

# DANCE AFRICANA!

A GUIDE TO  
AFRICAN AMERICAN DANCE  
IN PITTSBURGH, PA



*Dance Africanal!*  
*A Guide to African American Dance in Pittsburgh, PA*

Featuring:

**Nego Gato**

**Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble**

**Shona Sherif African Dance and Drum Ensemble**

**Umoja African Arts Company**

**Wacongo Dance Company of Africa**

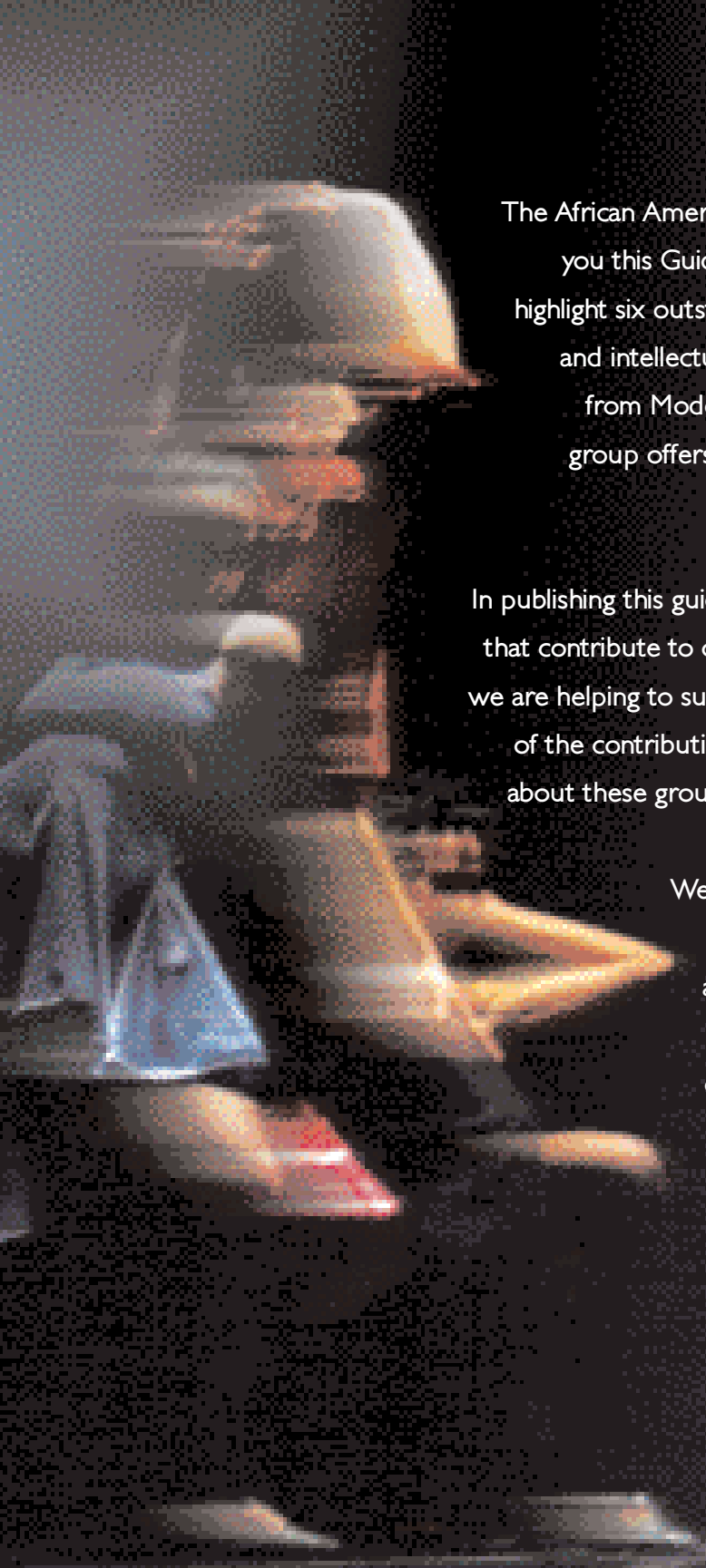
**Xpressions**

This Guide to African American Dance in Pittsburgh was published by  
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Additional Editorial Contribution: Erika Wirkkala

Design: Rootmotion [/m]





The African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh is pleased to share with you this Guide to African American Dance in Pittsburgh. Within these pages we highlight six outstanding dance organizations that contribute to the artistic, spiritual, and intellectual landscape that forms this great region. Their artistic styles range from Modern to Jazz and traditional African to Brazilian dance. Although each group offers its own unique style and form of expression, all of them celebrate our African American culture and heritage.

