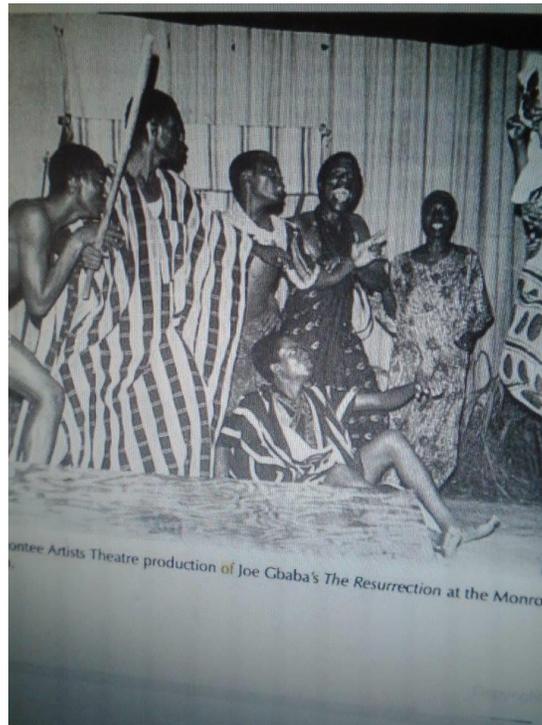


*Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc.: Promoting a Culture of Diversity and Tolerance over Forty Years!*



Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI) has survived forty-one years of promoting Liberian history and culture. It is thus far the longest surviving Liberian cultural group to consistently educate and entertain the world about the history and culture of Liberia and Africa, even though most Liberians rather promote western or alien cultures than their own. Also, in Liberia, the leadership of Liberia denigrates or puts down anything that originates from Liberia as being “country” or “uncivilized”; but any dirt that comes from the western world is the “bomb”!

Hence, automatically, a foreigner is preferred over a native Liberian, and perhaps soon, Liberian land will be snatched from Liberians and sold to foreigners for penny because Liberian lives do not matter to those who make the laws, interpret the laws, and execute the laws. The reason is because most Liberians lack self-knowledge: knowledge about themselves and the nation which granted them the privilege and freedom as the “Israel of the Black Race.” As a result, Liberians are divided into splinter political enclaves and warring factions that are committed to seeking the interests of their imperial masters rather than to seek their own national interests.

Further, today, prominent Liberian citizens are nationalizing the dress codes of foreign nations and their cultures, thereby sending a wrong signal to Liberian youth that their country has no cultural value systems to cherish. Even those who ascend to the highest seat in Liberia do all within their powers to demolish the national and cultural identity of Liberia, such as the demolition of Liberia’s National Cultural Center at Kendeja. Moreover, culture is never mentioned as a budgetary item in the national budget of Liberia. However, this is not the case

with our honorees, Madam Rita Beslow-Pierre, and Mr. Lars Tomo McCritty. Wherever they go, they take with them the DATI spirit of putting Liberia first, and they proudly educate and entertain the world about the diverse and rich culture of Liberia. Thus, their deeds are *honorable* and worthy of praise.

Unfortunately, these days, the word “honorable” is wrongly used in Liberia. For instance, Liberians refer to Liberian warlords that killed over two hundred and fifty thousand of their fellow countrymen and women, or those who hold high public offices and embezzle millions of dollars out of the coffers of Liberia as, HONORABLE “THIS” OR “THAT”. During elections in Liberia, Liberians queue in long lines under the scourging West African sun and heat to cast their ballots for “honorable” who steal or embezzle millions of public dollars that are intended to build schools, train professional teachers, improve agriculture so that Liberians can produce their staple diet (rice), and grow other produces by tilling Liberia’s fertile soil, to export their produces to generate much needed hard currency to construct well-equipped schools, vocational and technical institutions, hospitals, road networks, effective communication systems, improve the cultural and tourist industries, and provide basic utilities such as a constant flow of electricity, safe pipe-borne drinking water, and efficient health delivery systems throughout Liberia.

