

# Yahaya Kamate

Côte d'Ivoire: dancer, choreographer, teacher

Object: n'goni musical bow

*Kabini Karamôhgôh deniou ya karan damnana,  
gnandunugnanratèguè gnana.  
(Mandenka)*

*[When I went to teach children in schools, it  
changed my life.]*

I was from a family that danced and played music, and I stuck to that. When I was a boy, we made musical instruments out of nothing. We would make flutes from papaya strips, and we made a one-string instrument called an n'goni from a can and a stick of wood. I would dance to it. My father didn't want me to be a dancer. He thought that dancing is something we do everyday, not something to make a living from. So then I just started traveling.

The Ivory Coast has sixty-two different tribes, and you have to travel amongst them to know all the dances. I came here in 1994 with the national dance team of the Ivory Coast to perform at the Memphis in May International Festival in Tennessee. I was 27 and full of energy. Getting here was quite a challenge because you have to be one of the best. They have you perform at the U.S. Embassy in order to get your visa. Then I found a way to renew it and keep on working until I had my working papers. I had a contract to go to Disney World's Epcot Center and the Animal Kingdom, and to Busch Gardens in Florida. I stayed there for about three years performing five shows everyday. Then someone from a dance studio discovered me and asked if I was willing to teach children, and I said yes.

When I went to teach children in schools, it changed my life. I've been doing it ever since. I go from hospitals, teaching kids with emotional problems, to public and private schools. I work with inmates too. There are kids there who fight everyday. It's amazing to see the kids sitting side by side for an hour and a half, without arguing and just playing the drum.



## Bio:

Yahaya Kamate became interested in traditional dance and drumming as a child in Côte d'Ivoire, and, as a teenager, began formal training with his country's National Ballet. He has performed with Fotemoban Dance Company, Djensia Group, and Camodgen of N'guatta Dolikro Dance Company of Cote d'Ivoire, and Affoubenou Sakassou Dance Company of Senegal. For the past 18 years he has worked as lead dancer and choreographer for several companies in the United States, including Kulu Mele Dance Company and The Seventh Principle; and he has taught dance with organizations such as Djoniba Dance & Drum Center, Mark Morris Dance Group, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Harlem School of the Arts, Center for Modern Dance Education, and City Lore.