In publishing this guide, we offer you a glimpse of some of the most talented individuals that contribute to our diverse community. We hope that by recognizing these groups, we are helping to support their efforts in furthering public appreciation and experience of the contributions of people of African descent. We encourage you to learn more about these groups, attend their presentations, and engage them for performances.

We hope that this guide not only shines a deserving spotlight on these sensational artists, but inspires more artists of all cultures to grow and develop, just as these six groups have. Because we believe that culture, in its broadest sense, can be the most powerful factor contributing to our ability to understand ourselves, while building a path towards global understanding and peace in a troubled world.

We hope that you find this guide to be useful and inspiring.

Neil A. Barclay  
President and CEO  
African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh

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# Nego Gato, Inc.

Artistic Director: Nego Gato

The Nego Gato Music and Dance Ensemble is a beautiful fusion of upbeat Afro-Brazilian music, spiritual dance and the explosive martial art, Capoeira. Audiences who experience Nego Gato's breathtaking yet informing performance are transported to the world of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil while witnessing how Latin America continues to affect and shape our own America.

Jose Sena, known professionally as Nego Gato (meaning black cat) for his acrobatic springs and jumps, is the driving force behind the group. He along with his dance troupe continue to wow audiences everywhere with their unique blend of music and dance. Nego Gato has performed with R&B music legend Patti LaBelle, and African American tap sensation Savion Glover. The group had the distinguished honor of performing at Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center with internationally renowned Brazilian diva Danielle Mercury.

The ensemble performs all varieties of Brazilian music ranging from Samba and Merengue to Pagode. In addition, Nego Gato teaches Capoeira. His students learn the songs, instruments and philosophy of the art form as well as the acrobatic movements, attacks and defenses.

To learn more about Nego Gato, Inc., please contact:  
Justin Laing, Managing Director/Assistant Artistic Director  
1424 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
Tel: 412-201-4546  
Fax: 412-201-4547  
Email: [Justin@negogato.org](mailto:Justin@negogato.org)  
Website: [www.negogato.org](http://www.negogato.org)



# Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble

Artistic Director: Greer Reed

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One of Pittsburgh's earliest Modern Dance companies, the Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble deftly combines Modern Dance, Ballet, Jazz, Hip-Hop, and Ethnic Dance styles, presented by its bold, young artists.

In an effort to establish an institution serving as an umbrella organization for a professional level dance company, school for dance/creative and performance arts, and an artist collective, Greer Reed, Thomas Chatman, along with associates artists and colleagues set out to establish Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble.

In July 2003 the Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble was introduced to Pittsburgh and surrounding communities of Western Pennsylvania through a dance showcase under the name, and as a dedication to, the Pittsburgh Black Theater Dance Ensemble. Under the direction of Greer Reed, artistic director, and Thomas Chatman, executive managing director, with assistance from advisors consisting of artists, administrators, and educators, the ensemble has been formed with members ranging from high school age to professional level artists.

Currently the ensemble's repertoire includes works ranging from traditional to contemporary ballets.

Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble's mission is to become a professional level dance company with a focus on preserving the traditions of black dance and presenting the same through performances, lecture demonstrations, workshops, and artist residencies.

In addition to fostering relationships with artists ranging from local to international communities, the Ensemble maintains a top priority to create an environment in Western, PA dedicated to nurturing the wholistic development of young artists both technically and professionally while establishing pipelines in order to ensure the dance companies continuous growth.

In June of 2004, Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble received an African American Council of the Arts Onyx Award for Choreography in its production of "Fast and Furious."

To learn more about the Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble, please contact:  
Thomas Chatman, Executive Managing Director  
P.O. Box 53109, Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
Tel: 412-580-6981/412-537-1210  
Email: [bdanceensemble@yahoo.com](mailto:bdanceensemble@yahoo.com)



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# Shona Sharif African Dance and Drum Ensemble

Artistic Director: Oronde Sharif

By drawing from its richly textured African heritage, the Shona Sharif Dance and Drum Ensemble is pure rhythm and soul. They use a mesmerizing combination of spirituality in its music, and soothing, almost healing elements in its rhythmic dances.

The Ensemble was founded in 1982 as a diverse performing arts group. Today it has evolved in its mission to promote, educate, nurture and connect individuals to the many cultures, experiences, and histories of people of African, African-American and Caribbean descent through the sharing and exploration of various aesthetic forms—song, dance, music, literature, oral tradition/storytelling, clothing and crafts possessed by each culture.

