

# SAAKUMU

## DANCE TROUPE

WEST AFRICAN MUSIC AND DANCE



## BIO

*Saakumu Dance Troupe* is dedicated to introducing audiences to traditional and contemporary African music and dance. *Saakumu* means traditions, and as the name implies, the company bases their aesthetic on traditional styles combined with contemporary forms, creating a repertoire uniquely their own. They are an artist-founded association driven by a passion for bringing innovative dances and world music to their audiences. In addition to collaborating with artists and presenters of all kinds, they are committed to building new audiences via performances.

The award winning *Saakumu Dance Troupe* is one of the leading traditional/contemporary music and dance groups of Ghana, West Africa. Led by master musician, Bernard Woma, the group's repertoire spans genres from spiritual, ceremonial and recreational to contemporary African dance forms. Their music and dance is joyful, expressive and highly participatory.

Based in Medie Accra, the *Saakumu Dance Troupe* has performed at important governmental functions and national and international music and dance festivals throughout Ghana and the United States. They were the designated official performing troupe at the 2007 National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFAC), the largest cultural festival in Ghana.

Saakumu Dance Troupe has a strong educational and community engagement component that flourishes both at home in Ghana and along their tours. The group has developed programs in schools and colleges that involve all levels of participants in dance and music workshops, residencies and interactive, highly-engaging performances. Their educational work strives to promote the value of hands-on, experiential involvement in the arts as a tool for global and cultural understanding as well as a way to deepen the understanding of West African music and dance among students of all ages.

*"The dance troupe is an outgrowth of the Dagara Music Center. With about a dozen dancers and musicians, it represents about a third of the total ensemble."*

Dr. Rebecca Green, Associate Professor & Chair of  
Art History at Bowling Green State University

*"The makeshift stage in the multipurpose room in the Bowen-Thompson Student Union could barely contain the sound and energy of the dancers. With four drummers pounding out a mélange of rhythms, the dancers strutted and leaped across the stage making it shake and rattle."*

Mr. David Dubont, Sentinel  
Tribune of Bowling Green, Ohio



# PERFORMANCES

Saakumu Dance Troupe has toured around the United States by means of invitations to participate in Black History Month celebrations. The company took part in cultural and educational exchanges in 2008, 2009 and 2010 at the following institutions and locations:

- ❖ SUNY College at Fredonia, NY
- ❖ Ithaca College, NY
- ❖ Carnisius College, NY
- ❖ The Players Theater, NYC
- ❖ Williams College, MA
- ❖ Berklee College of Music, MA
- ❖ Wooster College, OH
- ❖ Bowling Green State University, OH
- ❖ Akron University, OH
- ❖ Indiana University, IN
- ❖ Hamline University, MN
- ❖ Macalester College, MN
- ❖ Gustavus Adolphus College, MN
- ❖ Concordia College, MN
- ❖ Minnesota State University Moorhead, MN
- ❖ Suburban World Theater & Trocadero, MN
- ❖ California Lutheran University, CA
- ❖ Northern Michigan University, MI
- ❖ And many other elementary, middle and high schools across the United States.

The group has also performed throughout Ghana and across the West African sub-region. They are eager to share their music and dance with the rest of the world.

Their instrumentation includes gyl (African xylophone), drums, calabash water drums and the praise singing (talking drums) of the Akan and Dagbamba people of Ghana.



# REPertoire

**Bewaa (Sebkper):** Sebkper is the oldest version of Bewaa, a moonlight dance by the youth of the Dagara people of the Upper West Region of Ghana. This recreational piece is performed with expressive dance movements.

**Bewaa (Firu):** Firu is the new version of Bewaa and is performed with gestures to communicate the message of the gyl (xylophone) music to the audience. The music is meant to educate people about social control and other vices in the meaning of the music.

**Dalari:** Clay pot drums are the oldest traditional instruments of the Dagara people. The music is performed during harvest period only. The instruments are believed to possess powers that can spoil a good harvest if they are played while the new crops (especially millet) are still bearing seeds. Thus the sound of the Dalari music signifies the arrival of the harvest season.

**Bine:** Bine music is performed at funerals, but it is also part of the social music and dance of the Dagara people. One needs to have a good understanding of the music before they can take part in the dance. The dance style is performed differently by men and women.