Consequently, many Liberians and foreigners have wondered how DATI was kept alive during time of peace and war, even though little or no attention is given to the promotion of Liberia’s rich and diverse cultures. In sum, Dr. Gbaba states that:

*The glue that keeps DATI alive is our strong belief in our rich and diverse cultural heritage, the mores and values handed down to us by our ancestors, such as: being our brothers and sisters’ keepers; respecting our elders, respecting ourselves and others, being sincere and trustworthy, and being “honorable” or upright in our interactions with one another. We celebrate and recognize our differences as our strengths, and we all develop an open mind to learn from one another and to promote one another as a family of patriotic Liberians that put Liberia and Africa first. These are the standards that determine whether a man or woman is “honorable” or not, and these are the standards that have kept DATI members united even though they come from different families, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities.*

Hence, Based on Dehkontee Artists Theatre’s standards, the word “honorable” refers to patriotic Liberians who do not only talk the talk, but walk the talk! We mean die-heart Liberians who do not only profess to be “Liberians” by mouth, but Liberians who spend their hard-earned cash to attend a Liberian play; volunteer their quality time and talents to participate in DATI’s productions free of charge, and at the same time use their meager financial resources to help purchase props, costumes, travel long distances to participate in a Liberian cultural event, to let the world know that there is a nation called Liberia on the continent of Africa. Such attitude about oneself and the others around you is indeed *honorable*, because it is worthy of praise and the actions are indeed in the *best interest* or the *common good* of all Liberians and Africans.

In view of the foregoing, this is the reason the Honorable Body of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI) does not use the word “honorable” loosely. Rather, to be referred to as “honorable”, one must perform a deed that is upright, not crooked; a deed that enhances the image of Liberia as a progressive and independent nation, and not one that degrades Liberia as a nation of thieves or beggars; a deed that puts Liberia on the map as a paradise among the comity of nations, and not deeds that denigrate the cultural heritage of Liberia, and/or that bring about suffering, human carnage, mass destruction of properties, etc.

Therefore, today DATI would like to highlight the contributions of Honorable Rita Beslow-Pierre and Honorable Lars Tomo McCritty, as two shining examples of who an “Honorable” should be in the Liberian society. These two distinguished Liberians, along with DATI’s founder, Dr. Joe Gbaba, members of the Board of Directors, officers, and actors, are among an array of Liberian Honorables that have demonstrated the shared values and vision to serve as flag bearers of Liberia and Africa in the realms of African/Liberian history and culture on the continent of Africa and here in the diaspora. We congratulate both honorees and their families and thank them for their service to Liberia, Africa, and the world. Below are reasons why we believe Rita and Tomo should be honored as Honorables in the Liberian society.

### **Rita Beslow-Pierre**



*Alexander & Rita Pierre (Grand Patrons of DATI).*

Rita Beslow-Pierre is an exceptional Liberian lady and feminist: well-mannered, family-oriented (married to her husband Alexander Pierre for more than thirty-five years). She is medical personnel actively engaged in seeking the well-being of her clients and others who may need her help; a compassionate mother of three sons that were well bred, and a die-heart cultural activist. Rita is from the old Liberian stalk—proud of her country, proud of her country’s history

and culture, and prepared at any time to promote it financially, materially, and morally. Above all, Rita is disciplined, God-fearing, and properly educated—a true Spartan and graduate of the B.W. Harris Episcopal High School in Monrovia, and a shining role model for young Liberian girls. Madam Pierre exemplifies her patriotism through her writings on social media and through her voluntary and priceless contributions to Dehkontee Artists over the span of more than thirty years as a team player and the glue that keeps DATI united.

For instance, in Liberia, most cultural groups do not last for a year. The group automatically is expected to break up in its first or second year because of cultural differences among its members; but Dehkontee Artists Theatre has been in existence for forty-one years. This should teach the Liberian people that their resilience is not pivoted on material things but in the rich traditions and cultural heritage they inherited from their forebears. It is these traditions and beliefs that have kept DATI alive through those with the shared vision that is propagated by Rabbi Prince Joseph Tomoonh-Garlodey Gbaba, that the strength of the Liberian nation lies in Liberians realizing that they are one family, one nation, and one people from the same hegemony. Until then, Liberians will remain divided and hopeless because the alien values they seek are far-fetched and far removed from the reality of their immediate environment! Therefore, Liberians must cherish their cultural roots to instill self-discipline and patriotism in all Liberians—young and old.