The Ensemble has dazzled audiences throughout the region including a memorable performance at the first-ever National Performing Arts Convention. In addition, The Shona Sharif Dance and Drum Ensemble recently received an African American Council of the Arts Onyx Award for its presentation of “Black Nativity.”

To learn more about Shona Sharif African Dance and Drum Ensemble, please contact:

Oronde Sharif  
University of Pittsburgh, WWPH 3T30, Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
Tel: 412-648-2276  
Fax: 412-648-7214  
Email: [senegal1@pitt.edu](mailto:senegal1@pitt.edu)



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# Umoja African Arts Company

Acting Artistic Director: Kadiatou Conte Forte

The name of UMOJA African Arts Company is synonymous with the explosive beats, insistent rhythms, and haunting melodies of African music, drumming and dance. UMOJA African Arts Company is dedicated to raising awareness and encouraging the preservation of the rich art, culture and heritage of Africa.

UMOJA, which means UNITY in the Swahili language, was founded in 1989 to promote the indigenous culture of Africa in the United States. In 1998, UMOJA re-invented itself as a non-profit arts organization to better convey its message of art serving as a bridge to connect cultures. Consistent with its mission to connect and unify diverse cultures, UMOJA provides programming in African dance, drumming, storytelling, and creative arts.

UMOJA's exuberant style has enlivened the stages of many venues including: the Smithsonian Museum for African Arts, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the New York Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the National Aviary, the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, the St. Louis Art Museum, and more.

To learn more about UMOJA African Arts Company, please contact:  
LaVette Malloy Smith, Managing Director  
Wood Street Galleries, 601 Wood Street, Suite 9, Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
Tel: 412.471.1121  
Fax: 412.232.3262  
Email: [umoja@stargate.net](mailto:umoja@stargate.net)  
Website: [www.umojacompany.com](http://www.umojacompany.com)

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# Wacongo Dance Company of Afrika Yetu

Artistic Director: Elie Kihonia

Afrika Yetu is devoted to preserving and promoting the African spirit through artistic expression and education. Afrika Yetu believes that by promoting African culture through the presentation of music, dance, and education, it can build bridges of understanding and strengthen ties between the people of Africa and the rest of the world. The artists have intensively toured Europe, Asia, North and South America. The Company explores music from the 400 ethnic groups in their performance including Luba, Mongo, Kongo, Mbala, Chokwe, Pende, Kuba, Mbunda and many more.

Among the various programs Afrika Yetu offers is the WACONGO Dance Company; a professional ensemble of master drummers, musicians, and dancers led by Afrika Yetu Founder, Elie Kihonia. With a tangible passion in all their performances, the group delights audiences with the ancestral songs and traditional dances of Central Africa.

In 2002, the group made history when they lead a parade of 600 Brazilian percussionists in the first African Carnival ever held in Brazil.

In addition, Afrika Yetu offers a series of Master Drum and Dance classes. These classes are designed to inspire people of all ages to learn fundamental and advanced skills of Central African traditional, neo-traditional, and contemporary African drum and dance. Other activities include the Safari Arts and Educational Program and the Healing Circle Master Workshop.

To learn more about Afrika Yetu, please contact: Elie Kihonia  
601 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
Tel: 412-281-3100  
Fax: 412-232-3262  
Email: [ekihonia@afrikayetu.org](mailto:ekihonia@afrikayetu.org)  
Website: [www.afrikayetu.org](http://www.afrikayetu.org)



