SeKou Gibson  
Jean-Armel Mampouya  
Tom Waller  
Kiazi Malonga  
Batantou Ferdinand  
Massamba Hyacinthe

#### SYNOPSIS

The narrative story within Kusum Africa is both a social commentary and an allegory about the struggle for leadership in Africa south of the Sahara, a region replete with wars, military coups, and acute poverty, where there is a serious crisis of responsible social and political leadership. It is about pageantry, peace, and love. It is about young people taking responsibility for the world around them. Perhaps, above all, it is about the power of dance.

The tale opens when King Agor ascends the metaphorical throne of Africa by eliminating the rightful heir, Atta Din, thus setting in motion an explosive chain of events involving misuse of royal power, greed, and mythical forces, as Agor struggles to retain his throne.

Spurred by his anger at the love of his only daughter, Tetele, and Ate, one of Atta Din's twin sons, King Agor gives in to his greed and fear, making selfish decisions with no vision for the African people whom he rules. Finally, the citizens and youth of Africa join with Atta Din's surviving family in advocating and battling for a restoration of normalcy, and the establishment of a new Kusum (culture) for their land.

## PRODUCER'S NOTES

Contemporary African Dance:  
Kusum Africa and the  
African Choreographer's Forum  
by East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

Kusum, by itself, means "culture" or "tradition" in Ga, the language of the Ga people of Accra, Ghana. In its use here, it means "expanding the tradition."

Today, an African dance-drumming choreographer faces special challenges when performing in a Western—or Westernized African—context, where conditions and audiences are often quite different from those that supported and nurtured this art form historically. The choreographer's audience is no longer likely to fully appreciate the rich social, cultural, and religious dimensions of the music and dance without explanation. Nor is a contemporary audience likely to fall naturally and spontaneously into the kind of interactive and collective participation that in traditional societies blurs the distinction between audience and performer.

Performed on the modern stage, African dance today is presented most often under the guise of cultural performance and is expected, above all else, to be authentic. The legitimacy of a choreographer's work is judged by how well it duplicates a narrowly defined range of recognized performance variables. Abstraction and other techniques of choreography and creativity that are the prerogatives of artists in other cultures, especially the Western cultures, are denied African choreographers. Audiences unfamiliar with the traditional subtleties that allow African artists to keep their art form vital and productive may look only at the surface and comment on the energetic or colorful qualities of a performance. Such criteria, if valid, would reduce the artist's creative role to a relatively mechanical one.

In reality, however, Sub-Saharan dance-drumming is a living and still very productive art form, sustained by highly skilled master artists whose experience encompasses both the depth and subtlety of the traditional performance context and the demands of performing to modern audiences in a changing world. To artists such as these, the challenge of adapting their art form to a new environment is an act not of concession and reduction but of creation and vitality. Their goal is simultaneously conservative and innovative: they maintain the highest standards of performance, respecting the traditional stylings and repertoire skills of the music and dance, and at the same time strive to make their art accessible to new audiences and adaptive to variable performance conditions.

Kusum Africa, in this context then, both tells a story and explores the practice of the modern African choreographer. Featuring the work of four renowned African choreographers and their respective companies, Kusum Africa is the creative centerpiece of our inaugural African Choreographers Forum, an event designed to showcase and examine the state of the art in contemporary dance-drumming in Africa and abroad. Inspired by historic events of the 1950s, when a group of young people occupied a square in the town of Accra, Ghana, to protest British colonialism, using dance, drum, and song to convey satire and revolutionary commentary, this East Bay Center for the Performing Arts world premiere production consciously adapts sub-Saharan dance-drumming for modern audiences, and was conceived by distinguished UC Berkeley professor, choreographer, and composer, CK Ladzekpo—a member of a famous family of African musicians, dancers, and composers, and artistic director of the African Music and Dance Ensemble. Joining him in this historic collaboration are Francis Nii Yartey, artistic director of the National Dance Company of Ghana; Kemoko Sano, artistic director of Ballet Merveilles de Guinée; and Malonga Casquelourd, artistic director of Fua Dia Congo.

This has been a complex creation—involving 54 artists and four dance companies, with artists living in three countries (United States, Republic of Guinea, and Ghana) and representing the traditions of three African nations (Congo, Republic of Guinea, and Ghana). It has taken us the better part of three years to present Kusum Africa here

tonight—distinct and diverse in our individual visions of dance, united in our pursuit of effectively expanding the tradition.

