

THIOSSANE



WEST AFRICAN DANCE INSTITUTE



# Our Founders



## ABDOU KOUNTA

Our beloved founder Abdou Kounta (1950-2011), was a Master drummer, international instructor and world-renowned musician of traditional African music. He mastered the djembe (jim bay) drum during his ten year tenure with National Ballet du Senegal, West Africa. Upon his arrival to the United States, Mr. Kounta and Mr. Assane Konte', co-founded Kankouran West African Dance Company in Washington, DC. He relocated to Columbus, OH in 1992 and continued his craft, mostly teaching, and performing at various conferences and other arenas. He loved training and sharing his great skills with admirers who awed at his natural talent and who wanted to become students of the soul-stirring drum. He is credited with performances at Woodstock NY and DC, Tokyo, Japan, Negril Jamaica and a host of universities across America. He also performed with the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra. He and soulmate, Suzan Bradford Kounta co-labored with the YWCA African Beginnings, and the two later founded Thioassane West African Dance Institute in 2000 with a mission to present and preserve traditional West African dance and music. Mr. Kounta's philosophy was "If one does not know where he comes from, he does not know where he is going, however the arts can be the direction."



## SUZAN C. BRADFORD KOUNTA

Rooted in Columbus, Ohio, Suzan Bradford Kounta is the first African American female Executive Director of the historic Lincoln Theatre. Since 2009, she has led the theatre's operations with strategic vision, fiscal excellence, and bold creativity; strengthening its legacy while positioning it as a vibrant hub for artistic incubation and community engagement. Suzan is President and Creative Director of the Thioassane Institute, a 25-year cultural icon dedicated to preserving and presenting traditional West African dance, music, and heritage. Through authentic performance, education, and immersive cultural experiences, (including annual study in Senegal), the Institute promotes intergenerational learning, wellness, and global cultural understanding. As adjunct faculty of the The Ohio State University Department of Dance since 2006, she is a respected lecturer, cultural consultant, concept developer and recipient of numerous honors whose work bridges artistry, anthropology, and community development and continues to elevate Columbus' cultural landscape while promoting humanity through the arts.

**The Essence of Thioossane Institute** is an intergenerational arts organization dedicated to honoring and advancing the legacy of the African Diaspora through traditional West African dance, music, and cultural education. Based in Columbus, Ohio, Thioossane has served the community for over 25 years as both a performing arts company and a community-centered learning space. As we usher in a new era of Thioossane, we will share culturally grounded programming that includes weekly dance and drumming classes, youth and adult education, community workshops, lecture-demonstrations, performances, travel and international cultural exchange.

Our programs foster healing, human connection, and equitable access, welcoming participants from ages 3 to 83, including differently-abled individuals. Rooted in ancestral knowledge and responsive to contemporary realities. Thioossane nurtures artistic excellence, cultural pride, and collective well-being through purposeful learning and community practice.

We all have a creative spirit; even the three year olds in our community class. We endeavor to tap into creative spaces of developing minds at a young age. We encourage all to identify and capture space for the joy that music and movement bring. The members of Thioossane West African Dance Institute have loved dance and drum all their lives, (as many were youngsters, under 10 years of age), when they were immersed in the richness of the African Diaspora for the first time.

This performance consists of legacy, founding and neophyte members. They are the creatives that will shape the legacy of Thioossane West African Dance Institute for future generations. You, the audience, will have a front row seat to witness the growth and essence of the Institute throughout the year.

Folklore allows us to continue the conversations that educate, engage and keep us aware of our traditional customs, beliefs, and history. The spirit of our communities grows stronger every time we re-tell the stories that have built our history and will sustain our future.



ThioSSane Institute Annual Community Showcase

Saturday, May 16, 2026 | 3:00pm

The Historical Lincoln Theatre

## **MATINEE PROGRAM**

### **WE ARE THE VILLAGE | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

WE HOPE THAT TODAY'S PERFORMANCE INSPIRES YOU TO DEEPEN YOUR APPRECIATION FOR THE RICHNESS OF THIOSSANE, WHICH IS DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE TRADITIONS AND HERITAGE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA. OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REFLECTS OUR CONNECTION TO THE INSTITUTE AS IT FULFILLS ITS MISSION AND PURPOSE.

