



ASAMBA DANCE: ORIGIN, COMPONENTS, AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Asamba Dance, which has been famously displayed within and without the Twin Cities of Minnesota by the Mankon community, has its roots, manifestations and importance far beyond America. This write up will examine its origin, cultural components, and significance.

Origin of Asamba Dance

The roots of Asamba dance can be traced back to the Mankon people of the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. The Mankon people are both a cosmopolitan and rural people who make up the greater part of the city of Bamenda, the capital city of the region. The Mankon people are also a sub culture within the Bantu people that dominate most of Central and West Africa. This rich cultural background is very prevalent in the different components of the Asamba Dance.

Components of Asamba

The main components that differentiate Asamba from other dances of the Mankon people are its costume, instruments, dance moves, and the messages in the songs.

Costume

It is made out of a colorful hand-woven fabric. Female dancers wear free-flowing skirts called awondo, while men don a piece of the fabric passed between their legs and fastened with a rope around their waist called ntum. Asamba dancers wear blouses or t-shirts atop their awondos, and traditional headwear to cover their heads. While men usually wear sandals, women dance barefooted or with flats. Asamba dancers always embellish their costumes with accessories such as sheathed machetes and traditional bags. Supporting dancers, usually in the background, wear the colorful and hand-woven traditional gowns and dresses called togho. Thanks to its unique costume, Asamba is very attractive wherever it is presented.

Instruments

A variety of drums make up the main instruments. There are at least two long drums, small (sometimes twined) drums, and a big short drum that are played by different people. There are also flutes, usually made out of Indian bamboo, that embellish the instruments. Additionally, female dancers sometimes wear ankle rattles that produce a jingle as they dance along.

Dance Moves

Asamba is very rhythmic, so the cadence reflects a high level of energy. The Minnesota Asamba dance troupe has four segments of dancers: The young dancers, adult dancers, the background dancers, and the instrumentalists. The young dancers are the most vibrant, having learned from their parents who form the support group of dancers behind the children. The background dancers are usually the elderly and notables of the community and dance at a deliberately slower pace. The instrumentalists also do some dancing, mostly with their upper bodies and heads.

Songs and Messages

Asamba has a lead singer who guides the troupe on the pitch and the rhythm of the songs. The rest of the group follows the leader in chorus. The songs are rich in messages of love, loyalty to the tribe, edification of the Chief of the land (called Fon) and customs of the people. The song lines are usually repetitive, which makes for easy understanding and participation.

Significance of Asamba

Asamba is a cultural heritage of the Mankon people. It expresses their joys, sorrows, fears, hopes, and values that bond the people together. It is a dance in which ordinary people and the notables in the community can be seen showcasing the past, present, and future of their common heritage during occasions such as funerals, weddings, anniversaries, enthronements, recognitions, and competitions.

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