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African dance and drum festival brings international talent to Little Haiti

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artburstmiami.com



Delou African Dance: Derron Linyear, left, and Sheila Alexander are part of the ensemble.

Miami Herald File

Delou Africa, whose vibrant dance and drum ensemble has been laying down roots from the motherland in South Florida for more than 25 years, hosts its fourth annual African Diaspora Dance & Drum Festival of Florida this weekend at the Little Haiti Cultural Center.

The event will showcase world-renowned dancers and percussionists from Guinea, Senegal, the Ivory Coast and Ghana as well as the United States, Cuba and Haiti.

“Africa is like the nucleus,” says Njeri Plato, a Trinidadian native and founding director of Delou. “We have developed our own cultures, but we have to bring it back to where it all came from.”

Since 2010, the festival has attracted fans eager to soak up energetic dance styles and intricate drumming techniques derived from disparate points on the African continent. This year’s edition is expected to draw 800 to 1,000 from as far away as Colorado, Texas and New York to take master classes and participate in Miami’s blend of African dance and drumming alongside traditions from Latin America and the Caribbean.

“People are more interested today because we have created an ongoing platform,” says Plato, who developed a passion for African movement and percussion as a teenager in New York. She started Delou in 1987, six years after relocating to Miami, after finding little here in the way of African dance.

The three-day festival is filled with workshops, panel discussions, yoga classes and an Aug. 3 concert featuring performances by Delou, the Children of Kuumba, Venus Rising and Tradisyon Lakou Lakay.

Legendary African dance instructor and cultural gatekeeper Chuck Davis, who is among the guest artists, says the festival provides needed dialogue.

“We are reaching more people and making reference to the earth, ancestors and the road they paved,” Davis says from his home in Raleigh, N.C., where his namesake African American Dance Ensemble is based.

The African dance movement, which he helped spearhead, has steadily permeated communities in the United States.

“As more and more African Americans become involved in stepping and liturgical dance, they understand the source and the origin,” Davis says.

If you go

What: African Diaspora Dance & Drum Festival Concert Extravaganza

When: 7:30 p.m. Aug. 3

Where: Little Haiti Cultural Center, 212 NE 59th Ter., Miami

Tickets: \$20, seniors and children 12 and younger \$10 at the cultural center box office beginning at noon Friday.

Info: delouafrica.com

FYI: Online workshop registration is closed. Call 305-978-3866 to inquire about openings.

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