PARENT TESTIMONIAL

• NYAKA | AKON KON | AGES 3-7

• AKON KON | LENDIENE | AGES 8-13

PARENT TESTIMONIAL

• THE PROCESSIONAL OF PRIDE

PARENT TESTIMONIAL

• BOUGARABOU | APPRENTICES PROGRAM

• SINTE | JUNIOR PROGRAM

• MAKRU | ADULT PROGRAM

### **THIOSSANE INSTITUTE EDUCATIONAL FACILITATORS**

CARLTON POPE | EARTH O. JALLOW | KEISHA MOOREHEAD | KEVIN SEALS | LORI LINDSEY

# Mackenzie Spain

## An Exceptional Student and Emerging Leader

Mackenzie is a goal-oriented and driven young woman with a deep passion for dance, child and youth development, and community involvement. At Marion Franklin High School, she has set herself apart through perfect attendance and consistent

Outside of academics, Mackenzie actively seeks opportunities to enhance her skills and make meaningful contributions to her community. She has completed Child Care and Babysitting Training through Nationwide Children's Hospital and has interned for three summers with the Columbus Urban League, participating in their Work Readiness Training University program. This program focuses on Empowerment, Innovation, High Performance, and Civic Engagement, and Mackenzie excelled in cultivating leadership, professionalism, and civic responsibility through her participation.

Mackenzie's commitment to learning, along with her creativity, empathy, and organizational skills, positions her as both a scholar and a budding community leader. She has been a dedicated member of the Thioassane West Dance Institute since the age of four, embodying the qualities and values essential for apprentices and junior performing company members. Her curiosity, discipline, and commitment to honing her talents reflect her desire to uplift those around her. As she embarks on her journey at Central Mackenzie is poised to thrive, contributing not only as a dedicated student but also as an engaged member of the campus community.

She is the daughter of Elizabeth Grimes and Sekou Spain.



We offer our children two vital gifts: roots and wings. As they grow into their teenage years, they are learning to harness the tools of life. Many members belong to the second and third generations under the Institute's legacy, representing our seeds of hope, truth, order, and harmony for the future. They fill us with pride and embody the greatest aspirations of our ancestors!

