

WOLF TRAP FOUNDATION PRESENTS

*Sights and Sounds of
African Music*

Kofi Dennis



**WOLF
TRAP**

INSTITUTE FOR
EARLY LEARNING
THROUGH THE ARTS

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Kofi Dennis has been a Master Teaching Artist with the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts since 1998. As a professional percussionist and storyteller, Kofi provides Arts Integrated classroom residencies in music and creative drama for early childhood educators throughout the region and worldwide. Kofi also conducts Wolf Trap Institute's arts integrated program "Baby Artsplay", for infants and young children with their families and caregivers, in county libraries and other community settings.

Kofi is an experienced Wolf Trap Institute Trainer, providing professional development opportunities locally, nationally, and internationally for educators and others working with young children and families. He has additional expertise leading professional development opportunities for new and developing Teaching Artists.

Kofi is well known as part of the former duo, Anansegromma, which spotlighted traditional African music, drums rhythms, and storytelling. He is the music teacher at IDEAVENTIONS Academy for Math and Science based in Reston. He teaches traditional djembe drumming, and has the unique opportunity of working with juvenile and adult prisoners in area county jails, sharing his talents in storytelling and drum rhythms.

Kofi is a graduate of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, and studied early childhood and adolescent education at Komenda College, University of Cape Coast.

FOR THE TEACHER/PARENT/CAREGIVER... BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Kofi is going to introduce us to instruments, music, rhythm and movements from West Africa. Here are a few things you can do to prepare for his field trip performance!

Explore the geography of the African continent. Do you know where Africa is? Do you know the names of some of the countries in Africa? Take a look at the African continent on a map or globe, then count and name all the countries you see!

Gather instruments to play along with Kofi. Do you have any percussion instruments? Percussion instruments are used to create beat and rhythm - and sometimes even melody! If you have any drums, rhythm sticks, shakers, maracas, bells, rattles or other percussion instruments, gather them before the field trip so that you can play along.

Finding percussion instruments. You can make a percussion instrument using things you might have around the house or classroom! A cooking pot or cardboard box can make a good drum. Do you have a wooden spoon or sturdy stick handy? It might make a good drumstick! Two spoons make a nice sound when you strike them together. Can you think of anything else you have around that you could use as a percussion instrument?

Making percussion instruments. Kofi encourages us to think about using recycled materials to make percussion instruments. Plastic bottles, discarded containers and other household items can be made into musical instruments! Get creative -- and be safe with small parts if you have a baby or toddler close by.

Join in and use your hands. If you don't have any percussion instruments, don't worry! You can use your hands to clap, pat or tap along with the beat or rhythm with Kofi.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Keeping the field trip experience alive from home!

• **Do the “Birthday Dance”!** Kofi showed us a musical experience that you can do again and again! To get ready to do the Birthday Dance you will have to do a few things.

- o Bring together friends and/or family.
- o Clear a safe space where you can move freely.
- o Know your birthday month.
- o Create a fun dance or movement for when it is your turn.

• **Fun with Call and Response.** Kofi shared a call and response called Agoo Amee. You can make your own too! Here are some tips to get started:

- o Decide who is going to be the leader. Don't forget to take turns!
- o The leader will start by singing or chanting.
- o Everyone else will echo the song or chant back in response.
- o You can use all kinds of different things to create a call and response. Try some out! How about verses from a familiar song, or instructions during a daily routine, or lines from a favorite book? What other ideas do you have?

• **Go Virtual!** If you have a cell phone, computer or mobile device, and can access a video communication platform, the Birthday Dance and call and response can be fun to share with friends and family across the miles. One person can lead, and everyone else can follow! Sharing music and dance is fun – even from far away!

LYRICS

Birthday Song

La-la-la! La-la-laaa-la! (2X)

La-la! Laaa! La!

Months of the Year

If You Were Born in January,
Come on, and dance!

If You Were Born in Feb.....

La-la-la! La-la-laaa-la! (2X)

La-la! Laaa! La!

Numbers/Shapes/Instruments
etc.

If You Have the Number 5, 11, 12,
13, 17, 19, 20 STAND UP! AND
JUMP/DANCE! 2X

If You Have a Triangle/
Rectangle/Square etc. Come on,
and Dance!

If You Have a jingle bell, djembe
drum, rhythm sticks, stand up!
And dance!

La-la-la! La-la-laaa-la! (2X)

La-la! Laaa! La!

Agoo Amee

Go through the Agoo Amee chant four (4) times,
clap your hands four (4) times

Cross your arms in front of your chest, tap your
shoulders with your hands four (4) times

Make two (2) fists in front of your chest and pump/
push them outward as you blow out four (4) times

Hold both fists in front of your chest and drop one
shoulder (elbow now angling down) on one beat and
then drop the other shoulder (other elbow angling
down) on the next beat, repeating for 4 beats

Cup your hands in front of your waist. Then, move
your hands out to your sides and up over your head
to create a circle. At the bottom of the circle (with
cupped hands), make a low (“grandpa’s voice”)
AHHHH sound getting higher (“baby’s voice”) as you
raise your arms.

Say the word UMO-JA!!!! (As you bring your arms
down in another circle motion)

ABOUT THIS PERFORMANCE

This performance features several songs, including the “Birthday Song” and “Agoo Amee.” Kofi’s interactive songs encourage the use of musical instruments such as triangles, bells, drums, and rhythm sticks. Children will learn about the months of the year, as well as sequential patterns, while singing and dancing along to the beat of Kofi’s drum.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Read a Story from West Africa!

• **Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears: A West African Tale**
(Aardema, Verna., Leo Dillon, Diane Dillon, Warren Wallerstein, and Atha Tehon. Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears: A West African Tale, 1975.)

• **Zomo the Rabbit: A Trickster Tale from West Africa**
(McDermott, Gerald. Zomo the Rabbit. Sacramento, CA: The Department, 1998.)

• **Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti**
(McDermott, Gerald. Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti. New York; Chicago; San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.)

Explore West African Song and Chants: Children’s Music from Ghana

Link to Smithsonian Folkways

ABOUT WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE FOR EARLY LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

Research has proven that the arts are a powerful tool through which children can learn. Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts was established in 1981 under a grant from Head Start, a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to support teachers' professional development and young children's learning. Through residencies and workshops across the country, early childhood professionals in partnership with Wolf Trap Teaching Artists learn arts-based techniques and strategies that empower them to integrate the arts in all developmental domains of curriculum. Age-appropriate experiences in music, movement, drama, and puppetry foster a love of learning and help support young children's skill development in social relations, creative representation, initiative, logic, mathematics, language, literacy, movement, and music.

WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE OFFERS A VARIETY OF SERVICES INCLUDING:

Professional Development Workshops for teachers that are designed to provide age-appropriate performing arts strategies that are linked to early childhood curricular learning outcomes.

Family Involvement Workshops offer parents and caregivers of young children an introduction to performing arts activities that can be employed at home, in the car, and even in line at the grocery store.

Wolf Trap Institute operates successful programs across the United States and has taken its services to nearly 100,000 children, educators, and parents/caregivers throughout 28 states.

For more information about Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, please visit: www.Wolftrap.org/Education, or call 703.255.1933 or 1.800.404.8461.

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