Making Dance-Drumming In Ghana:

The Case of the Earlier

Ghana Dance Ensemble

by CK Ladzekpo

Kaxoxowo nu wo gbea yeyeawo do. “By the example of old ropes we learn to weave new ones.”

I can still hear the echoes of that exhortative rhetoric—“be proud of your African personality.” That was part of the battle cry of nationalism and self-government movements in the Gold Coast during the 1950s. I was a teenager, and the Gold Coast was under British colonial rule.

There was a general concern about the rapid transplanted of European culture and values at the expense of that of the sub-Saharan. My father’s generation was very concerned about the lack of depth by my generation in our traditional culture.

My generation was partly a product of western-style education and partly of traditional upbringing by family and community. Most of my generation can hardly hold our own in traditional rituals.

The schools discouraged us from most of the values handed down by our ancestors. They called them pagan practices. Corporal punishments awaited any student who was observed at even a community secular drumming and dancing event.

As a child, I had to play the drum, sing, and dance. It was part of my upbringing. I come from a family of very famous drummers and composers. It was easier to bear those lashings at school than a self-excommunication from my family. I am yet to reconcile myself with the humiliation and deep anger that was my ritual every morning at school.

On March 6, 1957, the Gold Coast became the independent nation of Ghana. It was the first British African colony to gain independence, and it became the model for others to follow. Ghana was named for a powerful African empire that flourished along the upper Niger River from the 4th to the 13th centuries.

In a self-governing Ghana, institutions were developed to preserve and promote traditional African values. In 1961, the Institute of African Studies was established at the University of Ghana to conduct fundamental research in areas of African languages, history, and culture, and run interdisciplinary courses leading to MPhil and PhD degrees in African Studies. Attached to the Institute is the Ghana Dance Ensemble—a resident professional dance company that was officially inaugurated in 1962. The Ensemble links the University of Ghana with the national theater movement. The method and quality of the research that was conducted in the traditional African dance-drumming culture and the artistic policies that they produced were fine examples of scholarship and artistry.

#### EXPERIMENT IN PROMOTING MULTICULTURALISM

Ghana, at independence, was a union of distinct traditional states. Each of these states had been an autonomous entity in the past. Finding a formula to bring about some quality national unity was a national priority and academia was asked to help provide some leadership.

Under the leadership of Professor J.H. Nketia, Director of the Institute of African Studies, and Professor A.M. Opoku, Head of the School of Music, Dance and Drama, a research team was developed to study the dance-drumming tradition of Ghana.

In a bold experiment in search of a formula to promote multiculturalism, the researchers traveled across the breadth of Ghana. They selected several great drummers and dancers from traditional communities and brought them to the campuses of the Institute of African Studies. They were encouraged to share each other’s culture through dance-drumming.

The result was amazing. In a very short time, the participants developed a unique respect for each other. The distrust and lack of understanding that was an impediment to national unity was replaced with goodwill, respect, and trust.

The research team moved very quickly to institutionalize this success and transformed the experiment into the performing professional Ghana Dance Ensemble.

#### NATIONAL PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL TRADITION

Another important national priority and a mandate of the research team was preservation of the traditional culture. In their travels, the researchers studied the essence of performing various dance-drumming traditions from the traditional experts. In western-style classrooms at the Institute of African Studies, they mass-produced perfect practitioners of these dance-drumming pieces.

In most traditional communities, everyone can, or is expected to, dance. A traditional performance arena, therefore, has both good and bad dancers mixed together. The traditional community had never witnessed a performance of their dances by all perfect practitioners.

Ghana Dance Ensemble found the opportunity to send a troupe of trained perfect practitioners on tour to perform for the traditional communities. Experiencing the dynamic performances of deliberately trained professional performers was an amazing development. This linked the works of the Ghana Dance Ensemble with traditional communities across the country. These communities became the targeted audiences of the concert stage renditions of authentic traditional dances by the Ghana Dance Ensemble.

The traditional communities, as a habit, aspire to perfection. Living that dream of perfection through the works of the Ghana Dance Ensemble was empowering. To the younger generation, it sent the positive message that it was okay to live like an African and still have a western education. It was a new dawn of pride in our culture and provided the motivation to preserve it and share it with the rest of the world.

I was privileged to be part of this dynamic research as a member of the Ghana Dance Ensemble at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. I am very committed to keeping the research and pedagogy alive.