**Bagr-bine:** The religious worship music of the Dagara people. Although Western religions tried to replace the Bagr religion, this form of music has great influence on the Catholic Church music in the Upper West Region. Bagr is still a practicing religion in this part of Ghana and the vibrant music is reminiscent of the traditional African worship.

**Yiila/Guola:** Yiila, which means song, is the recreational music of the Sissala people of Northern Ghana. Similar to the Firu music of the Dagara Bewaa, this joyful music is meant to educate people about social control and other vices in the community. Guola, which means dance, is the funeral music of the Sissala people, and the dance is performed only at final funeral rites of an elderly person.

**Bamaya:** Bamaya means "the river valley is wet". It is the most popular social music and dance of the Dagbamba people of Northern Ghana. It began as a religious musical performance, but is now also performed during festivals, national day celebrations and other social occasions. Dancing Bamaya requires a lot of waist movement and twisting. The original name for this music and dance, Tubankpeli, is now the main dance movement. Originally, only men took part in the dance while the women would sing, shout praises and encourage the dancers. Now, both genders perform Bamaya.



**Nmani:** Wedding music and dance of the Dagbamba people of Northern Ghana. This music is performed exclusively by women to honor a new bride. Songs used in this celebration relate to relevant human, marriage and other social issues.

**Kpanlogo:** Kpanlogo is the most recent recreational music of the Ga people of Southern Ghana. It is an offshoot of Gome, Oge, Kolomashie and Konkoma. Referred to as "the dance of the youth," Kpanlogo started during the wake of Ghana's Independence as a type of musical entertainment in Accra. Kpanlogo is performed at life-cycle events, festivals and political rallies.

**Fume Fume:** A ritual and spiritual dance of the Ga people of Southern Ghana. The costumes and body makeup depict the spiritual possession of the dancers on stage. This sacred music and dance has evolved from its religious context to become part of the social music and dance of today's youth.

**Gahu:** Gahu emanated from the musical traditions associated with marriage and wedding rites of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Its historical origin is represented by the rich Yoruba costuming worn by the dancers. The Ewe people of Southern Ghana and Togo currently perform the dance at most social occasions.

**Gota:** Gota originated from the Kabre people of Benin and through trade in the early nineteenth century, was introduced to the Ewe people. Originally performed in Benin for their war god, Gota is now performed as a recreational music and dance piece by the southern Ewe people.

**Kpatsa:** Kpatsa is social music and dance of the Ga-Adangme, a sub dialect of the Ga ethnic group in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. This recreational piece conveys messages about the social behavior of youth in order to bring change to certain social situations.

**Zanu:** Meaning "seeking knowledge", Zanu is a contemporary piece that depicts knowledge of dance creation, revealing dreams of knowledge and the imaginative process of creating dance elements. Created in a contemporary setting with Dagara folklore, the piece focuses mainly on the beauty of movement and sound.



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- ❖ **Photography:** Amy C. Miller, Aaron Carpenter.
  - ❖ **Artistic Design:** Theodora Michaelidou





## BERNARD WOMA

**Bernard Woma** has shared the performance stage with renowned artists such as Maya Angelou, Yo Yo Ma, and Glen Velez. He has performed for international dignitaries and presidents such as U. S. president Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela and Queen Elizabeth II. He was honored as the cultural resource person for President Barack Obama's family when they visited Ghana in 2009. He is a true cultural treasure from Ghana who has toured the world as xylophonist and lead drummer of the National Dance Company of Ghana. Bernard is an extremely dynamic artist and deeply experienced educator. His recent appearances in the US include a performance with New York Philharmonic at the Avery Fisher, Lincoln Center, South Dakota Symphony Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra. Residency with the Ethos Percussion group, performed and taught at New York's AXF: African Xylophone Festival, and various universities and colleges. The performance of his composition "Gyil Nyog Me Na" in the spring of 2006 at Zankel Hall in Carnegie Hall is a testimony of his musicianship.

Bernard is the Artistic Director of Saakumu Dance Troupe, The Bernard Woma Ensemble and the founder and director of the Dagara Music and Arts Center in Accra, Ghana.



## CONTACT INFO

Saakumu Dance Troupe is managed through Jumbie Records Artist Management, an organization dedicated to promoting innovative music.

For information and fees, please contact:

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*"If we understand each other's culture, we'll understand each other's situation,...In Africa in music, every mistake is a new style...My focus is preserving traditional music, in contrast to the Afro-pop, which blends New and Old World styles. Afro-pop has its own language."*

Bernard Woma

