

To African Dance Instructors and viewers around the Globe

It is my privilege to extend this message to you. For the past thirty years, I have observed the number of growing African drumming and dance instructions throughout the Diaspora. As an African drumming and dance instructor, I am proud and grateful, for all the effort and determination by African artists.

However, there are some principles we as instructors must follow. First of all I am not trying to be discriminate but the fact is that there are some claimed instructors who are taking these endeavors for granted or for sake of financial gain which I believe, is devaluing our appreciation for traditional African culture. Yes, we are all Africans and should be proud of our heritage. However, we have culture and traditions which must be carried on with honesty and integrity as Africans. We should not underestimate the values of our culture just for financial gains.

Through the African Diaspora there have been significant contributions made to the musical traditions of non Africans. The contributions that African instructors have made include encouraging students and communities to interact as one despite a variety of learning and performances skills and backgrounds. This artistic interaction must take place both in Africa and abroad between African master drummers, dancers and other instrumentalist, as well as Western percussionists and other musicians and educators. The availability of classes for teaching traditional dance, drumming, songs and stories of Africa, should not be based on our own creativity and ideas, but those which were created by our ancestral artists, and have thrived to become the traditional dances of today. As we conduct our classes, we should enable non African student percussionist and dancers to understand the value and significance of African culture as a whole. There are many people in Western communities and other parts of the world participating in learning African drumming and dance today, but are ignorant about it due to the way Africa has been portrayed. Therefore we should conduct our classes and workshops with adequate sense of meaning so that our students can learn and appreciate the value of African culture.

Participating in such important cultural studies, one should not be focused on just physicality or personal interest, but must also be focused on the physical and spiritual principles of the founding fathers of African traditions. Most of all, African music and dance instructors should conduct their teachings with meaning which will enable

students to understand the value of and learn respect for African culture and the entire continent.

Meanwhile, we must also understand that as instructors, it is our responsibility to continue the legacies of our ancestral artist, through the preservation of African music and dance. We should also make our students, aware that Africa is full of many traditional dance repertoires that represent different festivities throughout the African Diaspora.

The dances which we teach must have an impact on our students through peace and unity. As we embark on these principles and journey, we must set moral examples using open hearts, minds and ideas without any discrimination or jealousy. As performing artists and instructors, we have the ability to unite the world without any racial or tribal differences. Our arms and hearts should be open wide to new ideas, not restricted with exclusive minds.

In this note shared, we are all benefiting from the beauty and richness of African culture. It's my hope that we will continue to abide by these principles and make sure our students in non African communities throughout the world understand the fundamental principles which bind us together as Africans. I believe that our founding ancestral artists will all be grateful and proud of our continued efforts to preserve their legacy of the traditions and culture of Africa.

- **Francis Kofi** *March 14, 2008*