#### THE NEW ERA

In 1976, my good friend F. Nii Yartey became the artistic director of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, which was appropriately renamed the National Dance Company of Ghana. He has since enlarged the company's standard repertoire to include the creation of extended works. I will use his own words in describing the present artistic direction and activities of the National Dance Company. The following statement on contemporary African dance by F. Nii Yartey was in the brochure of a recent production.

"While addressing the need to preserve the positive and desirable elements of our dance traditions, we are at the same time developing contemporary dance forms that express our unique history and socio-economic situation today. An African audience is therefore being cultivated at a very fast pace through the presentation of high-quality and relevant contemporary dance productions that have their roots in our African traditions, but that also reflect the reality and relevance of the current African situation, thus ensuring a receptive and sympathetic audience for the future."

#### Contemporary African Dance

by F. Nii Yartey

As Africans, our cultural values are unavoidably changing as the socio-economic and cultural conditions that nourish them give way to new thinking. Further, African communities are on their way to becoming multi-cultural and, perhaps, multi-racial. We are also faced with a duality of old and new cultural and artistic phenomenon, as the Internet, radio, and television continue to invade the psychological and spiritual privacy of the average African.

It is imperative, therefore, that we broaden our perceptions of life in general in order to face the challenges of globalization, as well as problems of our immediate environment.

In view of the above, my vision of "contemporary" African dance has set a fecund ground allowing me, as it were, to explore subtleties and qualities, and of course, the kind of artistry that will further help me exploit contrasts in dynamics and other essential elements of dance creation and practice as an African living in a world . . . so small.

In traditional Africa, our dance forms are created and shared based on common communal experiences. In "contemporary" African dance, however, we are motivated not only by these conditions, but also by the myriad of artistic and other cultural vocabulary arising out of our interactions with other cultures, both from within and outside Africa.

In my work, I strive to ensure that what I experience, what I see and feel around me as an African choreographer, is compatible with the African creative philosophy and principles of dance creation and performance.

by Malonga Casquelourd

Like most people who migrate to another country, I had many hopes and aspirations upon my arrival here in 1972. I arrived from the Congo via France with many hopes, but even in my grandest dreams, I never imagined that I would be the founding member and artistic director of Fua Dia Congo. Internationally recognized, the company was created in 1977, and is one of the first authentic African dance troupes created by African immigrants within the confines of the United States. Since its inception, some 25 years ago, the members of Fua Dia Congo have included not only Congolese people but also African people from throughout the Diaspora.

Fua Dia Congo is dedicated to presenting and preserving Congolese culture through the artistic interpretation of its daily life and rituals. The work is based on a vast wealth of classical dance forms from throughout Central Africa. Each production is seen as the guardian of the root dance forms, ensuring the integrity and clarity of the art form; it maintains a tangible link directly to the Congolese regions and the cultural contexts in which each dance functions. Though the songs and dances of Fua Dia Congo strive for a true Congolese authenticity, the spirit and heart of the company were born of my Pan-Africanist youth.

As I look back on my education and formation as an artist, the road has been a long and exciting one with varied, and at

times, contradictory influences. Growing up in pre-independent colonial Congo under the cultural domination of the French, the denigration and devaluation of traditional African culture was a part of daily life. The subsequent witnessing of, and participation in, the fight for, and creation of, an independent Congolese state, with the ensuing elevation and revaluing of traditional culture, profoundly affected my approach to art, culture, and African identity. It is ironic that an outgrowth of the colonial system was the increased interaction and inter-ethnic exposure of the diverse groups that make up the present day Congo. Prior to French colonization, most groups remained steadfast to the culture and rituals of their particular group. However, during colonial times, for reasons such as work, education, and health, certain regions of the Congo began to be urbanized, which began the exposure and living together of people from different cultural groups. In the 1960s, and even before, the implantation of certain European social institutions—such as the Boy Scouts and Christian youth groups—forged the beginnings of a genuine sharing and cultural collaboration, as people in urban areas began to learn the music, dances, and traditions of their neighbors. People were no longer confined to the dances of their particular group.

With the revolution of 1963, inter-ethnic exchange was given a prominent position of importance as a governmental priority. The newly formed government established la semaine culturelle, a week of cultural exchange that was actually a year in the making. Throughout this week, there were performances in every town and city, with local competitions that ended with the best performers competing in Brazzaville. This is one of the social phenomena that influenced the creation of the small dance troupes that eventually grew into our modern African “national ballets.”

