





Many of the dancers were not professional dancers or dance teachers but practitioners of African culture.

HHC Detre L&A, Conte-Forte Photographs, B02.A03.I01.

Arts Project. Usually performing at local venues such as the New Hazlett Theater or the Kelly Strayhorn Theater, Dance Africa teamed Kadiatou with Chuck Davis, the founder of the festival, some 37 years ago. Balafon in Pittsburgh went from a small group to a widely respected nonprofit that established a foundation to carry on the legacy of traditional African dance and art. The ensemble has performed on prestigious stages such as the Kennedy Center and for invited guests at the United Nations and the Smithsonian Institution.

A frequent recipient of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and other foundations, Balafon was designated a Pittsburgh Cultural Treasure as part of the American Cultural Treasure Regional Challenge Initiative. As an African immigrant in 1985, Kadiatou spoke very little English, with French, Susu, Arabic, and other African languages as her fluency. She worked hard to learn and become literate in English and the American tongue. She became a U.S. citizen in 2016.

Mama Kadiatou Conte-Forte passed away in 2022 in Pittsburgh, leaving a legacy of African cultural

excellence. Before her passing, she wished that her personal and nonprofit papers and records would be preserved at the Heinz History Center. In August 2023, her papers were transferred to the History Center, making it the most significant collection of African culture art in the region. ✨

Logo: *Spirit Form Freedom Corner Monument*, Pittsburgh, PA, © artist Carlos F. Peterson.



Portrait of Mama Kadiatou Conte-Forte, 2000s.

HHC Detre L&A, Conte-Forte Photographs, B01.I04.

One of the first dance ensembles to showcase women as drummers and dancers, Balafon reflected the creativity of Mama Kadiatou Conte-Forte.

HHC Detre L&A, Conte-Forte Photographs, B01.I02.