# Xpressions Contemporary Dance Company

Artistic Director: Staycee R. Walters

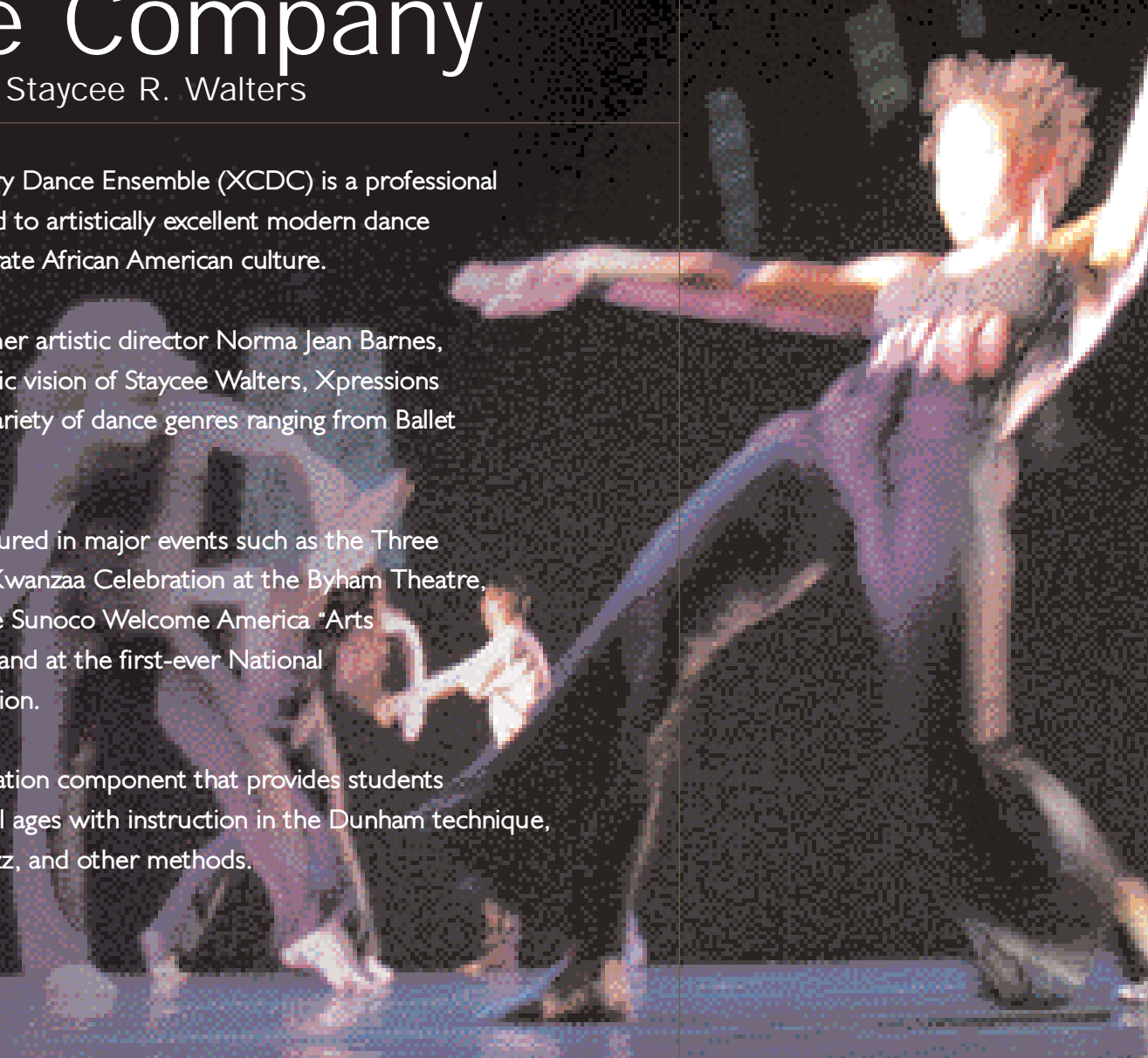
Xpressions Contemporary Dance Ensemble (XCDC) is a professional dance company dedicated to artistically excellent modern dance performances that celebrate African American culture.

Founded in 1996 by former artistic director Norma Jean Barnes, and now under the artistic vision of Staycee Walters, Xpressions deftly performs a wide variety of dance genres ranging from Ballet to Hip Hop.

Xpressions has been featured in major events such as the Three Rivers Arts Festival, the Kwanzaa Celebration at the Byham Theatre, Mavuno Arts Festival, the Sunoco Welcome America "Arts on the Avenue Festival," and at the first-ever National Performing Arts Convention.

XCDC has a dance education component that provides students and aspiring dancers of all ages with instruction in the Dunham technique, Contemporary, Ballet, Jazz, and other methods.

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To learn more about Xpressions Contemporary Dance Ensemble, please contact:

Dana M. Payne, Managing Director

601 Wood Street, Suite 12, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Tel: 412-227-0440 Fax: 412.227.0414

Email: [dpayne@xpressions-dance.com](mailto:dpayne@xpressions-dance.com)

Website: [www.xpressions-dance.com](http://www.xpressions-dance.com)

# About the AACC

African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh

The African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh is a not-for-profit organization that presents exhibitions, performances, education and public programs that deepen understanding and appreciation of the African American artistic, cultural and social contributions to Pittsburgh, the nation and the world.

