

KAHWA
MEETING

CIRCUS IN AFRICA: AN IVORIAN PERSPECTIVE



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.

This publication was
edited by Circostrada,
designed and written
with Claudine Dussollier

CIRCO
STRADA

• European Network
Circus and Street Arts

Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

PARTNERS

Co-organised by



With the support of



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



MINISTÈRE
DE LA CULTURE
*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors. The Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Additional note



The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of Circostrada Network, its members or co-financers. Although great care has been taken to ensure that the examples, stories and data collected are accurate, no responsibilities can be accepted for the consequences of factual error and inaccuracies.

This publication is the property of Circostrada Network and follows the Creative Commons agreement Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0):

- Reuse is allowed but you must give appropriate credit
- You may not use the publication for commercial purposes
- If you remix, transform, or build upon the publication, you may not distribute the modified publication.

🌐 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

For further information, please contact infocircostrada@artcena.fr

All pictures included in this publication are protected by copyright. All photographs were taken by Claudine Dussollier, except the one in page 17.

Cover picture

The Faso Cirque company rehearsing before the launch of the RICA in the Cocody district

Graphic design

Frédéric Schaffar

July 2020

Find all the publications
by Circostrada as well
as many other online
resources and news
from the network and its
members on:
www.circostrada.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABIDJAN: THE RALLYING FORCE OF CIRCUS

BY STÉPHANE SEGRETO-AGUILAR

4

THE STAKES AND REALITIES OF CIRCUS ARTS IN IVORY COAST AND AFRICA

BY CLAUDINE DUSSOLLIER

7

- The RICA: a small festival and driving force for circus arts in West Africa 7
- Pan-African collaboration is now underway for circus arts 8
- Circus arts and art in the public space at the MASA 9
- Assets and barriers in the development of circus arts 10
- Circus arts and art in the public space: opportunities and outlook in Africa 11

THREE AFRICAN CIRCUS PLAYERS TEAM UP ON A CO-PRODUCTION PROJECT 12

OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANIES WHO PERFORMED AT RICA 2020 13

PROFESSIONAL CORNER: OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD'S PLAYERS 15

- La Fabrique Culturelle in Cocody and the RICA, Interview with Chantal Djédjé 15
- Travelling clowns with strong ties to their territory: Zolobé company from Madagascar 18
- Company N'Soleh, a concentrate of urban energy: interview with Massidi Adiatou 19
- Puppetry in the public space: Interview with Ivoire Marionnettes and its artistic director, Soro Badrissa 20
- Emergence of the national circus of Ivory Coast: interview with its creator, the choreographer Georges Momboye 21

NEXT MEETINGS 22

- Circus arts represented in African Capitals of Culture 22
- Next edition of the RICA in March 2021 23

RESOURCES 24

ABIDJAN: THE RALLYING FORCE OF CIRCUS

By Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar



Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar is the Coordinator of Circostrada Network and the head of the International Department of ARCTENA. Since 2003, Circostrada has been working to develop and structure the field of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.

The third KAHWA meeting took place in Abidjan, alongside the RICA (Intercultural Circus Meetings of Abidjan) and MASA (the Abidjan Performing Arts Fair), bringing together the people and challenges at the heart of contemporary circus and artistic creation in the public space in Ivory Coast, and in the wider West Africa region. Travel diary of a short week in Ivory Coast.

Paris-Abidjan - 6 hours and twenty minutes of flying. When finally we land at the Félix Houphouët-Boigny¹ International Airport, all passengers have their temperatures checked and logged on a scrap of crumpled paper. We then hand over to the person in charge of issuing visas. At this stage, the pandemic is nothing but a rumour in the air, and causes us zero pause for thought. Next up: vaccination and passport inspections. Standard. By the time we leave the airport, it's already late in the day, and so we rush to the Institut français' auditorium, where the RICA's inaugural ceremony is already under-way. The third edition of the only festival dedicated to circus arts in Ivory Coast started an hour ago, and the room is packed. The audience watches on, mesmerised by the thirty-odd performers from the Ivory Coast National Circus who move between dancing and acrobatics, directed with style by choreographer Georges Momboye. Chantal Djédjé, the event's dazzling master of ceremonies, wraps the evening up with a few last words, winding the excitement down until tomorrow.

The next morning, we set off for the Fabrique Culturelle at Les Deux Plateaux in the Co-



All the artists scheduled at the RICA during the opening night on the main stage of the French Institute

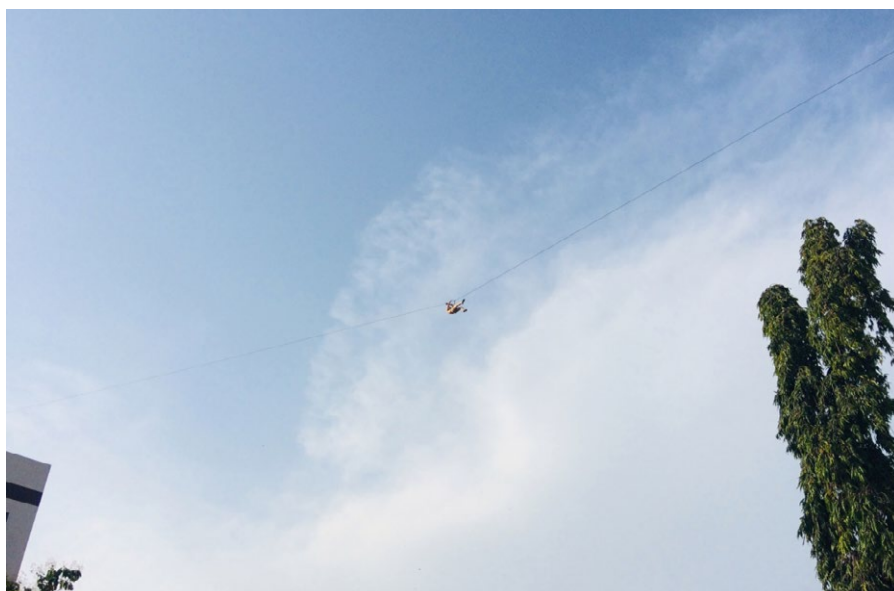
ody district, where "the trendiest spots are hidden and locked away behind imposing, unmarked black doors, or down little side streets"². Renovated in 2014 with the performing arts specifically in mind, this "cultural hub" is overseen by Chantal Djédjé, and serves as a residence, creative space, and venue open to artists and creatives, with outdoor capacity to seat up to 100 people. The day rolls by in the shade of towering

palms carpeted by ferns, as Europeans and Africans, artists and directors of creative spaces, professionals based in Europe, Africa, and even North America, all mingle and meet. The geckos watch on as we discuss the overlaps between traditional practices and contemporary work, the issue of upgrading equipment and ensuring its upkeep, the most viable ways of promoting and showcasing work across the African continent, and best

¹ Ivory Coast's first president from 1960 to 1993, after having been a traditional chieftain, a doctor, a tree-planter, a union leader, a deputy in France, a French government minister, president of Ivory Coast's national assembly, the mayor of Abidjan and Ivory Coast's prime minister.