Growing up in the Congo at the time that I did, my life was steeped in the pre- and post-revolutionary periods of my homeland. The significance of art as a medium of cultural exchange and a unifying force can never be underestimated. I have striven to bring this message to all of the audiences of Fua Dia Congo, with a particular emphasis on the relationships between Africans born at home and those abroad. What we, the artists of Kusum Africa, hope to create with this coming together of different artists from Guinea, Congo, and Ghana—is to give a message of African unity and true collaboration. Though the medium of Kusum Africa is dance, drum, and song, the overarching vision is that it is an exercise in exchange, mutual respect, trust, and unity. Though African culture has endured many hardships, it remains an inexhaustible source of talent and music of various forms. The artists of Kusum Africa want to give a message to our leaders and people of African descent throughout the world that true African collaboration and unification must manifest. Where politicians fail, the artist succeeds in expressing the pain, the joy, and the hope of a people through the expression of art.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### African Music And Dance Ensemble

The founding and development of the African Music and Dance Ensemble is closely associated with the development of the Pan-African consciousness of African-Americans in the United States. The Ensemble, in fact, emerged from a tradition of African music and dance activities set by CK Ladzekpo from Ghana, West Africa, through his scholarly research, teaching, and performances.

Since its inception in 1973, the Ensemble, resident company with the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, has sought to broaden access to the knowledge about Africa's rich cultural heritage. From university and high school campuses in California to Great Britain's Black Dance Development Trust's special summer schools for black dance professionals in Europe, the Ensemble has taught the skill, artistry, and philosophy that inform the African music and dance traditions. In community ethnic festivals in California, to a sold-out season at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Massachusetts, the Ensemble has pioneered the emergence of works by African choreographers on the modern concert stages of the United States with colorful and vibrant tapestries of authentic traditional dances and percussion ensemble music from the West African countries of Ghana, Togo, and Benin.

The African Music and Dance Ensemble stands for tradition, but it also stands for creativity. It stands for the qualities that Africans cherish and admire in their music and dances.

CK Ladzekpo (artistic director) is the director of the African music program at the University of California at Berkeley and has been a senior faculty member at East Bay Center for the Performing Arts since 1972. He has combined a brilliant career as a performer, choreographer, and composer with teaching and extensive scholarly research into African performing arts. He is a member of a famous family of African musicians and dancers who traditionally serve as lead drummers and composers among the Anlo-Ewe people of southeastern Ghana in West Africa. CK Ladzekpo has been a lead drummer and instructor with the Ghana National Dance Ensemble, the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies, and the Arts Council of Ghana.

Ladzekpo joined the music faculty of the University of California at Berkeley in 1973 and remains an influential catalyst of the African perspective in the performing arts. In 1973, he founded the critically acclaimed African Music and Dance Ensemble. As the company's artistic director, choreographer, and master drummer, he has led in many pioneering African dance and polyrhythmic percussion ensemble music presentations at major venues in the United States, Canada, and Europe. He has also been artistic director of the Mandeleo Institute in Oakland since 1986. Ladzekpo is the artistic director of the Northern California African Cultural Festival, popularly known as The Africans Are Coming. The Africans Are Coming is the largest seasonal professional African cultural arts extravaganza in the United States.

CK Ladzekpo's modern concert stage rendition of Atsiagbeko, a traditional war dance-drumming suite of the Anlo-Ewe, is one of the features in the television documentary African Dance at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, which has continued to be a popular broadcast since its national premiere on PBS in 1988. Most recently, he received one of the first James Irvine Dance Fellowships in California.

#### National Dance Company of Ghana

The high profile of the National Dance Company of Ghana marks the culmination of a development initiated by the first president of the Republic of Ghana in 1962, when the Ghana Dance Ensemble was established under the directorship of Professor J.H. Nketia at the Institute of African Studies. Professor A. Mawre-Opoku was its first artistic director, and his traditional choreographed pieces still remain part of the standard repertoire of the company. F. Nii Yartey took up the artistic director position in 1976. In 1992, a law moved the ensemble to the National Theatre as an autonomous body. Under the artistic direction of Nii Yartey, the company has enlarged its standard repertoire to include the creation of extended works.

The mission of the company is to preserve and enhance the quality and presentation of traditional dance forms through research and creative development; to study, experiment with, and develop innovative works of traditional dance-drama; and to explore the functional use of dance as a commentary on social, cultural, and political issues.

