



Trinity College

HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

July 8, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to recommend Abdoulaye Sylla as a teacher and performer of West African dance. I have known Abdoulaye for fifteen years; he has been a distinguished colleague in the Department of Theater and Dance at Trinity and a prolific dance artist in Connecticut and beyond, offering numerous performances, residencies, and classes. Abdoulaye's notable dance career in the Republic of Guinea, where he was a principal dancer and percussionist with Les Ballets Africains, the national dance troupe of the Republic of Guinea, and a principal dancer, percussionist, and the director of technique for Les Merveilles D'Afrique, a private folkloric troupe that trains dancers for the national company, provides him with an incredibly rich background in traditional African dance. He is truly an ambassador of his cultural heritage (and was credited as such following a residency in San Francisco at the University of California) and we have been incredibly fortunate to have him in our midst.

Abdoulaye has been an extremely successful teacher at Trinity where each semester his classes packed to overflowing and have waiting lists as well. No matter what the ethnic or gender composition of the class, Abdoulaye is able to communicate the movement techniques and the generative cultural context from which they emanate so that, by the end of the semester, the students are able to perform the dances (and they do so, on the main stage of Austin Arts Center) with a commitment, enthusiasm, confidence, and skill that brings the audience to their feet every time. The students don't just learn dance in Abdoulaye's course—they learn to appreciate a culture and a tradition that they can take with them and refer to throughout their lives.

Abdoulaye himself is a stunning performer who has a special dynamism and magic that is felt whenever he performs, whether drumming or dancing. Several years ago, I helped to organize a performance at the noted regional theater venue the Hartford Stage Company—an evening of awareness about the situation in Darfur, Sudan. I asked Abdoulaye if he would perform a piece. He agreed and performed a dance that suggested the suffering and pain of the genocide that is taking place there with supreme artistry and deep understanding. It was moving, beautiful, heartbreaking, and captured the essence of the situation without overstatement. It spoke to me of Abdoulaye's incredible range as an artist.

When I look at the numerous places that Abdoulaye has taught and performed throughout the State, it seems like there must be three of him rather than only one! His commitment to teaching is clear and the numerous invitations plus the longevity of some of his teaching engagements (Trinity being one) clearly speak to his success as a teacher. We are more than sad to lose Abdoulaye as he moves to the West coast, but I can only say that our loss is truly your gain and urge you to make him a part of any and all arts teaching and performing opportunities that are available. He has my highest respect and my unqualified recommendation.

Sincerely,

Judy Dwarin

Professor and Co-Chair, Department of Theater and Dance

DEPARTMENT OF THEATER & DANCE

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