



**GIWAYEN MATA'S
Cultural Experience Project
KWANZAA LIVE!
In partnership with
THE WEST END PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Who Is Giwayen Mata?

Giwayen Mata is a term that means “Elephant Women”. It is the title given to women who are leaders of women’s organizations amongst the Hausa people who live in West African countries including Nigeria. **Giwayen Mata** is an award-winning all sistah, dance, percussion and vocal ensemble. Founded in 1993 by Sarahn Henderson, Gail Jordan, Omelika Kuumba (Artistic Director), who are currently working with the ensemble, and seven other dynamic women, **Giwayen Mata’s** mission is *“to celebrate the lives of women and uplift our communities and our planet, while perpetuating the cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora through the study, creation, teaching, and presentation of artistic media including dances, rhythms, songs, poetry, and prose around the world.”* In keeping with this mission **Giwayen Mata** has been wowing audiences and students of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds with classes, workshops, and performances that are educational, energetic, thought-provoking, interactive, and entertaining. Audiences are often moved to their feet by the end and sometimes their performances and students speak enthusiastically about how their learning experiences go beyond movement and sound. In giving Giwayen Mata its first of three Creative Loafing Best of Atlanta Awards for Best World Music Group critic Roni Sarig wrote, “to call this all female group a band is an understatement. They are more like an event.”

What Is Kwanzaa?

Kwanzaa is a non-religious, African American holiday that celebrates African cultures and values. The holiday was created in 1966 by **Dr. Maulana Karenga** who was professor and chair of the Black Studies Department of California State University in Long Beach, California. Dr. Karenga's goals were to enliven, maintain and advocate Pan-African culture and nurture a sense of pride and commonality among indigenous Africans and peoples of the African Diaspora. Kwanzaa offers peoples of African descent a time to commune and commemorate their heritage. Kwanzaa is a time when families and communities come together to celebrate the harvests of the year; i.e. good grades, career accomplishments, growth in the family, etc. The word Kwanzaa comes from the **KiSwahili** phrase, "**matunda ya kwanza**" which means "**first fruits**." Dr. Karenga chose KiSwahili because it is spoken by people in many African countries. He added another "a" at the end of the word so that it would have seven letters. In many cultures seven is the number of perfection, security, safety, rest, and completion. **The Nguzo Saba** (or **The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa**) are the foundation for Kwanzaa. They teach African values that are the building blocks of family, community, tradition, and culture which are emphasized throughout the celebration. Kwanzaa is observed **Dec 26th - Jan 1st**. On each day activities in family and community settings, often focus on one of The Seven Principles. **Libation** is poured, acknowledging the Creator and ancestors, both personal and communal. A candle is lit for each principle, the meaning of the principle is discussed, ancestors, elders and their works are honored, and the youth are encouraged to respect their elders, honor the ancestors, be true to their commitments, and strive for excellence. Performances and presentations may also be included in the celebrations and many end with a tasty, healthy meal. Each gathering is concluded with **Seven Harambees**, an act of reaching in the air, pulling down with a clinched fist. **Harambee** means, "**Let's pull together**". Below are The Nguzo Saba: The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa and their descriptions:

The Nguzo Saba: The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa

Umoja (Unity) Dec 26th – to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) Dec 27th – to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.

Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) Dec 28th – to build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and solve them together.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics and Family) Dec 29th – to build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Nia (Purpose) Dec 30th – to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

Kuumba (Creativity) Dec 31st – to do always as much as we can, in any way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it.

Imani (Faith) Jan 1st – to believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

There are **Seven Symbols of Kwanzaa** which also reflect these fundamental values. The symbols are often used in decorating the home or a table for Kwanzaa or in observing rituals associated with the holiday in communal or family settings.

The Symbols of Kwanzaa

Mkeka (The Mat) – symbolic of our tradition and history and, therefore, the foundation on which we build.

Kinara (The Candle Holder) – symbolic of our roots and of our parent people— continental Africans.

Mishumaa Saba (The Seven Candles) – symbolic of the Nguzo Saba, the central set of values which African people are urged to live by in order to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and according to their own needs. Traditionally, there are 3 red candles, 3 green candles, and one black candle burned. The black candle is lit on Umoja. The black candle and the closest red candle is lit on Kujichagulia. The black candle, the closest red candle and the closest green candle are lit on Ujima, continuing and alternating until all seven candles are lit.

Mazao (The Crops) – symbolic of African harvest celebrations and of the rewards of productive and collective labor.