The AACC presents, co-presents and produces arts programs that explore African forms of cultural expressions including dance, music, literature, visual art, theater and more, and their connections/links to African Americans within the region and throughout the African Diaspora.

The African American Cultural Center is currently engaged in a Capital Campaign to raise \$32.7 million for the construction of its facility, a state-of-the-art, multi-disciplinary venue. With its future location at Liberty Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh, the AACC will make a stunning addition to the growing Cultural District, and a strong contribution to the financial and cultural regeneration of the city.

More than a museum, the new African American Cultural Center building will be reflective of all aspects of African American Culture. The new AACC will include galleries, classrooms, a 300+ seat theater, a gift shop, a café, and many multi-purpose spaces to be used for visual and performing art and expression.

Visit the AACC website at [www.africananculture.org](http://www.africananculture.org) for information on events, updates on the project and more.

# About MCAI



Multicultural Arts Initiative

For more than a decade, funding by the Multicultural Arts Initiative (MCAI) has been critical to the support of African American arts programming in the Pittsburgh region. Over the years, MCAI has awarded close to \$5 million and over 400 grants. During this time period almost a third of MCAI funding was directed toward providing operating support dollars for targeted African American arts organizations.

MCAI funding has assisted in establishing a platform of access and exposure to African American arts offerings in the Pittsburgh community.

The MCAI grantmaking objective is to enhance the cultural landscape of the region by funding consistently high quality African American and African-influenced arts programming, as well as targeted culturally specific arts programming to include Latin, Asian, and Native American. This expanded landscape will reflect a region, which integrates these art forms into the cultural fabric of its communities and heightens the cultural conscience of its citizens.

Visit the MCAI website at [www.mcai-pittsburgh.org](http://www.mcai-pittsburgh.org) for more information or contact them at 412.394.2654 \ [info@mcai-pittsburgh.org](mailto:info@mcai-pittsburgh.org)

**October 1, 2004**

Nego Gato, Inc  
Performing Arts Exchange  
Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Studios

**October 1, 2004**

Nego Gato, Inc  
RADical Days Showcase  
Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

**October 3, 2004**

Xpressions Dance Company  
RADical Days Showcase  
Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

**October 9, 2004**

Nego Gato, Inc  
RADical Days Showcase  
Pittsburgh Zoo

**October 19, 2004**

Pittsburgh Dance Ensemble  
Hot Pink Pittsburgh  
Carnegie Music Hall

**October 29 & 30, 2004**

African American Cultural Center  
Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE  
CAPA High School Theater

**October 29 & 30, 2004**

WACONGO Dance Company of Afrika Yetu  
SHEGUE DI in Reggae Nzaki  
Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

**November 19, 2004**

WACONGO Dance Company of Afrika Yetu  
Yondo Sister Band  
Dowe's on Ninth

**December 1-4, 2004**

WACONGO Dance Company and Kuntu Black Theater Ensemble  
Arts for AIDS in Africa  
Dowry

**December 13, 2004**

Umoja African Arts Company  
Umoja Jr.  
Homestead Library

**December 17 - December 19, 2004**

Umoja African Arts Company  
Kikombe Cha Umoja!  
Kelly Strayhorn Theatre

**December 20 & December 21, 2004**

WACONGO Dance Company of Afrika Yetu  
City-wide Kwanzaa Celebrations  
NGUZO SABA Concert, Kelly-Strayhorn Theater  
Kwanza Workshops, The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust  
Safari Educational Residencies, World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh.  
Performance and Workshops for students, Public School Residencies

**January 27, 2005**

Umoja African Arts Company  
Umoja Jr.  
Braddock Library

**January 24, 2005**

Nego Gato, Inc  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

**February 15 & 16, 2005**

African American Cultural Center & Pittsburgh Dance Council  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater  
Benedum Center

**March 19, 2005**

African American Cultural Center  
Ralph Lemon  
Byham Theater

**March 26, 2005**

Nego Gato, Inc  
Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

**April 22-23, 2005**

XPRESSIONS DANCE COMPANY  
Spring Concert  
Kelly-Strayhorn Theater

**May 14, 2005**

UMOJA African Arts Company  
2005 African Arts Gala  
Location TBD

**June 11 - June 12, 2005**

UMOJA African Arts Company  
2005 African Arts in the Park Festival  
Schenley Park

THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN DANCE EVENTS HAPPENING IN PITTSBURGH.  
BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ADDED EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR!