
CHOREOGRAPHY AND DANCE IN CONAKRY, GUINEA

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During summer 2017 I was one of the chosen few to travel to Africa with my classmate Karla Vanessa Narvaez and my professor Mohamed DaCosta. We had the opportunity to travel to Conakry, Guinea which is bordered by Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Liberia and the Atlantic Ocean. We were in Conakry for 21 days and had the amazing opportunity to indulge in the culture and expand our choreographic voices. We arrived in Guinea June 1 and we departed June 24.

Whilst in Guinea, Mohamed kept us busy and on a tight schedule on the weekdays. Monday thru Thursday we had dance “Two-A-Days” where we had one Dance Master in the day for three consecutive hours and another after lunch for two more hours. Mohamed made sure that the two Dance Masters that he chose were going to be not only great educators, but proficient griots (storytellers) as well. In African dance it is not only about the dance technique and movement but it is also about the story that creates an intention behind the movement.

We were blessed with the opportunity to work with the professional dance company *Ballet Merveilles de Guinee*. Djibril Abadji (company manager) and Moussa Conde (dancer) were on site with us every morning to teach us West African dance and culture. From these two we learned Baho, Baidiar, and Sintai. Each of these dances had various moves depending on the region and we had to learn 15 moves each. By the end of the warmups, Karla and I would be dripping puddles of sweat. After a light lunch, we worked with Sacko Mao, who also was a Guinean dance master who taught us 6 different dances in a three week span. My favorite dance that he taught us was Soboninkun, a celebratory dance that was fast paced and had swift but graceful movements. From the nine dances we learned, we brought back the knowledge and taught it to the students that participated in Agebidi Africa during the 2017 academic year.



Fridays and the weekend were our free days when we would travel around Guinea. We would also learn about social norms and interact with the children of Bonfi which was the neighborhood we were staying in. Being with the children of Bonfi was a very enriching experience and I actually miss them dearly. Every morning they would rush to our doorstep as we ate breakfast and waited for us to come to teach them English and spend time with us. Karla taught them an American dance song called “I Want to Dance today” that made them chant the days of the week and it was one of the things they always wanted to sing around us. The night before we departed we threw a big dance party and bought them dinner to celebrate our lives and the wonderful experience they gave us.

I could go on about how much I learned from this trip, but main thing I took away was humanity. The people of Guinea are very selfless and will give everything that they have to make sure that you are happy and taken care of. It put my



entire life and my priorities into perspective and made me more thankful for everything I have and what is a priority to me. I am forever thankful for this wonderful experience of traveling to Guinea.

Denzel Williams is completing his BFA in Dance at UF. He has been selected to participate in the American Dance Festival after he graduates from UF in May 2018.