



UC DAVIS PRESENTS  
**Community Outreach Program**

• 2000-2001 School Matinee Series •

**Les Percussions de Guinée**

Thursday, February 22, 2001  
Freeborn Hall, UC Davis 11:00 am

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this Teacher's Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will see and hear at the Les Percussions de Guinée matinee. The Guide provides background information on the artists and a review of theater conventions and audience protocol. Les Percussions de Guinée matinee, which is specially designed for young audiences, will introduce the dance, music, and cultural history of the West African nation of Guinea. The performance can provide a number of departure points for various areas of study, including the arts, humanities, American and world history and the appreciation of different cultural perspectives and traditions.

UC Davis Presents gratefully acknowledges the corporate sponsors supporting the Community Outreach Program during the 2000-2001 Season of Performing Arts:



***LES PERCUSSIONS DE GUINEE***

*“Western mind cannot easily comprehend what is most familiar to West Africans. The rhythms of the drums are a call to the people for an initiation ceremony, a wedding or just a joyous occasion. The drums are used as a vehicle to heal ourselves, to celebrate in community, to release our free spirit. The sound of the drums is a call for freedom and peace; they are an invitation to the Dance of Life.”*

## *Les Percussions de Guinée*

Guinean percussionists have long been highly respected throughout the world, and many prominent artists from the West African nation have appeared in recent performances and recordings by many popular Western musicians. Les Percussions de Guinée, which is comprised of members of the National Ensemble of the Republic of Guinea, features many of the best solo artists in Africa.

The sixteen-member company consists of seven master drummers, six dancers, and three additional musicians playing **balafon, bolon, djembe, flute, kora, krin, and sangban**. Costumed in plumed headdresses, fringed skirts, and other celebratory attire, Les Percussions de Guinée performs an exuberant program of traditional songs and dances used in weddings, baptisms, circumcisions, and other festivities. The ensemble's performances feature synchronized drumming, rhythmic group and solo singing, energetic dancing and acrobatic moves by both male and female performers, and humorous comic sketches.

The Les Percussions de Guinée demonstration offers an introduction to modern and traditional Guinean dance and musical styles as well as commentaries on the history and folklore. Here is a brief description of the instruments you will see:

- *BALAFON*: has a low wood chassis containing wooden keys of varying length, which resonate when struck with mallets.
- *BOLON*: is a kind of harp, made of gourd with a bent shaft strung with three strings. It is often played at hunting ceremonies.
- *DJEMBE*: is the main instrument used in Guinean music. This drum varies in size and has a diameter of 11 to 14 inches across.
- *FLUTE*: is made of wood or bamboo and has three holes. It is played during in traditional music ensembles during festivals.
- *KORA*: is a 13<sup>th</sup> century instrument first played in the royal courts of the Manding civilization. A lute-like instrument, the kora has 21 strings, 11 for the left hand and 10 strings for the right.
- *KRIN*: is a hollowed-out log drum, approximately 12 inches in length.
- *SANGBAN*: a cylinder-shaped wooden drum (approximately 10 inches in size), which produces a mid-bass tone.

## ***ABOUT THE COUNTRY OF GUINEA***

OFFICIAL NAME: République de Guinée (Republic of Guinea)

CAPITAL: Conakry

POPULATION: 7.6 million

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: French

HEAD OF GOVERNMENT: President Gen. Lansana Conté

MAJOR RELIGIONS: Islam 86.9%; traditional beliefs 4.6%; other 8.5%

Guinea is a country in western Africa. Facing the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Guinea is bordered by Guinea-Bissau and Senegal on the north, Mali on the north and east, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) on the southeast, and Liberia and Sierra Leone on the south. Guinea has four topographical regions: **Lower Guinea**, the **Fouta Djallon**, **Upper Guinea**, and the **Forest Region**. Lower Guinea comprises the coast and coastal plain, which are sandy and interspersed with lagoons and mangrove swamps. To the east the Fouta Djallon highlands rise sharply from the coastal plain to elevations above 3,000 feet. Upper Guinea comprises the Niger Plains that slope northeastward toward the Sahara (desert). The Forest Region, an isolated forested highland in the southeast, rises to 5,748 feet at Mount Nimba, the country's highest peak. Western Africa's three major rivers--the Niger, Sénégal, and Gambia--rise in the Fouta Djallon and drain more than half of Guinea's territory before exiting the country on their way to the Atlantic Ocean.

The coastal region and much of the inland area have a humid tropical climate with a long rainy season of six months. More than two-fifths of Guinea is covered by tropical rain forest, containing teak, mahogany, and ebony trees. In Upper Guinea the savanna supports several species of tall grasses. Wildlife such as monkeys, hyena, hippopotamus, and poisonous snakes are common; elephant, wild boar, antelope, and chimpanzee are rare.

**HISTORY:** About 900 AD, successive migrations of the Susu, a group related to the Malinke peoples, swept down from the desert areas of the north and east and pushed the original inhabitants, the Baga, to the Atlantic coast. Small kingdoms of the Susu rose in importance in the 13th century and later extended their rule to the coast. In the mid-15th century the Portuguese developed a slave trade.

In the 16th century the Fulani people established domination over the Fouta Djallon region. They founded a vast feudal empire and started a holy war in 1725 in order to convert the peoples of the plateau to Islam; the empire lasted into the 19th century. French merchants were active around the Nunez River in the 17th century, but until the 19th century trade was limited to slaves and ivory, was confined to the coast, and was conducted primarily by the Portuguese.