**DATI rehearsal at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in 1992 in Monrovia. Rita Pierre in front!**

When the civil war broke out in Liberia, many Liberians fled the country but those who had nowhere to run to, or who had no money to jump in airplanes to travel to other countries, remained in Liberia and faced the consequences of the actions of Liberian politicians that lacked self-knowledge, self-discipline, and who fostered high illiteracy rate in Liberia, and that wanted to enrich themselves at the expense of the lives of innocent Liberian citizens and foreign nationals that lived in Liberia. However, the huge human carnage and mass destruction of the infrastructures of Liberia did not deter Dr. Gbaba from remaining focused on his calling as a playwright and scholar to promote the history and culture of Liberia during the heat of the

Liberian Civil War. When UNICEF contracted him to help promote peace and reconciliation in Liberia through the performing and visual arts after the cessation of hostilities in 1992, Dr. Gbaba took the challenge seriously and sought patriots like himself that would step up to the plate to constantly remind Liberians to stop ill-treating one another. He helped to establish the UNICEF/Dehkontee Artists Theatre Kukatonon Conflict Resolution and Peace Education Project that included peace education workshops for school teachers and executives, and local government officials in areas of the country that were under ECOMOG control, as well as the Kukatonon Children's Peace Theatre that performed across Liberia advocating for the disarmament of child soldiers. Hence, Dehkontee Artists Theatre became a catalyst in the peace-building process of Liberia from 1992-1997 before Dr. Gbaba's departure from Liberia.

At that time, Monrovia was upside down. Liberians were very skinny and malnourished, too hungry to even volunteer to participate in a play or to even attend rehearsals, but there were "honorable" Liberians such as Rita, James Draper, Fred Deshield, Samuel Tukpah, Gregory Tugbe, George Dossen, Alfred Kollie, Williet Musgrove, Quintin Jackson, Lawrence Sharpe, Emmanuel Tulay, Emmanuel Lewis, Maude Juwle, Caroline Mooney, etc., that saw the need to sacrifice their lives and talents to help bring about a semblance of law and order in Liberia after a bloody civil war. Rita did not hesitate to sign up as a volunteer of DATI to help get the ball rolling. We risked our lives walking through rebel check points to attend rehearsals and we tried to encourage people to show up to witness our productions by word of mouth, through radio broadcasts, and through our churches and other social gatherings.



Rita as an actress has great potentials that have yet to be tapped. However, she has demonstrated a great sense of responsibility in executing her administrative and artistic roles in DATI. Her performance as Ma Miatta in DATI's radio peace and reconciliation drama series entitled "Road to Recovery" that was aired on national radio (ELCB) for one year went viral in Liberia. As Mary in Gbaba's "The Resurrection" that was staged at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in Monrovia in 1992, Rita nailed it! Again, true to her commitment to promoting the culture of Liberia, Rita was first to sign up when Dr. Gbaba decided to revive DATI in the United States. She travelled from Tennessee and participated in the Open House production that was held at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Teddy Urey in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1998. Rita stole the show in her role as Chicken during DATI's 2016 production of "The Frogs and

Black Snake in Frogsville” at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts in Maryland, U.S.A. Hence, the title of being an “honorable” befits Rita Beslow-Pierre because of the upright deeds she has performed as flag bearer of Liberia in the cultural domain—promoting the history and culture of Liberia on stage. Salute, Honorable Rita Beslow-Pierre! The Honorable Body of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI) loves and appreciates you. Thank you for serving Liberia honorably!

### **Lars Tomo McCritty**



*Lars Tomo McCritty, a Liberian cultural icon and DATI's Stage Manager.*

Lars Tomo McCritty is Dehkontee Artists Theatre’s Stage Manager. He assists the Executive Director of DATI in production decisions and participates in the shows. Apart from that, Tomo’s late mother, Mrs. Dolly McCritty Massaquoi was Dr. Gbaba’s surrogate mother. It was she who attended Dr. Gbaba’s first play, “Life Story of Kekula” at the Open-Door Theatre in Yekepa in 1974 (Forty-five years ago), sent him a congratulatory message, referring to him as the “Shakespeare” of Liberia! “So, it was Mommy Dolly’s blessings that got me fueled up to contribute significantly to the culture and history of Liberia and to improve Liberian literacy over the past four decades” Dr. Gbaba testified.