Muhindi (The Corn) – symbolic of our children and our future, which they embody. Traditionally, every display will have at least one Muhindi, representing the proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child”. It is customary for each household to have an ear of corn representing each child in the family.

Kikombe cha Umoja (The Unity Cup) – symbolic of the foundational principle and practice of unity which makes all else possible. The Kikombe cha Umoja is passed for each family member to sip from at intimate family gatherings. In public community gatherings, a representative, often a recognized elder, takes a sip on behalf of all in attendance.

Zawadi (The Gifts) – symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by the children. Sometimes the children receive a gift on each day of Kwanzaa. At other times, the Zawadi are given on the last day.

Bendera Ya Taifa (The Flag) – The colors of the Kwanzaa flag are black for the people, red for their struggle and green for the future and hope that comes from their struggle. It is based on the colors given by the Hon. Marcus Garvey as national colors for African people throughout the world.

While Kwanzaa is an African based celebration observed Dec 26th- Jan 1st, there is a beauty in the fact that the principles can be observed throughout the year and by people of all backgrounds.

What Will You Experience

When **Giwayen Mata** performs, you will take a journey to countries in West Africa and places in the southern United States of America. You will learn about dances, rhythms and songs from Africa and the African Diaspora. You will learn about the symbols, principles and history of Kwanzaa. The performance and workshop include drumming, dancing, singing, call and response, playing of percussion instruments, Q & Q and more. During the performance some audience members will have the opportunity to join us on stage. The workshop will give all of the attendees the chance to learn movements to one or more of the dances presented during the performance.

The Performance

Jalidon (also Djalidon and dialidon), is a dance in the family of dances performed to a rhythm called **Lamban**. Jali means griot or oral historian. Don means dance. Jalidon is the dance of the oral historian. The origin of the dance is the Bamana ethnic group of Mali, West Africa. The jali or griot plays an important role in the community. He or she is responsible for recording the history of the people, the royal family. The songs the jali sings tell of the experiences of the royal family and the events that occurred during their reign throughout the land. Sometimes the jali sings while playing a stringed instrument called a kora. The kora is made of wood, a gourd, and a hide which is beautifully decorated. The dance is done to honor the royal family and welcome esteemed guests. It is also done to commemorate special events during a person's lifetime. This includes the following:

Birth- after a child is born a naming ceremony often occurs seven days later. The community is informed of the child's name and its meaning at which time people, bringing gifts for the child and family, pledge to help the child fulfill his or her life's missions as prescribed by the child's name.

Puberty and young adulthood- as a young person enters puberty, he or she is taken through a series of events that help to prepare young men and women to be responsible adults in the community. These activities culminate in a rites of passage ceremony.

Adulthood- a special event that takes place when men and women become husbands and wives joining not only two individuals, but also two families, is marriage. Marriage expands the extended family and strengthens the bonds in the community. A wedding ceremony takes place and the commitments made by the couple are witnessed by the community.

Death- the practice of observing and celebrating the life of a person who has died in the community is reflected in a period of mourning and celebrating and a funeral service. Family and community acknowledge the significant contributions that the person has made and recall that as long as the person is thought of and spoken of he or she will always remain “among us”.

Jalidon is also believed to be a dance that chronicles the experiences of **Mansa Musa** as he sojourned from the Mali Empire to Mecca. The garment traditionally worn for this dance is a grand bubu, a large caftan-like garment worn in Africa. Some of the movements exemplify how the garment may have been used to assist in moving through the sand as it may have been blowing. Others show the dancers gesturing in homage to the heavens. There are also movements that may signify the “exorcising of spirits” that may have overcome this great king as he traveled and endured the heat and sunlight of the desert. There are also movements of celebration and jubilation as a result of the pilgrims’ successfully making their way to Mecca.

Dansa is a rhythm that has been included in the Lamban family of rhythms from the Mali Empire. It is from the Kayes and Kita region of southern Mali associated with the Kasonke and Bamana ethnic groups. Originally played for a competitive dance for young men, it is now a popular rhythm played all over West Africa. Kwanzaa is a time when elders and ancestors are honored for their contributions to society. We present Jalidon and Dansa in celebration of the foundation that our ancestors have laid and our elders and leaders have continued to build upon for our future. The principle of Imani is reflected here.

Kwanzaa: History, Principles, and Symbols

Giwayen Mata and students will examine the history, principles and symbols of Kwanzaa and apply them throughout the program.

