



KULU MELE AFRICAN DANCE & DRUM ENSEMBLE

OGUN & THE PEOPLE (WORLD PREMIERE)

Celebrating 50 Years • 1969-2019

Kulu Mele Ensemble Founder Robert Crowder (1930-2012)

Kulu Mele Ensemble Artistic Director Dorothy Wilkie

Kulu Mele Ensemble Music Director John Wilkie

Kulu Mele Ensemble Executive Director David Harrison

Ogun & the People

Director/Choreographer Idalberto Banderra Sido, Dorothy Wilkie

Original Music Composer/Arranger Idalberto Banderra Sido, John Wilkie

Videography Aidan Un

Story Script Writer Jos Duncan

Costume Design Dorothy Wilkie, Forklorico Cutumba

Set Design Ife Nii-Owoo

Sound Design Jon Cannon

PROGRAM

There will not be an intermission.

Saturday, November 30 @ 8 PM

Zellerbach Theatre



Major support for *Ogun & the People* has been provided to Kulu Mele by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.

Ogun & the People is co-commissioned by the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.



PNC Arts Alive is the official sponsor of Kulu Mele's 50th anniversary season.

PROGRAM NOTES

CAST (in order of appearance)

Libator Ira Bond

Children Razaanah Adib, Camryn Clark, Azziza DeSeignoria, Claudia Levin Dorko, Tallulah Green Hull, Maia Hannah-Drullard, Imani Heath, Alisha Holland, Hayes Plante, Anike Quinones

Storyteller Jos Duncan

Elegba Bryant Lee

Ogun Edward Smallwood

The People Tekeytha Amelia Fullwood, Renelle Hopkins, Patricia "Peaches" Jones, Bryant Lee, Payin Schley, James Ali Wilkie

Yemaya Ama Schley

Shango Yusuf Young

Oya Cachet Ivey

Leading Oshun Crystal Gatling

Supporting Oshun Alakee Bethea, Daniele Bourget Simon, Fasina Wilkie, Kia Holifield Wimmer

Vocalists Andres Cisneros, Claudette DeWindt, Dorothy Wilkie

Drummers Ira Bond, Kenneth Fauntleroy, John Wilkie

Executive Producer Dorothy Wilkie

Co-Producer David Harrison

Project Scribe Debora Kodish

Visual Creative Director Ilfe-Nii-Owoo

Artistic Advisor Idalberto Bandera Sido, The Company Members of Ballet Folklorico Cutumba

Cultural Interpreter Selina Morales

PROGRAM

Procession of the ancestors

Libation (ancient ceremonial offering)

Egun with the children of Omo Kulu Mele

Film

The story of Ogun

Elegba (with the children of Omo Kulu Mele)

The people with Ogun

The Orishas (in order of appearance: Yemaya, Shango, Oya, the Oshuns)

Oshun & Ogun

The return of the people & celebration (everyone)

ABOUT OGUN & THE PEOPLE

Ogun & the People is a timely multi-media work of American dance theatre, grounded in Afro-Cuban culture. It was specially created by Kulu Mele artistic director Dorothy Wilkie as her gift to the community (and the world), in commemoration of Kulu Mele's 50th anniversary. *Ogun & the People* incorporates live music, dance, film, storytelling, set elements, and more. Its world-premiere performance at the Annenberg Center features a cast of 23 professional performing artists, as well as children.

In *Ogun & the People*, Kulu Mele brings to life a version of a Pataki (sacred parable) about the Yoruba deity Ogun and a world in crisis. Wilkie sets her choreography in this breach. Elegba opens the way, and the story unfolds.

The orisha, Ogun, returns from an extended journey, dirty and disheveled from his labors. The people don't recognize him. Angry, he retreats into a forest, taking with him his gifts: the people's basic tools. Without Ogun and his tools, weapons, forces and powers, his people are unable to

hunt, cultivate crops, and defend themselves. They are not able to work without equipment or cook without iron pots and kettles. The people turn to the other Orishas, forces of life, to bring Ogun back and restore balance in the world. In turn, Yemaya, Shango and Oya make appeals to Ogun. Ogun refuses all entreaties. It is only when Oshun's love and persistence proves irresistible that Ogun returns. Balance is restored, the people get their powers back, and a celebration occurs.

As a Pataki, *Ogun & the People* is replete with powerful themes, morals, and teachings. Recognizable and inscrutable, complex characters (Ogun, Oshun, other Orishas, and the people) are built out of movement and music. Like all Patakis, *Ogun & the People* reveals new pathways for action, unforetold ways for all of us to find our way in life.