**We Are The Village | Children Live What They Learn**  
Value & Principal Clarification | Junior Company

Mackenzie Spain | 2026 Initiate of Thioassane Institute  
Sinte | Jr Company

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### OF THE INSTITUTE

Suzan Bradford Kounta, President

Dr. Julie Y Brice, Chair

Angela C. Dawson, Treasurer

Kimberleigh Harris, Secretary

Serigne Mara Diakhate, Intl Culturalist

Gwendolyn A. Gardner, advisor

Abby Carlozzo, Board Volunteer

## PHILANTHROPISTS OF THE INSTITUTE

Donna & Larry James

Barbara & David Brandt

Kathy & Fred Ransier

Pete & Suzanne Accetta

Gwendolyn A. Gardner

Estelle Diehl

## Funders of the INSTITUTE

Columbus Foundation

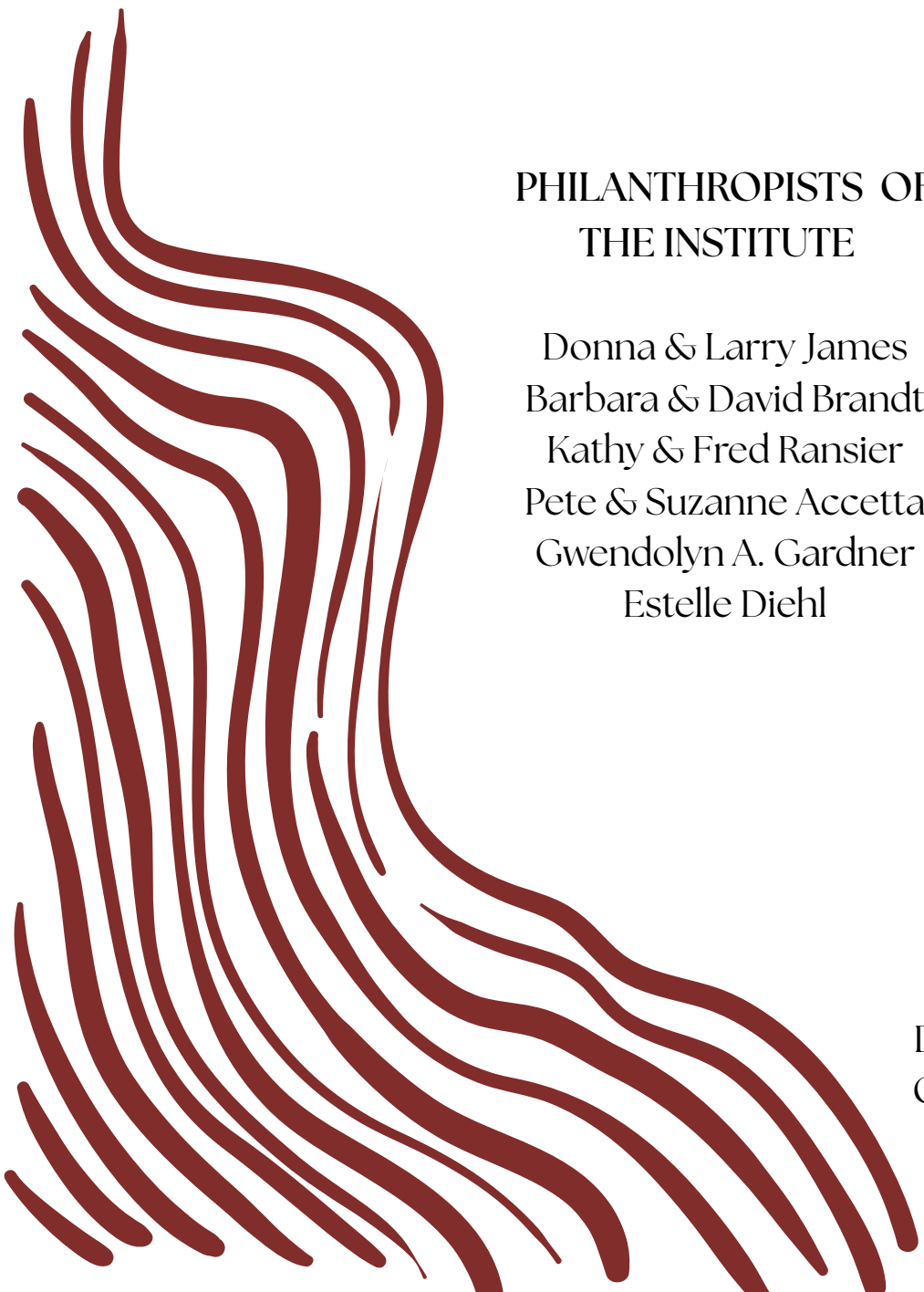
City of Columbus

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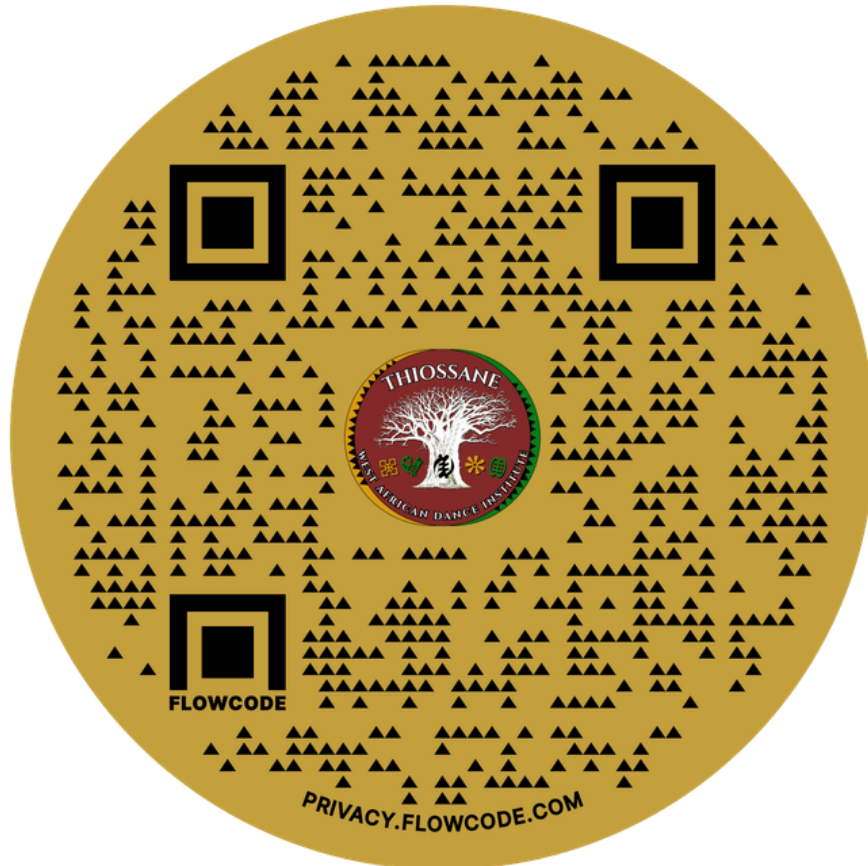




**THIOSSANE INSTITUTE**



**@THIOSSANE\_DANCE**





ThioSSane Institute Annual Concert  
Saturday, May 16, 2026 | 7:30pm  
The Historical Lincoln Theatre