² https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/07/23/a-abidjan-le-made-in-cote-d-ivoire-offert-sur-deux-plateaux_5492607_3212.html (translation from the original French)

practices for diversifying, appealing to, and building loyalty among different audiences. The discussions here are enriching and fruitful, as free-flowing and refreshing as the baobab, tamarind and bissap juice that fills our cups. Through our exchanges, some in the group, including Fekat Circus (Ethiopia), SenCirk (Senegal), Térya Circus (Guinea) and the RICA (Ivory Coast), begin discussing ideas for an African network aimed at supporting contemporary circus arts. The workshops are wrapped up, and it's back to the Institut français for the incredibly deft "La Main de la Mer" (staged by Gaëtan Levêque and co-produced by Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde and Métis'Gwa) and the lavish "Afrique en Cirque" from Montreal-based company Kalabanté, led by the multi-talented Guinea-born artist Yamoussa Bangoura.



The crossing of Antoine Le Menestrel, Lézards Bleus company (France)

Over the next two days, we learn more about the city's geographical and sociological landscape - and we also learn about the patience and sense of humour Abidjan's drivers are forced to embrace to be able to drive in such heavy, congested traffic.

One morning, we find ourselves discussing strategies for planning joint European-African projects backed by European funding for ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, or by French funding for colla-

borative projects between French and African cultural partners: in particular the Institut français' calls for proposals, supported by the French Development Agency. The next day, we watch on as the Zolobé company's Madagascan clowns perform their ingenious, joyous *Sakasaka*¹, before heading off to visit the incredible Ki-Yi Village, a centre for arts, crafts and cultural training that was founded in 1985 by Cameroonian painter, writer, choreographer and singer Werewere Liking.

We spend an afternoon taking part in the Abidjan Dance Parade, an epic procession with a "World Africa" theme and choreographed by Massidi Adiatou and Baba Touré, as its 2,000 dancers wind their way through the working-class district of Abobo (from the Samaké roundabout to the Abobo town hall, just across from the brand-new Adama Toungara Contemporary Culture Museum)², accompanied by a gigantic puppet operated by the Ivoire Marionnettes company (directed by Soro Badrissa). The next afternoon, meanwhile, we try (and fail) to keep up with the MASA's plethora of performances at Abidjan's Palais de la Culture Bernard Binlin-Dadié³ venue, where climber and performer Antoine Le Ménestrel caught us off guard, capturing the audience's attention and turning the air electric.



MASA opening parade in Abobo

When night falls over Le Plateau, the business district nicknamed 'Little Paris', or 'the Manhattan of the Tropics' on the Ébrié Lagoon, the air fills with the beating wings of thousands of bats. Just a few weeks later, their starring role in the Covid saga would be revealed.

¹ A stewed cassava leaf dish, native to Central Africa, West Africa and the Comoros. Known as "ravitoto" in Madagascar.

² https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/07/28/a-abidjan-le-nouveau-musee-d-abobo-veut-mettre-l-art-contemporain-a-la-portee-de-tous_6047534_3212.html (translation from the original French)

³ Ivory Coast writer, academic and politician

The end of the RICA is drawing near, and we head to the Institut français one last time, to celebrate 2020's inspiring edition with the Zougrou Women Band. Zougrou is an urban musical genre that has its roots in Ivory Coast, and recounts everyday living as experienced by the country's young people, sometimes with a humorous twist, other times with a political slant. Some of them ("Tonton joli", "Marie, mère de Jésus", "Mémé gentille") we had already heard the night before, in a bar by the lagoon in the Blockhauss district.

Our last day kicks off with a professional MASA meeting, an incisive workshop carefully led by Claudine Dussollier and developed with Khalid Tamer. How to structure a regional network for circus and street arts? How to heighten existing ties between leading professionals working in these sectors in Africa? How to draw on success stories and failures abroad as inspiration in building networks? A series of constructive discussions that is buoyed by audience participation and continues on in the corridors of the Palais and the arts and crafts village that sits alongside the MASA, where a sales exhibition showcases work



KAHWA meeting at the MASA professional area

by over 120 artists and craftspeople from Ivory Coast and West Africa.

Time seems to slip between our fingers. After lunch, we decide to head back to the hotel and pack, before following the old coastal road up to Grand Bassam, where the highly recommended Natio-

nal Costume Museum awaits. But when we arrive, we're sorely disappointed: the museum is closed. With a few hours to kill until our evening flight, we stop off to catch our breath, gaze out over the ocean and plunge into the waves.



Grand Bassam

THE STAKES REALITIES OF CIRCUS ARTS IN IVORY COAST AND AFRICA

By Claudine Dussollier



Claudine Dussollier has been trained as a geographer and cultural engineer; she is a member of Transvercité, an editorial counsellor and managing director at Editions Deuxième Époque and l'Entretemps. After holding a position in the field of immigrants' integration and social and urban development, she became involved in the cultural sector in 1993 and worked as counsellor of the Director of La Villette for 5 years. Since 1998, she supervises cooperation, training, editorial and cultural development projects in France, in the Mediterranean area and in West Africa.

The RICA: a small festival and driving force for circus arts in West Africa

It was late afternoon on 2 March 2020, and the atmosphere in Cocody was electric. The audience was clustered around a dance floor marked out with lorry tyres, and had been on their feet for three hours in a row, watching and cheering on the line-up of circus performers selected by Chantal Djédjé¹ and her team in the run-up to the third edition of the RICA.

That evening was a festive one on the market square of this working-class neighbourhood. The programme featured a smorgasbord of circus performers from Circo Bénin, the Cirque de l'Équateur, and the Gabon, as well as those from the European women's collective Ino Kollektiv, acrobats from Faso Cirque, and equestrian performer Madi Dermé from Burkina Faso. This edition also offered up a wonderful discovery in the form of an Ivorian troupe of young acrobatic dancers from Abidjan, whose flashes of humour and sprightly sense of mischief delighted the crowd. The dancers grew up in the Yopougon district, where they met Franco-Haitian choreographer Jenny Mezile² and her company, Les Pieds dans la Mare. As a result, the first seedlings of a new initiative are emerging into the light: a circus school in this neighbourhood of Abidjan, aimed at fostering these talented young people who



Circus shows in the Cocody neighborhood before the start of the RICAs

play on the traditions of their city and its popular coupé-découlé with panache.

RICA rolls off the tongue, ringing out loud and clear. It stands for "Rencontres Interculturelles du Cirque d'Abidjan" (InterCultural Circus Meetings of Abidjan). The events are intercultural in more ways than one: Africans collaborating with Africans; Europeans, Canadians and Africans all coming together; performers and audiences interacting – "meetings" of all types form the bedrock of this festival!

The RICA kick off in several different working-class neighbourhoods in the days leading up to the start of the performances

that make up the festival proper, which take place at the Institut français in the city centre. These public afternoon events are held on the Place de Cocody, or in Abobo primary school's spacious courtyard, bringing together over 2,000 children and many parents. The events are a key part of La Fabrique Culturelle's strategy aimed at raising awareness of circus arts and increasing audiences. The festival's financial viability lies in its ability to take a multi-faceted approach: artistic education, paid entry for venue performances and free entry for street performances, partnerships and organising events in schools. Guest performers play their part

¹ See interview with Chantal Djédjé

² Franco-Haitian choreographer Jenny Mezile, long-time resident of Abidjan, founded the Les Pieds dans la Mare company: <http://lespiedsdanslamare.com>



Abobo neighborhood

by running workshops for locals, working with young people in public and private schools. During the day, the RICA also include touring children's shows in schools and introductory sessions for pupils.

