

# African Caribbean Dance Theatre

Tallahassee, Florida

## Background

A hub of African cultural activity in the Tallahassee, Florida, area, the Florida African Dance Festival (FADF)—hosted by the nonprofit youth and adult cultural education organization African Caribbean Dance Theatre (ACDT)—engages and educates its surrounding community through live performances of African drumming and dance and associated workshops and demonstrations.



African Caribbean Dance Theatre students in performance at the 2012 Florida African Dance Festival concert. Photo by Will Joshua

### Folk and Traditional Arts Awards (2013-2015)

**Category:** Direct Grants to Organizations

**Fiscal year 2013 (\$10,000)**

**Project:** Florida African Dance Festival

**Fiscal year 2015 (\$25,000)**

**Project:** Florida African Dance Festival

The festival is the brainchild of ACDT co-founders Jevelle and Marcus Robinson, who were inspired by African dance events that they saw happening in American urban centers like Atlanta, Georgia, and Washington, DC. With the initial assistance of a tourism grant, they began hosting their own version of these festivals in Tallahassee. The festival has grown significantly over the years, receiving multiple grant awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, and has gained respect among African dance enthusiasts nationwide.

Separate from the festival, ACDT also invests in education in order to sustain the traditions of African dance across generations. Established 25 years ago to serve the community's youth, today ACDT's goal is to instill self-respect, self-esteem, self-confidence, discipline, and a sense of community and cultural pride among individuals. Through teaching African dance and drumming activities, ACDT also helps to preserve these folk and traditional art forms. The majority of their students are African-American girls and women ranging in age from 5 to 55 years old coming primarily from urban environments.

*"We saw when we began working with youth, how it impacted them. Somebody would come in, they'd be so timid and shy, but through a course of a period, they would open up through the dance and gaining confidence and you know, self-esteem and what have you. I think how the dance company has impacted others has been the most rewarding part and the reason why my husband and I have committed so much to it." – Jevelle Robinson*

## Activities

The Florida African Dance Festival is a three-day conference held each June featuring performance workshops led by internationally renowned artists and culminating in a concert by the host company and guest artists. Dance companies from around the country come to learn from the festival's master artists so they can share what they have learned with their home communities.

Music and dance are not the only components of African culture highlighted at the festival—other activities include a hair-and-fashion show, a health forum, and a vendor marketplace, where vendors display and sell items such as clothing and jewelry. Festival activities encourage a spirit of exchange and sharing.

## Perceived Impact

Though it can be expensive to bring established traditional artists to Tallahassee, the investment has paid off for the festival, for the community of artists, and for the local area.

According to Jevelle, the festival has received much media coverage over the years. Additionally, the festival artists enhance their portfolios and engage with new audiences.



**The action of the "bantaba" and Finale of the 2010 Florida African Dance Festival concert performance. Photo by Will Joshua**

The event brings many people to Tallahassee, which in turn drives local tourism revenue and brings greater visibility to local artists performing at the festival.

The festival's partnerships with the local business community extends the reach of these businesses and helps them make a deeper impact in the local community. In addition, the festival's health forum increases awareness of health issues prevalent within the African-American community.