

Peace and Blessings Family,

In honor of the 49th DanceAfrica, the festival will again feature Uganda's Ndere Troupe following their 2001 and 2007 visits. I am reminded of the joy it was to share the stage as the choreographer and artistic director of Forces of Nature then, and how much spirit the company exuded. Following the success and reaction to bringing East Africa's The Song & Dance Company of Mozambique in 2025, we traveled to Uganda to bring more of the best from this region to our audience. After spending time with Ndere Troupe, we felt the joy and impassioned commitment to their culture and tradition as it aligned with the resurgence of their traditional African identity in Uganda.

This year's theme is **Uganda: Umoja/Mirembe/Obulungi (Unity/Peace/Beauty)!**

Founded in 1984 by artistic director Dr. Rwangyezi Stephen, the Ndere Troupe is a celebrated Ugandan ensemble dedicated to preserving and sharing the country's rich cultural traditions. Through dance, music, and storytelling, the troupe showcases the depth and diversity of Uganda's many ethnic groups, emphasizing community, heritage, and joy. Their performances are both a cultural archive and a vibrant expression of contemporary Ugandan identity, offering audiences an opportunity to connect with Africa's living traditions.

Thousands of years of African cultural development were interrupted by centuries of colonialism, which gave rise to a socio-political movement that led to Uganda's independence on October 9, 1962, and its formal nationhood in 1963. In the decades since, a powerful artistic movement has emerged to reclaim and celebrate Ugandan identity and intelligence through cultural expression, a force that continues to this day.

Today, ancient Uganda is considered a cradle of human evolution and early civilization in the East African region of Lake Nalu Baale, the traditional name of what became Lake Victoria. In Luganda, a Bantu language, "Nalu Baale" translates to "Mother of the Ancestral/Guardian Spirits." I am honored to share more of these ancient dances and songs, mixed with shades of contemporary visions of East Africa, vis-à-vis the spirited artistry of the Ndere Troupe.

The staff and creative team of BAM, Ndere Troupe, the Council of Elders, Asase Yaa African American Dance Theater, The Billie Youth Arts Academy, The DanceAfrica Spirit Walkers, The Billie Holiday Theatre, Weeksville Heritage Center, MoCADA, and Brooklyn Bridge Park invite you to experience the joy, passion, creativity, and power of the traditional and contemporary culture of Africa and its diaspora through film, food, fashion, art, theater, music, and the dance!

Baba Abdel R. Salaam
2026