In the early 19th century the French established a settlement on the Nunez River and in 1849 proclaimed the coastal region a French protectorate. The protectorate was called Rivières du Sud. It was renamed French Guinea and in 1895 became part of the federation of French West

Africa. In 1946 Guinea's status changed to that of an overseas territory of France. In 1958 it achieved independence and joined the United Nations, and Sékou Touré became the first president. The president is the head of government and is assisted by a council of ministers, or cabinet.

Until 1984 artistic and literary expressions were limited largely to African themes by the single political party and its leader. As a result Guinean intellectuals exhibit a strong sense of nationalism. For example, the professional National Guinean Ballet has retained some of the dance and music of the distinct ethnic and regional groups. Creative accomplishments in modern dance and popular music have given Guinean musicians and singers an international reputation.

Handicrafts in Guinea declined sharply during the colonial era with competition from manufactured consumer goods. The lack of tourism and creative marketing since independence has limited the amount of change and innovation in local crafts, so that the leatherwork, woodcarving, and jewelry produced in Guinea tend to be more genuinely ethnic than elsewhere in western Africa.

For your information, we have included a few pages of performance and instrument descriptions in French. These are taken directly from the artist's press packet and hope they will give you a flavor for the educational and entertaining matinee you will see on February 22 at UC Davis.

## ***ATTENDING THE THEATER***

### ***What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:***

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees for 2000-2001 have reserved seating*). It is critical that students and teachers sit in their assigned seats.
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times.
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times.
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements.

- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption.
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

***What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:***

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

**THINK ABOUT IT!**

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe the Les Percussions de Guinée performance to a friend?
- 2) What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the dancing?
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
- 4) Write a poem expressing your impressions of the performance: what you saw (the dancers); what you heard (the songs and music) and the kinds of feelings and thoughts you had during the show.

## UC DAVIS CAMPUS RESOURCE GUIDE

The University of California, Davis campus is a very beautiful and interesting place to visit and there are many learning experiences available to young student visitors. We have listed some of these below. While on campus, consider taking advantage of these resources. The enclosed campus map can help you find the locations.

### **Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS) 752-8277**

Private cars may park in several lots on campus for \$4.00. Please call Sandy Morgan (752-7657) to arrange for bus parking.

### **Places to Eat** *(Please call ahead if you have a large group)*

**On Campus:** Coffee House, Memorial Union (752-6622)  
Silo Student Union (752-1900)

**In Davis:** Carl's Jr., Sub City, Pizza Hut, Brennan's Coffee, Taco Bell, Le Crepe

### **Art Galleries** *(Please call ahead for current exhibits and possible tours)*

*Design Gallery* (Walker Hall) is an innovative space known for its exciting exhibitions of design-related objects such as architecture, textiles, and folk art. 752-6150

*Richard L. Nelson Gallery* (Art Building) is located south of Shields Library. It is well known for its regularly changing exhibitions of historical and contemporary works of art. 752-8500

*Fine Arts Collection* (Art Building) represents various historical periods and cultures as well as houses the Davis campus' major collection of art.

*Craft Center* (South Silo) provides opportunities for workshops and classes in woodworking, weaving, jewelry-making, art and graphics, computer imaging, ceramics, photography, silk-screen printing, welding, leather-working, stained-glass, and other crafts. There is always a display of students' work. 752-1475

*C.N. Gorman Museum* (Hart Hall) features changing exhibitions of works by Native American and other diverse artists. 752-6567

*Memorial Union Art Gallery* (Memorial Union), 2<sup>nd</sup> floor exhibit. 752-2885

### **Campus Tours Available**

*The Tram* provides a one-hour tour of the campus for 20-40 people. Reservations should be made one week in advance. The pick-up is at the Buehler Alumni and Visitor Center on Old Davis

Road. 752-8222

*Animal Barn Tour Program* tours are offered during the Spring for classes K-5. The tours consist of visits to three campus locations where cows, pigs, and horses can be observed. Student guides conduct the tours, providing information on the animals. 754-8111

*Peter J. Shields Library* (located south of the Quad) houses collections in the humanities, arts, social sciences, biological sciences, agricultural sciences, mathematics and computer science. It is one of the premier research libraries in North America. 752-6561

*Bohart Museum of Entomology* has an educational program about insects. The 60-minute tours can be arranged by appointment only. The museum is located in the Academic Surge Building. Tours use permanent and hands-on exhibits as well as live insects for demonstrations. The primary objective of the educational programs is to teach children about insects, particularly (1) their enormous diversity in form, color, behavior, (2) their impact on daily human life, (3) their importance in ecosystems, and (4) their general harmlessness. Contact Steve Heydon, 752-0493.

*California Raptor Center* has an on-site program to increase the public's awareness of raptors (birds of prey) and their environment. The facility has a museum containing displays, exhibits, and hands-on materials. The Center is located in South Davis. 752-9994

*Davis Arboretum* is an 80-acre public garden on the UC Davis campus. The Outdoor Education Program is geared particularly for K-6 class visits and uses the "guided discovery" approach to increase children's awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the natural world. 752-4880

*Equestrian Center* (located on Garrod Road near the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital) provides instruction in both English and Western riding along with training in horse care and stable management. 752-2372

*Environmental Horticulture Teaching Gardens*, located on Old Davis Road next to the Alumni Center, are opened to the public and include common and unusual species of trees, shrubs, ground covers, perennial, and bedding plants. The arrangement of plants is based on botanical and horticultural principles rather than on design principles. Tours last a half hour and are suitable for 5<sup>th</sup> grade through high school students. 752-0349

This Teacher's Guide was written by ANETT JESSOP, Department of English, UC Davis