In 2020, the RICA offered up a diverse, international line-up, with the Institut français's stage giving pride of place to African troupes from across the continent: the Madagascan company Zolobe with *Sakasaka*, Térya Circus from Guinea-Conakry with *Ikawana*, and equestrian circus performances from Madi Dermé from Burkina Faso with *Je me souviens*. Four European and North-American acts added yet more texture to the offering: the Parisian Académie Fratellini, Métis'Gwa from Guadeloupe,

Ino Kollektiv's seven young European performers, and the Cirque Kalabanté, who left Guinea to go live and work in Canada. This edition's highlight was unquestionably *No Limits*, the National Circus of Ivory Coast's very first show. Developed by choreographer Georges Momboye¹, the show thrilled audiences, providing a shining example of the movement currently underway to create a serious circus sector in Ivory Coast. The industry's professionals are still in a fragile position, and are looking to consolidate their skills, resources and organisation. But while this may be true, the third edition of the RICA is indisputable proof of an effective foothold in the Ivorian capital, home to an international festival, national circus, and emerging young teams.

Although some parts of the puzzle may be missing, such as venues, funding, public policy supporting circus arts, and new skill-sets to bolster amateur and professional training opportunities, other pieces are clearly in place: drive, skills, audience numbers that are steadily rising year on year, schools and institutions keen to get involved, and a handful of determined figureheads such as Chantal Djédjé, Georges Momboye, and others.

As a result, by holding international professional meet-ups for the first time as part of this third edition of the KAHWA event, co-run with the Circostrada network as part of the festival, the RICA are taking a stand, and are already playing a decisive role in Africa's circus scene.

"Pan-African collaboration is now underway" for circus arts

Chantal Djédjé's comment following the KAHWA#3 meeting on 6 March offers a neat summary of the atmosphere that reigned at the meetings, and the concrete plans that emerged from them in terms of initiatives to be launched within the next two to three years. Enriching discussions tackled four pressing aspects for the African continent: communication, facilitating access to circus arts for new audiences, creating apparatus and the rela-

tionships between traditional practices and contemporary circus. The participants – RICA performers, representatives from the MASA, and local and international cultural stakeholders – spent an entire day debating and exchanging at La Fabrique Culturelle, which offered them a warm welcome. Brainstorming sessions drew on thoughts offered up by participants from Benin, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Ethiopia,

Guadeloupe, France, England, the United States, Guinea, Canada, Morocco, Algeria, Portugal and Italy, and led to a number of avenues to be explored.

The first avenue involves pan-African research, particularly into apparatus and endogenous practices similar to circus arts on the continent. The second avenue looks at organising communication and promotion across the

¹ See Interview [page 19](#) with choreographer Georges Momboye

continent by forging ties between existing festivals, showcasing performers and companies, encouraging individuals to set up national federations, and establishing a pan-African association. The routes to achieving this are facilitating information-sharing, boosting the visibility of artistic initiatives and working to promote circus arts on a continental scale. The third avenue concerns the issue of designing and developing acts and shows, with the emphasis

on finding new partners and reinforcing means of production. The fourth avenue focuses on artistic training in circus arts by circus professionals, and artistic, technical and professional training for young teams.

Three concrete projects in development emerged from these talks, and have not been significantly slowed down by the global Covid-19 pandemic that erupted just after the

RICA and the MASA. Plans for a tripartite production with Fekat Circus (Ethiopia), Georges Momboye (Ivory Coast) and Sencirk' (Senegal) have been launched. Alongside this, joint efforts are now being made to tackle the issue of apparatus, and discussions are continuing around the idea of setting up an "African Federation for Circus Arts".

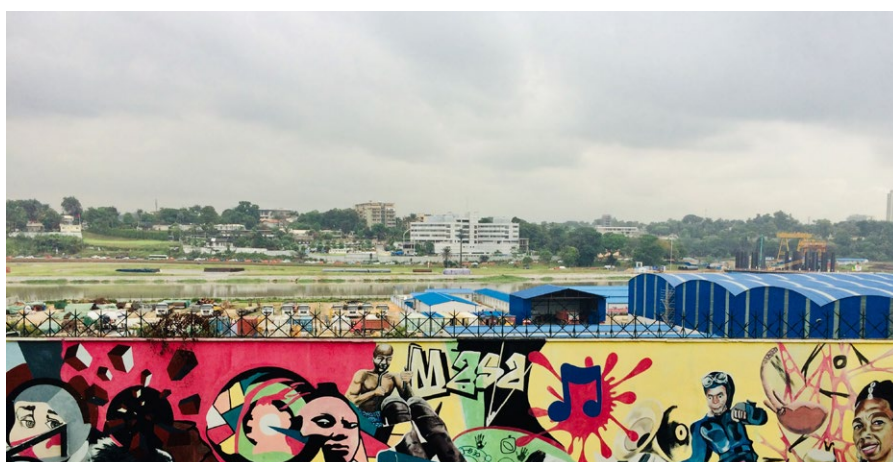
See you at the next RICA!

Circus arts and art in the public space at the MASA

The MASA, a major international highlight, took over from these Abidjan festivities from 7 March. To open this African Market for the Performing Arts (MASA), a parade snaked its way through the sprawling district of Abobo, magnificently orchestrated by artist and choreographer Massidi Adiatou¹. Local creativity in all its glorious diversity was revealed and showcased at this event that brought together artists, residents, amateurs, clubs and societies, and dance and music schools as they followed their lord of the dance and his team, decked out in brightly-coloured and often outlandish costumes, performing their meticulously choreographed and rehearsed dances as they went. The overall effect was one of lightness and joy, the thrill of transgression in the spirit of carnival, and pride in taking part in a national and international event. The procession included a giant puppet designed and animated by the company Ivoire Marionnettes, and animated by artist Soro Badrissa².

Massidi Adiatou is something of a pied piper. Along with N'Soleh, his company based in the Yopougon district, he works with young urban dancers and acrobats to create shows that are performed at street level as well as in venues. His latest offering, *Faro-Faro*, was included in the MASA, much to the delight of audiences and the Circostrada delegation in particular.

A number of other street arts and circus arts performers featured in the MASA line-up, such as Moroccan circus and parkour



Mural painting from the MASA headquarters with a view on Abidjan

performer Said Mouhssine and his *Routine*, and Patricia Gomis, founder of the Djarama association in southern Dakar in Senegal, and an artist who fuses object puppetry, street arts and circus arts. Yet the MASA's vibrant, multi-faceted atmosphere didn't allow for any particular focus on a given art form. As French-speaking Africa's only artistic market, the MASA is single-handedly responsible for being present on all fronts. Every two years, it introduces the general public and professionals from around the world to shows and acts sourced from 40 different countries, encompassing all performing art forms, including music. This is a formidable challenge indeed, and conditions are often limited with respect to the venues and resources available, despite a large number of partners and sponsors, and the support of Ivory Coast's Ministry for Culture.