F. Nii Yartey (artistic director) has been in the forefront of contemporary African dance development in Ghana for many years. He was educated at the University of Ghana, Legon, and the University of Illinois in the United States. He is also a published scholar on traditional and contemporary African dance form and technique. For more than 30 years, Nii Yartey has choreographed and produced dance-theater productions and collaborated with international cultural institutions, including the British Arts Council and the Institute of Jamaica. Nii Yartey has choreographed and directed many dance productions for stage and television, including the creation of more than three dozen major full-length dance-theater works, among them SOLMA, The King's Dilemma, and Musu: Saga of the Slaves.

With the National Dance Company of Ghana, he has toured extensively in Europe, Asia, the United States, and Africa. He is also a senior research fellow in dance at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

#### Ballet Merveilles de Guineea

“The dancers in Les Merveilles de Guinea were unabashed crowd pleasers. The group is led by Mohamed Kemoko Sano, the former choreographer for Les Ballets Africains, and he staged a choreographed revue of drums, songs, and smiling dancers with bright costumes and flying limbs. Using tall, goblet-shaped djembe hand drums, along with slit drum, balafon (West African marimba), and a griot-style singer playing the kora (harp-guitar), the music surged forward as group after group of dancers appeared. There were the triple-time rhythms of griot songs and one exuberant beat that sounded like a West African ancestor of calypso; there were crisp modal melodies and rumbling crescendos.

“A group of women arrived, dancing and flourishing drumsticks before they took over the drums; men came forward with their arms and legs flailing around still, balanced torsos. The male drummers became dancers and gymnasts, somersaulting and cart-wheeling, and the Sidi Boss, a man with atrophied legs, came out dancing on his hands, skipping and twirling and even leaping up on a drum.” (New York Times, June 2, 1999)

Kemoko Sano (artistic director) had a traditional upbringing in a village near Macenta, in the Forest Region of Guinea. Heir to an artistic tradition that values communal rather than personal expression, Kemoko Sano is recognized in francophone West Africa as one of the foremost exponents of traditional music and dance. For more than 35 years, he has directed large music and dance ensembles in Guinea in regional, national, and international venues, beginning with the Prefectural Troupe of Macenta in 1960, and moving to the Ballet National Djoliba from 1973 to 1986. In 1986, he became choreographer for Les Ballets Africains, the national dance company of the Republic of Guinea. After leaving Les Ballets Africains, he founded Ballet Merveilles de Guinea. In addition to creating new work for the company, he has performed with them in Guinea, Ghana, Europe, the United States, Mexico, Colombia, and Australia.

Kemoko Sano has trained some of the finest Guinean artists of the generation that came of age after Guinean Independence in 1958. These artists include the director and most of the original members of the seven-member Percussions de Guinée, which has toured widely internationally in recent years in the revue Africa Oyé, and Mamady Kéita, now resident in Brussels.

Kemoko Sano’s international projects have been increasingly varied since 1989. He played the doundoun riding 16 meters above the Champs Elysées at the very top of a pyramid of 115 Guinean percussionists on a float in La Marseillaise, the parade extravaganza conceived by Jean-Paul Goude for the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution in 1989, and seen live by television viewers around the world. In 1991, Sano was asked by the Guinean-born theatrical director Suleiman Koly to collaborate on a French-funded production, Waramba: l’Opéra Mandingue for Koly’s troupe, Koreba, in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire. Although artists from all over francophone West Africa worked on the project, Sano’s participation as director of percussion was considered essential to the success of this production, which had its international premiere in Paris in October 1991 and its US premiere in Atlanta in July 1994.

He taught a performance workshop at San Francisco State University in the spring semester of 1994 as a Fulbright artist-in-residence. In March 1994, he worked in Los Angeles assisting Debbie Allen in integrating two of his male dancers into her choreography for 16 dancers from eight world-famous companies for the 1994 Academy Awards telecast. Twenty-five members of his troupe, known then as the Merveilles, performed at the Marché Africain des Spectacles à Abidjan (MASA) in May 1995.

#### Fua Dia Congo

Fua Dia Congo is a company of 30 dancers and musicians dedicated to the preservation and presentation of the Congolese culture through the artistic interpretation of its daily life and rituals.