Welcome

Board Members | Angela Cornelius Dawson | Julie Y. Brice | Kimberleigh Harris |

Legacy Holders | Quianna Simpson | NiaAdjowa Sheard | Kevin Seals | Ami Kounta

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY OF TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS OF WEST AFRICA AND JAZZ INSPIRED  
LAYERED WITH MALIAN SONG AND DANCE

Arranged by Birame Mboup with musicians, Brandon Scott, Rob Riley, Michael Ealy,  
Gabriell Prophetess, and Senegalese vocalist Guewel Baye

SOHKO BALANTA

Guinea & Guinea Bissau -the migration of dance, music and culture.  
Choreographed by the Legacy holders |Kounta, Seals, Simpson

2026 Initiate of ThioSSane Institute  
Mackenzie Spain

## Intermission

The story of Adinkra begins with the Asante (Ashanti) people of Ghana, particularly within the Bono Kingdom. The term “Adinkra” is believed to come from the name of King Nana Kofi Adinkra, a ruler of Gyaman, (Ivory Coast)who was defeated by the Asante in the early 19th century. After his defeat, the Asante people adopted and developed his symbolic tradition into a rich visual language that became a cornerstone of their culture. Popular symbols include

Gye Nyame | I fear no one except God.

A symbol expressing the omnipotence and supremacy of God.

Sankofa

It reminds us that tradition and history are not to be forgotten but embraced and carried forward.

The Sankofa Tribute | GHANA WEST AFRICA  
ADOOWA | GAHU | ADZOGBO | KOTEBAH  
Collective Choreography by Suzan Bradford Kounta and Akosua Ameyaa  
with music arrangement Lenny Amoo

Communal Truths |  
DIDADI | NGRI | BARRA  
Stages of life and the rhythms that guided me to my destiny.  
Researched, studied and choreographed by Quianna Simpson.  
Music Arrangement | Kevin Seals and Thioossane own musicians.

Didadi  
Malian dance and drum, celebrate the bonds of mother and child throughout Life.  
Ngri  
we honor and fear water that brings and takes life.  
Barra  
Women's day of prayer for all the ways of loss and the restoration of faith.

FINALE' | World Music Project

ARTISTS TALK BACK

Quianna SIMPSON, Birame MBOUP, Akosua AMEYAW, Ami KOUNTA, Lenny AMOO, Kevin SEALS | IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE PROGRAM | 30 MINS

## AFTER PARTY

We have planned an onstage celebration with Senegalese vocal sensation, Guewel Mbaye and band to culminate our launch of the new era tonight. We invite you to join us onstage with your wristband in 30 minutes for this historic event.

In the meantime, we ask that you move to the lobby, share your experiences, purchase Thioossane paraphernalia, support the vendors, visit the bar for more signature drinks, meet the baby sitter outside. The Lincoln ushers will notify you when to come to the stage with your wristband for admission. If you wish to purchase a ticket now, visit our website, and select the party ticket. Your confirmed payment will designate your eligibility to be issued an entrance wristband, providing seating has not reached its capacity of 100 people.

The heart never forgets what the eye has seen - African proverb

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### Teens & Apprentices of the Institute

Aria Ray | Camille Donohoe | Jalise Burton | | Jeremiah Marbury | Justice Usher Peace | Karis Seals | Kaydence Seals | Kendall Simpson | Kyla Bell | Mackenzie Spain | Myriam Diop | Odomie Comer | Omari Edwards | Malia Ray | Naeem Scott | Naomi Scott

### Performing Members

Carlton Pope | Charlette Keuchler | Bethany Cole | Damani Wade | Earth O. Jallow | Keisha Moorehead | Lori Lindsey | Naiya Sayavong | Najdiyyah Muqtasid | NiaAdjowa Sheard | Talia Walls |

### Guest Artists

Akosua Ameyaw, Ghana | Lenny Amoo, Ghana | Kingsley Nyarko, Ghana | Ibrahima Ndiaye, Senegal | Birame Mboup, Senegal | | Guewel Mbaye, Senegal



# Thank You!

## Production Staff

Stage Manager | Jordan Harris

Wardrobe Designers | Diane Ivery, Ladybug Unlimited | Tonya Helm Burton | Jasmine Burton, Alexandra Jay  
| Omar Humphrey, AnkhStitch Apparel, LLC |

Wardrobe Assistant | Coral Bealer

Assistant to Artistic Director | Faith Pendleton

Stage Crew | Lincoln Theatre Staff & PADDI participants

## Administrative Team

Talia Walls | Customer Relations Manager

Damani Wade | Web Manager

Joenathan Banks | Social Media Content Manager

Marquitta Minniefield | Image Coordinator

Jordan A. Harris Program Designer |



THIOSSANE  
INSTITUTE