The second event in this KAHWA#3 line-up was part of the professional networking sessions run by the MASA, and brought together circus arts, street theatre and puppetry artists and producers. Discussions paved the way for participants to share their experiences of the different festivals and networks popping up across the continent's sub-region. Speakers of note included Amélie Tapsoba, chair of the ACMUR collective and member of the *Ma Rue* network, Mario Barnaba, representing the FNAS (Italy's national federation for street arts), Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar for Circostrada, Chantal Djédjé for the RICA and Richard Djoudi from Térya Circus, for the development of circus arts. What is clear is just how important it is to foster intra-African networks of cultural stakeholders in order to champion the development priorities of each artistic sector.

¹ See interview [page 12](#) with Massidi Adiatou from the N'Soleh company

² See [page 17](#) Puppetry in the public space - Interview with Ivoire Marionnettes and its artistic director, Soro Badrissa

Assets and barriers in the development of circus arts

Let's get back to circus arts basics in Africa, as explored by the KAHWA#3 events and meetings with the artists and participants who attended. Circus arts in African countries have enjoyed powerful social resonance. This is an art form that has been fostered in-depth through international cooperation – with Canada first, and later with Europe – due to its ability to inspire energy and creativity, particularly among young people, those who are disenfranchised, street children and those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Because of this, in the 1980s/1990s, the NGO *Jeu-nesse du Monde*, associated with the Cirque du Soleil, funded and backed a large-scale programme to bring circus training and workshops to the general public in many countries, including Guinea-Conakry, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Benin and Ethiopia. Other initiatives, instigated in a context of bilateral cooperation by institutions such as the Pôle National Cirque et Arts de la Rue d'Amiens (France), bolstered programmes with similar aims: the Faso Cirque association in Burkina Faso is a fantastic example of this. Drawing on the training and schemes they enjoyed access to over a twenty-year period, the companies still in existence today are generally confined to running two types of service in order to survive: community programmes in refugee camps or with street children; and private services for events, or training pupils in private schools.

Despite aspiring to create shows and productions, these teams struggle to find the right partners, and means of production are severely lacking across the continent. Consequently, many circus performers – often some of the most talented – head for Europe, Canada or the United States to pursue their careers. Over the past thirty years, countries such as Guinea-Conakry



Ivoire Cirque Décalé company in front of La Fabrique Culturelle

and Ethiopia have seen a number of circus schools and companies created, which have produced many artists and performers while providing their invaluable community and educational services. Yet despite spectacular productions that tour the world, such as those developed by Circus Ethiopia¹ and Circus Baobab², heavy blows to budgets and national policies added to occasional conflicts within the teams have hindered the sector in developing a sustainable structure. The solution to preventing this creative brain drain and structural difficulties lies in rooting the sector in several different African countries. The only way this can happen is if States and their cultural ministries experience a shift in outlook, and through acknowledgement of the creative potential of circus arts beyond events and community initiatives, which would usher in supportive policies tailored to each country. In addition, backers via European and international cooperation engaged in the cultural industries must also take into account the sector's creative needs, by recognising the resources re-

quired in terms of training, production and awareness-building or communication.

With this in mind, establishing a federation for circus arts³ through the continent's network of artists and operators could lead to cross-disciplinary artistic and managerial training programmes that would strengthen leaders' ability to develop appropriate economies. This would need to go hand in hand with efforts to showcase productions and promote existing festivals. UCLG Africa⁴ intends to work with this approach as part of its "African Capitals of Culture" initiative, via structural programmes for specific sectors between editions⁵.

¹ Circus Ethiopia

² Cirque Baobab

³ See the interview [page 15](#) with Chantal Djédjé on the subject of launching a circus arts federation

⁴ United Cities and Local Governments of Africa

⁵ See [page 20](#) the "Circus arts in African Capitals of Culture" inset

Circus arts and art in the public space: opportunities and outlook in Africa

Circus and street arts have the capacity to reach the most diverse types of audience imaginable, from the Madagascan countryside to the streets of Dakar. The people who founded these companies and bring them to life understand rural living, such as the Zolobe company, or the urban experience, such as the Sencirk' performers in Dakar. They all have skills, and are determined to make a living from their art with a humanistic vision that is in keeping

with a deep involvement in their communities. The scene's focus today is more cultural than it is social, taking inspiration from endogenous artistic trends, and tales, stories and feats embedded in ancient practices, sometimes tinged with spiritual and initiatory aspects.

Because of this connection to a range of "traditional" source materials and a varied selection of disciplines shaped and moulded by urban life, immigration, the

Internet and digital communication, circus performers – whether clowns, acrobats, dancers or musicians – are at the epicentre of the developmental challenges faced by the African continent today. Participating artists at the RICA and MASA are their spokespeople. The KAHWA#3 events, and the creative and unifying projects that are emerging from within them, are a highly positive and exciting sign of a landscape in the making.



Circus Dafra and Faso Cirque artists (Burkina Faso) in front of La Fabrique Culturelle

THREE AFRICAN CIRCUS PLAYERS TEAM UP ON A CO-PRODUCTION PROJECT

Sencirk' in Senegal



Sencirk' is so much more than simply Senegal's leading circus company. The organisation was founded to inject all circus has to offer into supporting children in social and medical difficulty in Dakar and the surrounding area. Circus is a way of drawing people out of social exclusion, and in particular professional exclusion.

It encompasses a wide range of different performers, artists and professionals, as well as circus school teachers and volunteers from around the world. This circus is a place where people come to meet, exchange and get involved. Sencirk' uses circus arts to question our times and offer these questions up to audiences. Sencirk' is also a circus school that works with other schools, runs workshops and courses and trains young performers. Circus school is a way of passing on knowledge and providing pupils with artistic fulfilment by developing children's mental and physical abilities.

DAKAR, MARCH 2022, NEXT EDITION OF SENCIRK' FESTIVAL

Given the global sanitary situation, the festival decided to postpone its 2021 edition to March 2022.

The festival intends to invite both African and European companies and to organise workshops and meetings.

More information will be released from June 2021 onwards.

🌐 <https://sencirk.wixsite.com/sencirk> ✉ sencirk.developpement@gmail.com

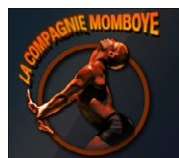
Fekat Circus in Ethiopia



Fekat Circus is one of very few independent cultural and creative hubs in the heart of Addis. It fosters a new generation of creative minds and spreads positive vibes. The circus's recreational learning team introduces children from all backgrounds to the world of circus. Fekat Circus is a circus troupe that sources and stages artistic performances in Ethiopia and abroad. It is the organiser of the Festival des Arts du Cirque Africain, a programme designed for young artists and circus organisations that offers skills development, networking and opportunities for exchange, with a view to expanding the circus arts sector within Ethiopia and across the African continent.

🌐 <https://fekatcircus.com> ✉ fekatcircus@gmail.com

Georges Momboye Dance Company



Founded in 1992, the Georges Momboye Dance Company, consisting of some fifty artists, enjoys an international carrier. For the choreographer Georges Momboye, dance is above all a movement in constant evolution, which is nurtured by all influences, starting from the influence of his own culture, but also all his experiences: from Alvin Ailey to Martha Graham, his encounters with artists coming from diverse horizons, African companies, contemporary companies, classical dance or even hip hop, so many artists that he gathers in the frame of his creations. Georges Momboye's choreographies exploit differences, they translate a spirit of openness and respect towards cultures, which gives them their strength and originality. While contributing to the evolution of African dance, in a contemporary gesture, Georges Momboye uses music brilliantly and as a full component of his artistic writing.