In story above, note that Teacher Dolly saw a certain quality in a Liberian student. She did not regard or label him as a “Country” or “Congor” child. Rather, she put Liberia first and recognized the young playwright as a future potential Liberian scholar, and subsequently encouraged Gbaba to “continue the good work.” And that “good work” is paying off huge dividends with regards to educating the world about the history and culture of Liberia. That is the Liberian way of life that Dehkontee Artists theatre promotes—putting Liberia first—and honoring our cultural heritage so that the name of Liberia can remain supreme.

DATI’s “Putting Liberia First” model discourages tribalism. In Dr. Gbaba’s own words, “We see ourselves as one big Liberian family and treat one another as brothers and sisters. In fact, Lars is more of a brother to me than some of those who may have the same last name as I

do. This was how we grew up in Liberia back in the day. We went to school and made friends and these friends' parents accepted us in their homes as their own children. So, we had many surrogate mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters, other than our own parents and siblings. We never really asked others for their tribes as Liberians do today, and we respected one another's cultural heritage even when we found out later what ethnic group our friends belonged to."



*Lars Tomo McCritty on the Red Carpet!*

Lars is a graduate of the prestigious Carroll High School, the same institution at which Dr. Gbaba received his calling. He had the opportunity to receive similar training in music, the performing arts, and to participate in a couple of Carroll High's annual musicals before coming to the University of Liberia in the early 1980s. He joined ranks with Dr. Gbaba to revive DATI that had been inactive in Liberia because Dr. Gbaba had travelled abroad to pursue his graduate degree in Drama at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. As a gifted lad, Tomo learned very fast and became invaluable to the organization in terms of his expertise and handiworks, and soon gained the confidence of Gbaba. Tomo participated in Gbaba's "The Resurrection" that was staged at the Monrovia City Hall in 1984 and has since been very active as Stage Manager in the United States.



During significant DATI events, Lars travels from Minnesota to participate in DATI productions in Philadelphia or Maryland. He even teaches children in the Minneapolis school system some Liberian cultural dance steps and songs. He does this at his own expense and with a true spirit of patriotism and genuine love for his homeland. As a Liberian, Tomo understands that the word “Liberia” means “Land of the Free”; and, to be “free”, we must purge our minds of all evil thoughts that tend to limit the freedoms of others to choose who they want to be; to speak their minds freely, live and travel to any part of Liberia they desire to live, prioritize and secure the interest of Liberians and regard one another as Brothers and Sisters, instead of viewing the others around us as members of a given tribe or ethnicity. Hence, such moral values and philosophy have kept Dehkontee Artists theatre, Inc. at bay, irrespective of the lack of patriotism of most Liberians with respect to appreciating and promoting their own cultural heritage.



Against this backdrop, the fundamental reason Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI) has survived for forty-one years is because our underlying philosophy is very clear: All Liberians and Africans are one people by God’s command. We celebrate our ethnic differences in a positive sense—we respect one another as brothers and sisters, and with the super objective of being flag bearers of Liberia and Africa. But this sort of philosophy does become a reality by

mere words. Instead, such philosophy or words must be transformed into upright deeds, “honorable” deeds that uplift the spirit of every Liberian, African, and citizen of the world. So, Lars, thank you for your service to Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. Thank you for being a faithful and respect junior Brother; thank you for being a good role model for our youth at home and abroad, and thanks for your immense sacrifice to serve Liberia and to be a flag bearer of Liberia in the cultural realm! Congratulations!

Ladies and gentlemen, we hope you have learned a good cultural lesson from this edition of DATI’s press release. We encourage you to support the culture and history of Liberia in every way you can as a law maker, a judge, or chief executive of Liberia or CEO of a company at home or abroad. When we put up shows, we expect Liberians and Africans to turn out in numbers to show the world that we are proud of our race and are willing to support our own talents and to encourage them financially, morally, and materially, to excel. In this light, the Honorable Body of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI) cordially invites you to its 41<sup>st</sup> Gala on Saturday, July 28, 2018, at the International House Ibrahim Theater, 3701 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. We will be featuring “Love for Mymah”, a traditional Liberian romance drama that centers on the strong love bond between two Liberian royalties from the Vai and Kru ethnic groups of Liberia. The program begins at sharp 8 PM. Doors open at 7 PM and Guests are expected to take their seats before 8 PM.

#### Admissions

Grand Patron: \$100

Patron: \$50

Adult: \$25

Seniors: \$15

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