

Pan African Dance Ambassador Makeda Kumasi Celebrates National Dance Day as California Arts Council Grant Recipient



San Bernardino, CA – Makeda Kumasi, founder of WE 3 PRODUCTIONS, has been gracing stages professionally across California for over two decades as a phenomenal force with her dancing, teaching, directing, and performances. As a global beacon for the Pan-African arts, she has inspired adults and

children alike as a respected resource, particularly throughout Los Angeles' Inland Empire. As the recent recipient and one of 26 individual artists to receive a Creative Corps Inland Empire Grant from the California Arts Council in addition to an individual Alliance for California Traditional Arts Living Culture grant, Kumasi is observing National Dance Day in a jubilant celebration! National Dance Day, co-founded by Nigel Lythgoe, the co-creator of "So You Think You Can Dance," and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, is acknowledged each year on the third Saturday in September to demonstrate support for dance as a form of valuable exercise and artistic expression.

As a California Arts Council grant recipient, Kumasi will work in collaboration with Joy Wilson of Caribbean Joy Dance Group and Monique Williams-Randolph of Unity Dance Studio in Victorville, CA on a yearlong project, "Dancing with the Leaders of the Inland Empire." The expansive endeavor will oversee interviews with local community and government leaders regarding their engagement and knowledge of the traditional dance practices from their culture and or contemporary styles they enjoy. The team will also implement West African, Caribbean and jazz dance workshops; audition for choreography based on the dances mentioned in the leaders' dance interviews; and produce three multimedia shows incorporating documentary video of the project leaders' interviews, original choreography, and live music.

The Alliance for California Traditional Arts Living Culture (ACTA) grant is a coveted individual artist stipend that allows Kumasi to repair and maintain the instruments used in her community youth program, "The Sesh Project," and further develop her "Soulful Saturday Drum and Dance Class" at Akoma Unity Center in San Bernardino, CA, while also providing financial support for her traveling Urban Djali Tour.

"This year's National Dance Day holds significant meaning for me. Dance is more than movement, it's wholistic medicine for the body and mind. As an artist, these kinds of grants are crucial to our livelihood and the expansion of our creative articulations. The California Arts Council's recognition of my commitment and efforts in the world of dance is affirming on so many levels. 'The Dancing with the Leaders' project is going to be groundbreaking and I'm looking forward to our final productions. On the other hand, the ACTA grant enables me to continue to expand my personal mission as an artist and culture bearer, shining a light on the beauty of Africa and sharing the healing that comes from participating in her diasporic arts," expresses Kumasi.

Makeda Kumasi is indeed a living embodiment of the beauty of dance. The founder of the art firm, WE 3 PRODUCTIONS, as well as the co-founder and artistic director of The Umoja Ensemble of the Inland Empire, she is a continuing lecturer at the University of California, Riverside in the Department of Dance, as well as a lecturer in the Department of Theater, Film and Digital Production. Recently, Kumasi became an adjunct professor in the Performing Arts Department at Long Beach City College and her West African dance choreography will be featured in their upcoming fall production. Her work with children is equally impactful working extensively with the youth through various performing arts programs including "The Sesh Project" through the Kumasi School of the Performing Arts.

Her career highlights are many and her personal accomplishments include book author with titles, "12 Days in Senegal: An Artist's Journey," and "I See Hip Hop Afrika." As a spoken word performance artist her debut musical release "A Spoken Word Experience," is available on all music streaming platforms, and she has plans to tour an accompanying multimedia show, Urban Djali. She has been featured on MTV's "Starting Over", BET's "Fly Poet", and, coincidentally, the first season of "So You Think You Can Dance?", hence a personal affinity for National Dance Day. A wife and mother of three children, and a caregiver for her mother who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis over 40 years ago, Makeda Kumasi is literally dancing through a litany of commitments that would overwhelm most. On National Dance Day and beyond, dance with her across social media on Instagram at [@makedakumasi](https://www.instagram.com/makedakumasi), on Facebook at [@MakedaKumasi](https://www.facebook.com/MakedaKumasi) and online at makedakumasi.net.