🌐 <http://www.momboye.fr>

OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANIES WHO PERFORMED AT RICA 2020

Cirque de l'Équateur Gabon

Founded in Libreville in 1980 after an encounter with Italian artists, Cirque de l'Équateur is a cultural institution in Gabon. It is both a circus school that trains in traditional performance arts and contemporary circus disciplines, and a company that performs in and outside of Gabon. At the RICA festival, they impressed audiences and actively participated in the KAHWA Meeting. The Cirque de l'Équateur is currently fighting to secure the resources it needs to continue its activities.

 <http://moungueng.free.fr/Bienvenue/8BA9AAB9-84BB-40C3-A64B-FF0A65F672C5.html>

 <http://www.cliquezcirque.com/artistes/le-cirque-de-l-equateur>

Faso Cirque Burkina Faso


Combining acrobatics, juggling, music and dance, Faso-Cirque was the first circus company to be founded in Burkina Faso in the late 1990s. Based in Ouagadougou, it is part of a network of artists based in several cities across the country. Some of its members were trained by the prestigious Canadian Cirque du Soleil and have won numerous trophies. In recent years, Faso-Cirque has inspired the creation of several new companies in Burkina Faso. The company also has a significant social impact through the artistic education it provides, supported by several French (Pôle national cirque et arts de la rue - Amiens) and Canadian (Cirque du Soleil) cooperation projects.

 <https://www.facebook.com/FasoCirque/>

The AGBE de Houédo company Benin

From performance arts and dance to acrobatics, the AGBE de Houédo company and its director Anicet Adanzounon dazzled the various Abidjan audiences who were lucky enough to see them in action perched atop 10-metre high masts in the public square. *Agbehoun* is the name of this traditional dance on bamboo posts. The company transmits the traditional know-how involved by transposing the challenging physical prowess it represents into the world of contemporary circus. These acrobatic dancers have also performed internationally at the *Rendez-Vous Chez Nous* festival in Ouagadougou, and at the *Accroche-Cœurs* festival in Angers.


 <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agbehoun>

 <https://berenicagainsi.wordpress.com/2020/03/02/3eme-edition-des-rencontres-interculturelles-de-cirque-dabidjan-le-benin-present-dans-les-airs-ivoiriens/>

Ivoire Cirque Décalé Ivory Coast

The company started out as specialists in a traditional Ivorian dance known as *coupé-décalé*. Hailing from the streets of Abobo, their modern performances recount daily life in Abidjan. Spotted in 2020 by Chantal Djédjé, their show, which incorporates their first steps in circus performance, was a huge hit with audiences. Ivoire Cirque Décalé is currently preparing a co-creation, which is scheduled to be presented at the 2021 RICA festival.

 <https://www.facebook.com/123ivoire/>

 Interview conducted by Edouard Dropsy (RFI)

The Madi Dermé company Burkina Faso/France

Drawing on Burkina Faso's rich equestrian heritage, Madi Dermé founded his company after a career as a performance rider with Bartabas at the Zingaro Equestrian Theatre company.

As a rider, animal tamer, acrobat, trainer and breeder, Dermé creates solo equestrian shows, such as the one he presented at the RICA festival after touring the French Institutes in West Africa. He has also initiated a biennale dedicated to the equestrian arts in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.

 <https://www.facebook.com/madi.derme.9>

 <https://institutfrancais-burkinafaso.com/ouaga/festival-international-des-arts-equestres/>

Terya Circus Guinea-Conakry


Founded in 2008, the Terya Circus company (Terya means 'friendship' in Mandinka) blends acrobatics, dance and Guinean music, delivering a whirlwind of original performances, a level of mastery bordering on the magical, and a breathtaking sense of cohesion and energy. Since 2015, the company has been performing its show *Boulevard Conakry* – which recounts life in the streets of the capital with its often surreal atmosphere – in Africa and Europe.

 https://m.facebook.com/teryacircus/?locale2=fr_FR

Kalabanté Productions Canada/Guinea-Conakry

These acrobats were trained at a circus school near Guinea-Conakry, where the majority of the company's members were born. In Susu, one of the languages spoken in Guinea-Conakry, *kalabanté* means 'an ambitious child with exceptional courage'. Kalabanté Productions was created in 2007 by the founder and artistic director of the company Yamoussa Bangoura, a Guinean multidisciplinary artist who has been based in Montreal for several years. Kalabanté mixes circus arts with African music and Inuit songs. The motto of these talented musicians, acrobats and trapeze artists is: "If you can talk, you can sing; if you can walk, you can dance". They offer entertainment in various formats, including musicals, street theatre and large on-stage productions.

 <http://www.kalabanteproductions.com/kalabante/ecole-en-guinee-conakry/>

 <http://www.kalabanteproductions.com/spectacles/creations/>

Zolobé company Madagascar

See interview with Zolobé on [page 18](#).

National Circus of Ivory Coast

See interview with Georges Momboye on [page 21](#).

Metis'Gwa Guadeloupe

Metis'Gwa is a dance and circus company based in Guadeloupe, funded by the Direction des Affaires Culturelles de Guadeloupe and the Departmental Council, among others. In collaboration with Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, it created *La Main de la mer* show, which was presented at the third RICA festival. This creation is part of the PACAM (Passeport Caraïbes Amazonie Danse et Cirque) project, which is led by Métis'Gwa and co-financed by the European Interreg Caraïbes initiative. The PACAM project aims to foster the emergence of a circus arts centre with strong ties to the Caribbean and the Amazon in the West Indies and French Guiana. Metis'Gwa is also the benchmark training centre for cultural administration and management in its local area.

 <https://metisgwa.com>

PROFESSIONAL CORNER: OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD'S PLAYERS

Interviews conducted by Laura Gérard and Claudine Dussollier



LA FABRIQUE CULTURELLE IN COCODY AND THE RICA, INTERVIEW WITH CHANTAL DJÉDJÉ



Born in Abidjan and having spent much of her life in France, Chantal Djédjé is one of many Ivory Coast nationals who decided to “come home” and invest in the country. Her work involves forging the ties between people that will enable them to communicate and so live more harmoniously side by side. This writer, director and cultural entrepreneur has been working to increase links between artists and members of the public for a number of years now. With this in mind, she set up La Fabrique Culturelle in Abidjan’s Cocody area in 2014, and founded the RICA in 2018.

What is La Fabrique Culturelle?

La Fabrique Culturelle was an idea I had been mulling over ten years ago, and which took off six years ago. It stems from a desire to set up a private, Ivorian space for promoting and practising art in Abidjan. I had been coming here on holiday when I lived in France, and I saw that the country had all this incredible talent, but nowhere to train, learn and showcase the work being produced. I wanted to create a space on a human scale, not too big, not too overwhelming. A place where profitability wouldn’t be an issue, so that everybody could feel welcome.

Over the six years that La Fabrique has been in existence, we’ve supported young dance troupes as a co-producer. We set up partnerships with them, we provide them with free rehearsal and creative spaces, and in return they perform their premières at La Fabrique, for no performance fees. La Fabrique has never been awarded any grants or funding. Our economic model is entirely circular. We are self-funding, in particular through our partnerships with schools, as we’re responsible for drawing up annual artistic programmes for schools that follow the French curriculum.



Outside view from La Fabrique Culturelle

Over the course of a year, we schedule in nine theatre, dance, music and circus performances in schools, for children at three different stages in their schooling. That makes one show per term for each school, and accounts for 60% of La Fabrique’s annual budget. We also hire out spaces for artist residencies and creative retreats, we earn from ticket sales for the shows we put on throughout the year on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and we also have a res-

taurant and bar area. All these little things feed back into La Fabrique’s economy.

We have volunteers, because we don’t have the budget to pay salaries. We do employ a cultural mediator tasked with handling all school-related tasks, a part-time administrator responsible for coordinating our programming, and a part-time stage manager/technician for the performances. We also have a chef who handles the catering.

What was the inspiration behind the RICA, and how did you build on the idea?

The RICA were sparked by our artistic programmes for schools. Three years ago, schools had to look at circus as a subject of study. There's a school counsellor we discuss each year's programming with, and I told him that we weren't going to be able to help because there wasn't enough circus art in Ivory Coast. We needed to bring in three companies, because we couldn't offer the same type of show for kindergarten, primary school and secondary school. That got me thinking that we should bring the three in at the same time and build a series of events around them: a festival to introduce Ivorian audiences to circus, as they never had the opportunity to see any circus performances. And that's how the RICA were born. You could say my instinct paid off, because over and above the schools, the public immediately responded extremely positively. The audiences clamoured for more. That spurred us on to repeat the experience the following year, and now this year, too. Our approach always includes a training component. We spent two years focusing on dance, on how to set up a dance company, on improving skill-sets, through training and through getting people in. Training and upgrading skills, and creating lasting change across the country. And we did the same with circus performers. For the first edition, we worked in partnership with the ENSAT, we brought in their director who got them working on dance as a discipline.

Now you're in your third edition, what do you think the future holds?

One tangible, clear positive to come out of this third edition is that Ivory Coast now has its own national circus company, and smaller circus companies are popping up. Some dance companies, and particularly urban dance troupes, are saying: "Guess what? We do circus now." And that's really the RICA's legacy.



Artists from Cirque de l'Equateur (Libreville, Gabon)

In the future, I'd like to build on the ambitions that are emerging among the country's performers and companies by giving them the means to increase their skills and thereby give their circus language real sophistication. We also want to extend our initiative across Africa, starting with the sub-region, because there are countries that are one step ahead of us in terms of circus arts: incredible things are happening in Guinea, Ghana and Burkina Faso. We want to work with them to consolidate this new direction that has taken off in Ivory Coast, and to support emerging initiatives here. One person who springs to mind is Jenny Mezile¹, who founded a circus arts school in Yopougon. Backed by her Les Pieds dans la Mare company, she began providing circus arts training last year.

Is that why you incorporated professional events into the RICA this year?

These professional events mark a turning point for the festival, which is first and foremost about the audience. We succeeded in sparking public interest and in building up an audience for circus arts². The professional events are about asking: "How do we do this?" How do we become more professional? How can we improve? How can we provide an outlet for all this burgeoning energy? I can already say that what has come out of these professional events is extremely beneficial, as new ideas for projects are taking shape. These projects will be lending structure to the continent's circus arts scene, notably in terms of creating apparatus and developing a circus network in Africa.

¹ Haitian choreographer Jenny Mezile, long-time resident of Abidjan, set up the Les Pieds dans la Mare company: <http://lespiedsdanslamare.com>
Presentation of the school: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOaOLkPezcw>

² The festival showcased thirty-odd companies across three editions, and connected with close to 30,000 spectators.

What do you mean by creating “apparatus”?

The biggest obstacle across the region and in Africa is insufficient means for artistic production. The “apparatus” initiative aims to give companies access to reliable equipment and accessories created here. By cutting production costs for companies, this project will benefit circus acts, making apparatus accessible to all.

We’ll be taking things one step further, and ensuring absolutely anyone can make their own apparatus via online tutorials. The Internet and YouTube are even more widely used in Africa than they are in Europe: everyone knows how to use them, even in the villages. So we’ll be creating tutorials, which any performer, creative or company can draw on to make their own apparatus, get inspired or practice. I think that within the next two to three years, we should have a lot more productions, at a much higher standard, that cost a lot less, as we will have gone some way to resolving issues around production costs. We’re developing this project alongside Sencirk’ in Dakar and Fekat Circus in Addis Ababa.

Will you be a part of Africa’s circus federation?

It is now essential to set up a pan-African network. This is key to pooling skills and knowledge, improving communication and showcasing, and building performers’ networks. If we don’t set up this network or “federation” – I’m not yet sure what we’ll call it – we run the risk of turning inwards, everyone homing in on their own region or country. To prevent that from happening, this network will get us all working together, and enable productions to tour from one country to another. The network could also work as a resource centre. As things currently stand in Africa, how do you find out if there’s a festival running in Senegal or Ethiopia? The network should include a platform of resources, an inventory of all the information available on



KAHWA workshops at the Fabrique Culturelle

existing companies, available venues, distribution channels, and more. This network, this African federation of circus professionals, is what will help us grow.

Would it include advocacy?

Absolutely. A federation will allow us to carry out advocacy work all together, and very often the WAEMU¹ and ECOWAS² are spaces where this happens. I think the federation could take care of advocacy and meetings with financial backers.

What’s in store for La Fabrique Culturelle over the coming months?

For the past two years, we’ve been planning on setting up accommodation and residency space. We get a high number of requests from people wanting to come for residencies, and for training sessions, too. Accommodation for trainers is very expensive. We’re considering creating dorms and

studios. Luckily, we have the space to do it, which would allow La Fabrique Culturelle to offer extra training sessions and residencies. Our second priority is launching the apparatus project by formalising the details with Senegal, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso in time for the RICA 2021.

We’re also brainstorming ideas for a joint production between Ivory Coast, Senegal and Ethiopia, a workshop we plan on running before the next RICA, and a performance from these four countries to open the festival. It’s all in the pipeline.

And getting all that ticked off will keep us busy for the year!

🌐 [La Fabrique Culturelle](#)

📍 [La Fabrique Culturelle](#)

¹ The West African Economic and Monetary Union.

² Economic Community of West African States.



TRAVELLING CLOWNS WITH STRONG TIES TO THEIR TERRITORY: ZOLOBE COMPANY FROM MADAGASCAR

Jacquelin, Ridel, Hervé, Mohamad, Vagno and Julien: five performers from Madagascar and one from France, and a team that has been delighting Abidjan's audiences with its mix of sincerity and seriousness combined with the light touch of its clown acts and music. Let's cast an eye back over the group's journey so far.

The Zolobe crew have backgrounds in music, puppetry, theatre, story-telling, capoeira and hip-hop. They founded their theatre company in 2002. As Ridel explains it, "our theatre was adapted from traditional Madagascan tales that we staged and performed in various districts in Diego, and in the bush, too. Over time, we saw there was huge public appetite, and so we thought we could organise a big festival in Diego to bring everyone together. Since 2007, we've been running a street festival called *Zegny'Zo*, with the support of all the partners we've gathered along the way".¹ It was during the 2010 edition of the festival that the group met Julien Delime from the CRAAC², based in Niort (France). The chemistry was there right from the start, working with the idea of clowning, which became the backbone of their artistic process. Following a three-year period of training workshops, in 2013 the Zolobe produced their very first rice-themed clown act, *Zarazarao*.

Sakasaka, a water-themed musical and clown show

In Madagascar, water is a big issue. The Zolobe company's clowns and musicians chose it as the theme for their latest production: *Sakasaka*. And while water may be lacking in Madagascar, it is omnipresent across the globe, making it just the kind of universal theme that lends itself perfectly to a show. According to Zolobe performer Jacquelin, "sometimes people get up in the morning to go and fill their containers, just because there isn't enough water during the daytime. The rice fields don't get enough rainwater, they're all dried out. We have a lot of problems with water in our



The Zolobé team, from left to right: Julien, Jacquelin, Vagno, Ridel, Mohamad, Hervé

country, and we want to share them. It's a theme that everyone can relate to." The word "sakasaka" comes from the idea of thirst. When dogs pant, when they're thirsty, they do what we call "sakasaka".

The Zolobe and their clowning director Julien Delime worked with this theme, exploring it in all its many guises. The writing was a collaborative effort, with ideas and suggestions all coming from the clowns, the musicians, and the director. For the Zolobe, music flows hand in hand with movement. And that means the joint writing process takes place on stage. "Music is part of the language of the soul," explains Julien Delime. "It leads us to feeling. It has a complementary relationship with movement. I like it when music is performed for the clowns, in the sense that a clown doesn't stick to the exact same sheet music every single day. It's not something you can add a soundtrack to.

The music has to be performed live, with the opportunity to skip over a movement, or skip over a note. I don't see it as there being three clowns and two musicians, but rather five players. Each with their own musical score."

Sakasaka explores water as an expensive, limited resource that is sparingly shared. Water as a source of joy and a glimmer of madness, water that wets, and that triggers both laughter and conflict. Water as a source of cleanliness that purifies and washes away. Water as necessary to life. Water that is lacking, driving people to migrate towards unknown destinations... Interweaving sequences that are by turn poetic, absurd, slapstick and musical, the three clowns hold spectators' attention, captivating their young audience, who hang on their every word and movement.

🌐 <http://zolobe.com>

¹ The importance of cooperation in supporting the company and its projects. The French département of Finistère supports the company's cultural activities, and is one of their longstanding backers. This collaborative relationship is underpinned by the deep historical ties that bind the city of Diego Suarez and Brest in France: there are naval shipyards in both. In Brest, there is even a street called Rue Madagascar. The relationship continues to thrive today. In celebration of 20 years of cooperation, the Zolobe performed in Brest in July 2020 as part of the Fêtes Maritimes festivities.

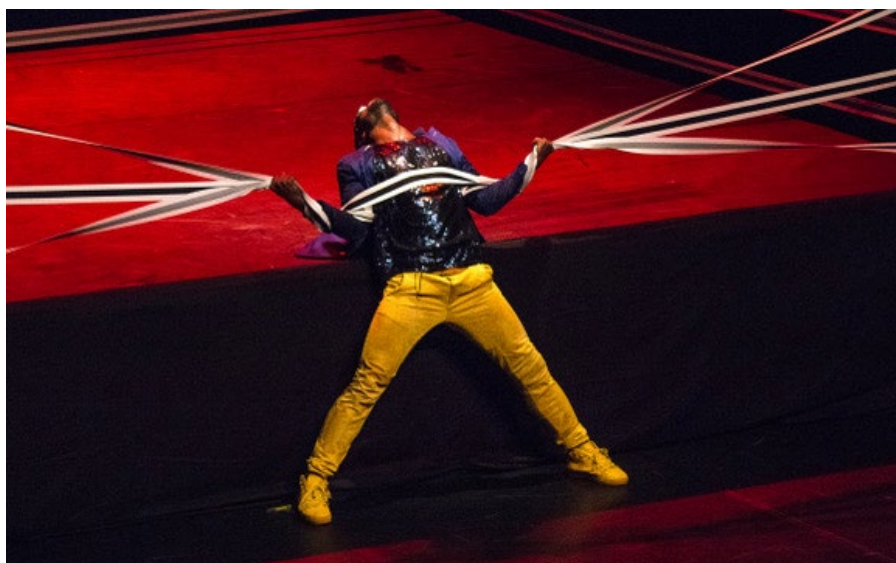
² CRAAC: Centre de Recherche Artistique d'Anthropologie du Clown (Centre for Artistic Research into Clown Anthropology).



COMPANY N'SOLEH, A CONCENTRATE OF URBAN ENERGY: INTERVIEW WITH MASSIDI ADIATOU



Massidi Adiatou grew up in Abobo, a working-class district of Abidjan. Having trained under Were Were Liking, he founded the N'Soleh company in 1994. A dozen productions followed one after the other, from *Dolorosa* to *Faro-Faro* in 2016. He has collaborated artistically with Christian Lacroix, Bernardo Montet and Claire Denis, and won prizes and awards from UNESCO, Culture France and Jeux de la Francophonie.



Az et les fils © Alexis Fournel

Is your choreography inspired by the street, as seen in *Faro-Faro*, or does it unfold in the public space? What role do these settings play in your artistic process?

For any young African living in a working-class neighbourhood, the street is where life happens. My first steps as a dancer were taken in the street. I am the street – the street and I form a single whole.

My choreography is inspired by the street, a place of continuous transformation. There is no better setting for my productions than the public space.

Although my shows could be performed just as easily in a venue as in the street, the public space is the beating heart of my artistic process, because my career as a choreographer was made in the street, with rehearsals taking place outside. As a result, my work momentarily alters the urban landscape, serving as a stage on which to

showcase young street people for the benefit of an audience that recognises something of itself in them. People who wouldn't have stepped inside a cultural venue.

How do you work with the groups of locals who take part in the procession?

We like to say that we don't have any more of a claim to dance than the people who turn up to take part in a parade. In Mali, for the CAN's opening ceremony, I ran a casting session that featured 100 professional dancers and 1,400 volunteers. For the MASA 2020, professionals on the Ivorian dance scene were selected to put together a group to include 30 to 50 locals. They rehearsed three to four times a week over four months, overseen by selected choreographers supervised by me.

What projects do you have lined up next?

In late 2020, we will be touring Ivory Coast and Europe with *Faro-Faro*. The Africa 2020 projects, the Biennale de Lyon/Ateliers Frapaz parade and the choreography for *Autophagie*, directed by Eva Doumbia for the Avignon Festival, have all been postponed to 2021 due to Covid-19.

In 2021, I will be devoting my time to the N'Soleh company, which I will be incorporating into the Abidjan international urban dance academy at the Bingerville site.

In 2021/2022, I'm planning another production for 12 dancers and two musicians, which I'm calling *Les Pirates d'Abidjan*. Hassan Kassi Kouyaté, director of Limoges's Festival des Francophonies en Limousin, has also appointed me artistic director for the opening ceremony of Les Zébrures in Limoges in 2022: "Pyramide".

And finally, I have been asked to create a piece with the Pokémon Gnakry group (Guinea) for the Jeux de la Francophonie (the Francophone Games) in 2022. This is an urban dance troupe with which I'm considering creating a new version of *Faro-Faro* with N'Soleh.