Wilkie's *Ogun* uses elements of traditional ritual, dance and culture to explore contemporary concerns that are relevant right now, in Philadelphia and around the world. Her *Ogun* is rooted in the authentic folkloric traditions with which she is very well-versed, including Afro-Cuba, Haitian and Oriente (Eastern Cuban) Yoruba culture, and contemporary Yoruba culture as practiced in Philadelphia, as part of the Yoruba Diaspora.

With the loftiest commitment to her artistry and in support of this production's richly informed development, *Ogun & the People* is Wilkie's most original work, and her most ambitious artistic investigation, as was necessary in order for her to translate a pataki from oral tradition and ritual context, into a staged work of dance theatre. Wilkie is emphatic in her belief that the story of *Ogun & the People* must be told now, at this time of civic and cultural crisis, and in the face of rising violence and hate in Philadelphia and globally.

As Kulu Mele's all-new 50th anniversary production, *Ogun & the People* recognizes the value of Kulu Mele's work in this moment, and it enacts Kulu Mele's historic and ongoing role in carrying the torch for the culture.

Ogun & the People was developed in part through a residency in Santiago de Cuba with Ballet Folklórico Cutumba.

Read about this transformative practice in a special 100+ page commemorative book, as well as other publications and educational tools. Kulu Mele will also make this story accessible in residencies and at additional performances. For more information about Kulu Mele's arts education programs and performances, please visit kulumele.org, email kulumele@kulumele.org or call 917. 238.0756.

Tell Kulu Mele what *Ogun & the People* means to you: kulumele50@kulumele.org or 484.202.0524.

ABOUT THE ORISHAS (in order of appearance)

Elegba is the orisha of roads and doors. He holds all the keys, good and bad. He stands at the crossroads of humanity and divinity. Nothing can be done in either realm without his permission. He is playful and mischievous. His colors are red and black.

Ogun is an ironworker, laborer, hunter, warrior and king. He is the protector of the people. He is a hard worker with a legendary temper. He wields a machete. His colors are green and black.

Yemaya is the goddess of the oceans and the rivers, including the River Ogun. Her name means "the mother whose children are the fish." Her attire emulates the waves of the ocean; her lace slip represents the foam of the sea. Her colors are blue and white.

Shango is the god of thunder, lightning and fire. He is a noble king and a supernatural beauty who is powerful and feared. With his double-edged axe, he symbolizes dancing. His colors are red and white.

Oya is a fierce warrior and the ruler of storms, wind and fire. She is the embodiment of turbulence; she creates hurricanes and tornadoes. She guides people at times of transformation. She dances with a black iruke (a horse's tail fashioned into a whip.) Her colors are all colors, except black.

Oshun is the goddess of sweetness, love and sexuality. She represents the river waters. She is happy, cheerful and festive. She tempts Ogun out of the forest with honey. She teaches everyone that the secret of life is to love. Her colors are gold, yellow, white and green.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Kulu Mele African Dance & Drum Ensemble

Inspired by the voices of its ancestors, it is the mission of Kulu Mele African Dance & Drum Ensemble to preserve, present and perpetuate the traditional dance and music of West Africa and the African Diaspora, and to celebrate contemporary African American culture.

Kulu Mele was founded in 1969 by the late Robert "Baba" Crowder (1930-1982). Kulu Mele is the oldest continually performing African dance and drum ensemble in the United States. Kulu Mele draws on the African musical and movement genres of Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, and the Senegambia region; the Afro-Caribbean traditions of Cuba and Haiti; and more, including Afro-Brazilian and other cultures. In addition to presenting the dance and music of Africa and the African Diaspora, the Philadelphia-based ensemble also performs contemporary American music and dance including hip-hop, the Bop, Cha-Cha and the Slop, blending West African ancestral traditions with African American creativity.

Kulu Mele performances and educational programs vividly convey the meanings of dancing and drumming in the African and African diasporic societies from which these traditions originated. The ensemble is the first performance on the main stage upon the sacred procession's return from the river at Philadelphia's Odunde Festival. The annual summer festival has been dedicated to Oshun since its beginning in 1975. Kulu Mele now has more than 20 members and includes a children's ensemble, Omo Kulu Mele (Omo means child in Yoruba).

The seeds of Kulu Mele were planted when Ghanaian drummer Saka Acquaye, who was highly influential at the time, came to Philadelphia to study art and sculpture at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1953. Acquaye's *Gold Coast Saturday Night* album, recorded in 1958 and released in 1959, featured Robert Crowder as one of the drummers. Crowder, along with dancers Arthur Hall and Lone Nash, joined a dance ensemble formed by Acquaye in 1958. Each carried Acquaye's legacy forward and went on to establish important Philadelphia dance and drum ensembles. Kulu Mele is the only one that still exists.

In 1969, some of the musicians who played with Acquaye became the nucleus of Kulu Mele. That group included drummers Garvin Masseaux, George Cannon and Wil Letman. More than 77 dancers and musicians have been a part of Kulu Mele over the years. Kulu Mele has been a crucial training ground for African dance, drumming and culture throughout the Philadelphia region.

During its first five years, Kulu Mele consisted of a small core of people seeking musical and cultural education, motivated by a hunger for African culture. The company performed at community events, Black arts programs, and Black history tributes; at a prison with poet Sonia Sanchez and with activist Angela Davis at a Young Workers Liberation League Convention Rally for Youth Rights.

1982 to 1984 was a turning point for Kulu Mele when Cuban percussionist Enrique Adamo Admiral came to Philadelphia. He was very influential to Kulu Mele's artistic, cultural and spiritual education. For two incredible years, he brought the company deeper into Afro-Cuban culture.

In the 1990's, Dorothy Wilkie, first a dancer, then dance captain, succeeded Baba Crowder as Kulu Mele's artistic director (a post she has now held for over 25 years).

Kulu Mele has a long history of artistic and community collaboration, in support of the development and advancement of individual artists and the communities Kulu Mele serves. Kulu Mele has commissioned some of the most accomplished African-heritage choreographers and composers

working today, including Ronald K. Brown, Jeffrey Page, Oyu Oro Afro-Cuban Experimental Dance Ensemble (Dany's "La Mora" Perez, artistic director), M'Bemba Bangoura, Youssouf Koumbassa and Lela Aisha Jones/FlyGround, among others. Kulu Mele's community partners have included the African American Museum in Philadelphia, Taller Puertorriqueno, Raices Culturales Latinoamericanas, the Philadelphia Folklore Project, the Senegalese Association of Philadelphia and more.

Kulu Mele currently performs year-round throughout Philadelphia and tours nationally and internationally. Kulu Mele has appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and the Frank Gehry-designed Disney Hall at The Los Angeles Music Center. In September 2015, Kulu Mele traveled to Santiago de Cuba, for an intensive cultural immersion and eight-day residency with Ballet Folklorico Cutumba, as part of the company's artistic development process for *Ogun & the People*.

In addition to performances, Kulu Mele's extensive arts education program serves thousands of Philadelphia children and adults annually, in both school and community settings. Kulu Mele's in-school programs also exclusively serve economically disadvantaged families.

Dorothy Wilkie (Kulu Mele Ensemble Artistic Director/*Ogun & the People* Executive Producer)
Dorothy Wilkie joined Kulu Mele as a dancer in 1971. She was later promoted to dance captain, and then artistic director, a position she has held for over 25 years. Wilkie, or "Mama Dottie", as she is known, began to pursue serious study of a wide repertoire of African Diasporic dance in 1955, approaching the genre originally as an art form, and later as an aspect of her spiritual practice as an Orisha priest. After joining Kulu Mele, she began intensive study of Nigerian and Ghanaian dance with Robert Crowder and his wife, Saudah Bey. Wilkie continued her studies with Jackie Corley, James Marshall, Baba Ishangi, Xiomara Rodriguez, Tenefig Dioubate, M'Bemba Bangoura, Youssouf Koumbassa and other renowned movement artists. Recognized worldwide for her choreography, Wilkie has studied in Guinea with Les Ballets Africains, in Senegal with the National Dance Company of Senegal and in Cuba with Ballet Folklorico Cutumba. She choreographed the Odunde Festival's "Hucklebuck to Hip-Hop" productions featuring the African American vernacular social dances that she excelled in while growing up in North Philadelphia. Wilkie has choreographed for the Lantern Theater Company and for African Rhythms at the University of Pennsylvania. In 2007, she was awarded a prestigious Pew Fellowship in the Arts for Dance Choreography. In 2015, Wilkie and her husband, John Wilkie, who is Kulu Mele's music director, were awarded lifetime achievement awards from the Philadelphia Folklore Project for their contributions to Philadelphia arts and culture. The Wilkies have been married for more than 53 years.

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