Fua Dia Congo was established in 1977 in Palo Alto, by its artistic director Malonga Casquelourd. Since its inception, Fua Dia Congo, which means “Congolese Heritage,” has astonished audiences with its unique repertoire of more than 20 Central African dances, musical numbers, and songs. The repertoire of Fua Dia Congo is drawn from the music and dance traditions of the people of the Central African countries of Congo, Zaire, Angola, and the Central African Republic, which exemplify the dynamic blending of music, song, and dance in black Africa. The company’s repertoire reflects the religious, social, and military traditions of several cultural groupings from these Central African countries. The company has appeared in many ground-breaking performances at major venues throughout the United States. These include seven seasons at the nationally known San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival at Herbst Theater; Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC; a sold-out season at the world-class Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival; several seasons at the African Cultural Festival in Oakland; and, performances at the Harambee African Festival in Houston, Texas.

Malonga Casquelourd (artistic director) is a distinguished African choreographer, dancer, master drummer, singer, actor, and teacher. He has been a faculty member at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts since 1995. Malonga was a principal dancer with the National Congolese Dance Company from 1965 through 1968. He came to the National

Company after several years of apprenticeship at “Community Fetes,” which are indigenous Congolese centers of learning, devoted to the assimilation of the younger generations into the cultural traditions of society. As a member of the National Congolese Dance Company, he toured and performed in Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America.

In 1969, Malonga moved to Europe as resident choreographer and principal performer with Le Ballet Diabouam, a rare Congolese repertory company based in Paris. While there, he led Le Ballet Diabouam in three successful annual performances and touring seasons (1969–1971), introducing the dance artistry of the Congo and other Central African countries to the European concert stage.

In 1972, he came to the United States and co-founded, Tanawa, the first Central African dance company in the US. Malonga concurrently pursued a distinguished career as a faculty member at the following New York City institutions: Hunters College (1973–1974); Clark Center for the Performing Arts (1973–1976); York College (1975); New York University (1974–1975); as well as New Jersey State University (1974–1975). In 1976, Malonga moved to California; he has since taught at Stanford University (1977–1979), San Diego State University (1980), and San Francisco State University (1977–present).

Malonga’s concert-stage rendition of Ganza, a traditional circumcision dance of the Gwaka ethnic group of Central Africa, performed by Fua Dia Congo, is featured in San Francisco City Celebration’s documentary film *And Still We Dance*, a profile of the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival released in 1988. He has also choreographed, performed, and directed Fua Dia Congo in the television documentary *African Dance at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival*, which was broadcast nationally on PBS during Black History Month in 1988 and 1989. In addition, Malonga won the Isadora Duncan Dance Award in 1988 for Sustained Achievement in Dance.

East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, led by artistic director Jordan Simmons, is both the San Francisco Bay Area’s foremost school for rare leadership and performance skills and home to nine culturally specific resident companies whose work reaches 35,000 to 40,000 audience members annually, consisting largely of low-income, inner-city families. The Center has a professional artist faculty of 50 serving 2,500 students each week in long-term sequential training classes, and annually presents up to 100 productions. The Center produces programs unduplicated anywhere in the United States, and when it enacts the two-hundred-year-old Anlo-Ewe Hogbetsotso ceremony, it conducts dance-drumming workshops so that young African Americans can experience what it is like to fully participate in complex public art in a traditional manner. In *Luz de Tradicion: Culturas de Mexico*, California Encuentro del Son, the Center brings artists from Mexico and California together for unique collaborations exploring the Mexican tradition of son, a distinctive traditional Mexican music, dance, and literary genre, combining elements of improvisation and storytelling. Commissioned works like *Portrait of a Girl From Nowhere* and *Deai* have traveled to the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, Lincoln Arts Center, and the Women’s World Conference in Beijing. At the Center’s 125-seat main site theater or at a local high school gymnasium, audiences can see visiting Tenek elders and local immigrant Mexican children and families participating in the 2,000-year-old corn/creation ceremony; a Mien wedding celebration; or a presentation of *Walking, Talking, Bill Hawkins* by Allen Taylor, a solo theater piece exploring issues relating to the father/son relationship and what it means to be a man in our society, particularly in African American culture.

The Center continually seeks out means by which it can bring to Bay Area audiences the finest examples of under-represented art forms while, at the same time, creating educational channels by which those forms can become better understood. Its alliance with major presenting organizations like Cal Performances represents a significant evolution of the Center’s presenting efforts.

For more information, please visit [www.eastbaycenter.org](http://www.eastbaycenter.org) or the Center’s main facility at 339 11th Street in downtown Richmond (telephone 510.234.5624).