

# National Dance Week at JCAL – 'Celebrating Africa and the Diaspora'

JAMAICA, N.Y. – Apr. 19 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – In recognition of National Dance Week, the Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning (JCAL) will offer Master Classes in dance and a live performance on Saturday April 28, 2007 from 12 PM to 6:30 PM. This year, JCAL celebrates National Dance Week by traveling the globe with the dances of Africa and the African Diaspora.

The African Diaspora is defined as the cultures and populations created by the movements of the peoples of the African continent to the Americas (including North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean), Europe, and Asia. Over a period of nearly four hundred years, four million Africans were transported to foreign lands in the slave trade.

As they struggled to retain their traditions in a world devoid of familiarity, new customs and cultures were born. The dance traditions of Africa merged with those of the new world to form distinct new forms; we can see the influence of African dance in the dances of Brazil, the Caribbean, and even American popular culture.

On Saturday, April 28, JCAL is proud to present a day of classes and performances as we welcome acclaimed West African dancer Youssouf Koumbassa, founder of Les Ballets Bagata, as our guest master artist. Born in Guinea, West Africa, Mr. Koumbassa has performed internationally in West Africa, Japan, Bangladesh, India, Holland, Hungary, Russia, Korea, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the United States. Since moving to the United States twenty years ago Youssouf has established himself as the pre-eminent teacher of dance from Guinea, and now travels widely throughout the world as a much sought after master teacher.

The event includes a West African master class with Mr. Koumbassa as well as classes in Afro-Brazilian/Samba and American Tribal Style Belly Dance. The West African Master Class involves graceful and energetic movements to vibrant drumming. The Afro-Brazilian/Samba Master Class is a festive and celebratory class of Afro-Brazilian dance to live drumming combining movements, rhythms and beats of West African dance with influences from indigenous Indian and European cultures.

Samba is considered the “national” dance of Brazil and is most often associated with Carnival. American Tribal Style Belly Dance, a recent movement in the USA has addressed the feminist philosophy of empowerment of women through Middle Eastern belly dance. It is an ethnic fusion style, influenced by ancient dance techniques from North India, the Middle East and Africa, but inspired by American artistic sensibilities.

Tickets are on sale now. To purchase tickets and for more information call 718-658-7400 ext. 123. Visit [www.jcal.org](http://www.jcal.org).

National Dance Week is supported, in part, by The Harkness Foundation for

Dance. The Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning is housed in a landmark building owned by the City of New York and is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs with support from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg; Cultural Affairs Commissioner Kate D. Levin; the New York City Council; Council Speaker Christine Quinn; the Queens Delegation of the Council; Majority Whip, Councilman Leroy Comrie; and Queens Borough President Helen M. Marshall.

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