Mendiani

Mendiani is a masked dance of initiation from the Maninka (also Malinke) people (Guinea and Mali, West Africa). “Mendiani” is a title for virgin girls (6-14) who are initiated into a secret society of dancers. The elder women of the society were former Mendiani. They watch the young girls dance and select the strongest ones to train in this special dance. In addition to being stronger dancers, they must be fearless. The young female initiates are taught the secrets of their society. The rhythm, Denadon is played as the young ladies enter the ceremony area while being carried on the shoulders of their elder men. When they touch the ground they become Mendiani, remove their masks and outer bubus and perform the dance. Mendiani is an example of the principle, Kujichagulia.

Djembe Rap, Back to Basics, and Shakin' the Sekere

Giwayen Mata will tell you about the instruments played during the performance. Through call and response, you will learn about the jembe (also djembe), a hand drum made of wood, goat skin, metal rings and string and often leads the rhythms and dances; the bass drums are made of wood or metal, cow hide, metal rings and string, including the sangban, kenkeni, and dununba, that are usually played with sticks and often provide the foundation of the rhythms; the agogo, a metal bell that keeps the time for the music, and the sekere, a beaded gourd that is played by shaking and striking which provides spicy accompaniment for the rhythms and is more often played with conga drums. During this part of the program, Giwayen Mata will play Bushe'. A rhythm played in the market place in the Congo. The market place is where goods and services are bought, sold, traded and bartered. Many Kwanzaa events include vendors with African and Africentric goods. The principles of Ujamaa and Kuumba are demonstrated here.

Handclap Polyrhythm and Percussion Polyrhythm

A polyrhythm is two or more rhythms played at the same time in a musically coordinated fashion. **Giwayen Mata** will invite you to be musicians using your hands as the instruments. Once you have gotten the understanding of listening and playing together you will be shown how to play various percussion instruments together. One instrument will be the bell. In many cultures bells are used to signify important moments, i.e. church bells, school bells, etc. Bells are often the time keepers for rhythms. In some West African countries, the bell is called agogo. Playing music together is an example of the principles of Umoja, Ujima, and Kuumba.

Tiriba (Triba)

Tiriba is from the Baga and Landuma people, from the Boke and Boffa regions in western Guinea. The dance has evolved over what appears to be three phases. The oldest phase was a masked dance. It told of a great dancer who assembled a group of percussionists and performed his dances. He was called "**Tiriba**" when he wore a particular garment. Eventually, there were no more **Tiriba** dancers associated with this phase. The second phase identifies **Tiriba** as a dance done for the initiation of girls. Mothers and daughters celebrate and dance together. Today, **Tiriba** is a very popular rhythm that is played at a variety of events that include dancing. In **Tiriba**, we see the principles of Umoja and Kuumba at work.

Kuku

Kuku is a dance from the Susu people. Many Susu people live in Guinea, West Africa. Kuku was originally created to celebrate when the women returned with a good harvest of fish. Now it is done for all kinds of occasions. Kuku is the first dance Giwayen Mata performed during our debut in Sisters Chapel at Spelman College in 1993. The principles of Umoja and Ujima are demonstrated in Kuku.

Special thanks to Sis. T. Ayo Alston, Sis. T. Omiyale Harris, Master Guinean Dancer Bro Youssouf Koumbassa and Senegalese Master Dancer, Master Drummer, Mamady Keita, and Marie Basse for providing this information to their students.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

1. What does **Giwayen Mata** mean?
2. What is **Kwanzaa**?
3. Name the **seven principles** of Kwanzaa (**Nguzo Saba**).
4. What is the ethnic group of origin for the dance, **Kuku**?
5. What are the seven symbols of Kwanzaa?
6. Why are bells sometimes played?
7. Name different kinds of **rites of passage**.
8. **Mendiani** is a celebration dance done by whom?
9. What is a **polyrhythm**?
10. Why do you think it is important to learn about other cultures?
11. What does **ancestor** mean?
12. What are the **seven symbols** of Kwanzaa?
13. What are the three phases of the development of **Tiriba**?
14. Who founded Kwanzaa in America?
15. What does **Kuumba** mean?
16. Who gave the national colors of African people throughout the world?
17. What African king is often related to the dance, **Jalidon**?
18. What is often done at the end of Kwanzaa celebrations?
19. Name a fruit that can be made into an instrument.
20. What are three sounds played on the djembe drum?

The Workshop

The students will select the dance they would like to learn during the workshop following the program. It will include a brief warm up, movements and a cool down.

The Q & A

Participants will have an opportunity to query Giwayen Mata members about the performance and about their lives as performing artists.