📍 [Group N'soleh](#)

📍 [Massidi Pross](#)



PUPPETRY IN THE PUBLIC SPACE: INTERVIEW WITH IVOIRE MARIONNETTES AND ITS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SORO BADRISSA



Soro Badrissa is a professional puppeteer trained at the KIYI M'BOCK village. Designer, puppets and puppet shows creator, he is the founder of the company and Ivoire Marionnettes Academy (professional training center for puppetry art) as well as the director of the RIMA festival (international puppets meetings of Abatta).



Giant puppet of Ivoire Marionnettes during the MASA parade

Ivoire Marionnettes is one of the Ivory Coast and West Africa region's leading puppetry companies. How do you work in the public space?

We work within the framework offered by whatever space we happen to find ourselves in. If that's a parade with giant puppets, for example, we use fanfare to accompany the puppets over a predetermined distance. We also use urban music with a truck-mounted sound system to accompany the puppets through a procession. When we're performing in a show in a permanent location in the public space, we wander around with the giant puppets to encourage people to gather.

How are things looking for puppetry in Ivory Coast and Africa? What does the future hold?

Puppetry is gaining ground across the African continent. In Ivory Coast and Africa generally, giant puppets are now firm fixtures at opening celebrations for major ceremonies and some public festivals. Young people are increasingly interested in puppet art; there is high demand for training. The opportunities are incredible, and we're calling on the cultural authorities in Ivory Coast and Africa to support puppeteers.

What projects do you have lined up next?

We are planning on setting up a puppetry arts school in Ivory Coast with the support of the Swiss Embassy here. This will be a first in the sub-region, and the school will be called the Regional Puppetry Academy. Our second project in the pipeline is to take our latest production, *Tchangara, le Géant d'Afrique*, on a worldwide tour with the support of the OIF, the Swiss Embassy in Ivory Coast, the MASA and Ateliers Frappaz in France. *Tchangara, le Géant d'Afrique* is a nine-metre-high puppet manipulated by 20 puppeteers. It made its début appearance at the opening of the MASA 2020, and its mission is to bring together all peoples around the world.

🌐 www.academieivoiremarionnettes.com



EMERGENCE OF THE NATIONAL CIRCUS OF IVORY COAST: INTERVIEW WITH ITS CREATOR, THE CHOREOGRAPHER GEORGES MOMBOYE



Georges Momboye is an Ivorian dancer and choreographer based in Paris. His work is considered to be among the most representative of modern African dance. Momboye's style is inspired by Alvin Ailey, Brigitte Matenzi, Rick Odums and Gisèle Houri among others, and is characterised by a fusing of traditional African dance and European ballet. He has choreographed a number of award-winning international dance productions, both with other artists and his own troupe, the George Momboye Dance Company (created in 1992). His most acclaimed pieces include an adaptation of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and the circus-inspired live show *Afrika! Afrika!*

The Ivory Coast national circus association was founded in March 2018 by the Minister for Culture and Georges Momboye, following the latter's show staged at the FESPACO¹ in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Ivory Coast's Minister for Culture was in the audience, and was highly impressed by this pageant of circus, dance and fashion. He officially asked the choreographer to set up the country's first national circus. The project is funded by the Ministry for Culture and the President. The government is aware of, and believes in the circus's potential to create jobs and boost the economy.

Georges Momboye got ready to start work on a first show with this in mind. He began casting around for circus art practices and talent in different African countries, and to ensure additional independence and efficiency, he requested the circus be managed by his company, Summum Plus.

In March 2020, the **No Limits** premiered as part of the RICA: a flamboyant, dazzling whirlwind show that Georges Momboye developed alongside thirty-odd circus performers, with 80% of the artists hailing from Ivory Coast, and 20% from Ghana, Guinea-Conakry and Ethiopia. His goal is to take the show on tour in Africa and around the world.



The artists who performed *No Limits* on stage during the premiere at the RICA

Circus was born in Ivory Coast and is growing up across Africa. How do you see artistic processes in the region?

I think we need more connections between circus companies and performers than currently exist, and more artistic training and circus festivals, too.

As a renowned choreographer, what parallels do you draw between circus arts and dance?

Traditional or African dances have the same artistic bent as circus arts, by and large – the same encompassing, democratic outlook as classic circus forms. Think of the round stage

you see at the circus, and the traditional dancing circles you find in villages. To me, both dance and the circus aim to bring together, to unite, to share and to create a sense of wonder, while tirelessly striving to push boundaries.

What plans do you have in this respect?

I want to set up a dance and circus arts centre with a focus on training and production. Training young people from all kinds of backgrounds is a priority for me. I also want to develop and produce new circus shows to showcase Africa's arts and cultures, both old and new. The Ivory Coast circus is actively seeking new partnerships for these different initiatives.

¹ FESPACO, a pan-African television and film festival in Ouagadougou, a biannual international event: www.fespaco.bf

NEXT MEETINGS

Circus arts represented in African Capitals of Culture

Rabat is the first African Capital of Culture. Originally scheduled for 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced the Moroccan authorities to postpone Rabat to 2021. Despite the wait, this freshly launched cycle of culture capitals serves as proof of the new emphasis Africa's local authorities and their partners are placing on culture.



Abidjan Danse Parade - MASA 2020

Khalid Tamer, who attended the RICA and the MASA, for which he served as an advisor, is the General Director of the African Capitals of Culture Organising Committee.

He supports the idea of a pan-African circus arts initiative within the context of the Cultures of Capital framework. He talked Circostrada through his perspective on the subject.

"Circus arts involve several bodies of performers and technicians working together to translate poetic, fantastical images into reality. From acrobats, tightrope-walkers and actors to clowns, dancers, story-tellers and other

awe-inspiring performers, the African circus scene has long understood the value of combining contemporary creativity with folk art.

Deeply rooted in the life of the city, it succeeds in preserving collective memory, while remaining a special place of self-expression for the continent's energetic and creative youth.

The very first pan-African circus event will take place as part of Rabat's African Capital of Culture celebrations, featuring a number of different circus troupes. The event will

unfold in collaboration with the Théâtre Nomade de Casablanca company and Addis Ababa's Fekat Circus, led by communication agency Consensus, which boasts a firm foothold in the cultural landscape in both Rabat and the Kingdom."

🌐 <https://africapitales.org>

Next edition of the RICA in March 2021

After a long hesitation as to the opportunity to organise another edition of the RICA in 2021, it seemed important to us to maintain this meeting, which Abidjan citizens from all horizons and circus artists from around the globe are now looking forward to attend.

This is also a way for us to "RESIST". RESIST the crisis, which is hitting hard all actors from the cultural field, RESIST the general atmosphere of withdrawal, RESIST by showing that culture is also a key sector, crucial for social and economic life.

These RICA will not have the same scope as the previous ones but they will nevertheless be a beautiful festival. For this edition, which we are planning to organise from 22 to 28 March 2021, the programming will be limited to 4-5 companies - depending on the sponsors' support - and the festival will be held over 3 days for the general audience and 5 days for school children.



RESOURCES



KAHWA Publications

- [Art in the public space in the Arab world: dynamics, actors and resources](#)
- [Arts, society and players: a panorama of the Tunisian artistic and cultural scene](#)
- [An overview of circus and street arts in Morocco](#)

