

## *DATI's 2018 Auditions Kick Off on a Good Foot!*

Photography by Mrs. Ariminta Gbaba

### *Saigay Sheriff: U.S.A.*



*Ms. Saigay Sheriff, one of DATI's newest sensations and talent house!*

Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc.'s 2018 auditions kicked off on a good foot last night at the Francis J. Myers Recreation Center's Reading Room located at 5801 Kingsessing Avenue in Southwest Philadelphia. At 6 PM sharp, a charming, five-foot-six-inch tall African princess named Saigay Sheriff quietly walked in the auditions room. She was calm and polite and well-polished when she entered, and her smile lit up the entire space. Saigay greeted the Executive Director Dr. Joe Gbaba and his wife Arimita very warmly and the couple responded affectionately and asked her to have a seat. She sat like a lady and kept a bright and confident smile on her face that reflected a high-spirited youthful persona.

Saigay has all the credits a young lady and an actress-in-waiting needs to succeed in the United States of America. She is beautiful "inside and outside" the old folks say, and she has a bright future ahead of her. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Food Business Management, with a minor in Advanced Wines and Beverages from the famed Culinary Institute of America in Hyde, New York, and graduated with high honors in 2017. She is also good at professional catering and bakes very well. So, as a lady, she is well-rounded and prepared for the traditional and postmodern tasks of womanhood and motherhood. A rare quality that is very difficult to find in most young ladies her age.



Interestingly as well, this Philadelphia native (“born and raised”)—as Philadelphians usually say about themselves and their “City of Brotherly Love”—comes from a rich traditional African/Liberian cultural lineage. Even though a Philadelphia native she learned how to do her traditional African/Liberian dance (Lorma, Vai, Gola) since she was three years old. Her tutor is her mother, the famous traditional Sande Master Dance Instructor, Madam Kormassa Bobo, one of Africa’s best dance instructors. Madam Bobo was a member of the world-renowned Liberia National Cultural Troupe. She has performed for African heads of states, world class diplomats, and a diverse range of audiences across the globe.

Further, Kormassa inherited her artistic talents and prowess from her late father and magician named Korlubah Bobo from Malima, a small but culturally rich enclave/village a few miles from Voijama, Lofa County—one of the rich cultural belts of Liberia. As Saigay sat for her interview and prepared to do her auditions, one could surmise what a success she will end up being if she commits to improving her God-given talents to be an actress and model someday. For this promising young lady, the stage is set and ready to go as she begins her career under the adept tutorage of Professor Joseph Gbaba.

Saigay has a warm heart and penchant or strong inclination to learn. “I am willing to learn, and I do not pretend to know it all” she said in her soft-spoken voice. She informed the panel she had little experience in acting when she was in high school, but she looks forward to acquiring more acting skills from the veteran playwright, theatre director and actor who has a wealth of experience teaching theatre arts, Literature, and Liberian history and culture.



After her interview, Saigay gave a dance rendition that was satisfying and thunderous! She played her background traditional African/Liberian drum beats from the Vai and Lorma ethnic groups of Liberia and did several heart-throbbing dance steps that ignited joy and excitement in the panel. Yes, you should come and see Saigay in action during DATI's Open House Performance which is coming up soon in the month of March!



*Charming and beautiful Saigay, the multiple talent on the bloc!*

*Anssuamne Sila: Republic of Guinea Bissau*



*Master African Drummer Anssuamne Sila from Guinea Bissau*

Auditions are all about deeply searching for talents from any part of the globe—searching for different pieces of the puzzle that will create a neat fit for a production. This year DATI is going all out to do just that in preparation for its 2018 theatre season and the nonprofit’s 41st Gala. The grand ceremony will be held at the International House Ibrahim Theatre near the campus of the University of Pennsylvania—3701 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—on Saturday, July 28, 2018 from 6-10 PM.

Anssuamne Sila is a citizen of Guinea Bissau, a tiny West African state perched between Senegal and the Republic of Guinea on the West Coast of Africa. Equatorial Guinea is the third African nation with the name Guinea on the continent of Africa. It is an island in the Atlantic Ocean that is in the Gulf of Guinea, near Gabon. During the interview Anssuamne made the clarification because he said very often most people he meets mistakenly think there is only one Guinea on the continent of Africa (Guinea-Conakry). “Instead”, he said, “There are three distinct countries in Africa that carry the name “Guinea”, and I am from Guinea Bissau.”

Humm, that was a piece of worthwhile cultural lesson from the veteran African drummer and artist who says he has been drumming his entire life and he is now forty-one years old. Coincidentally, Master Drummer Silla was born the same year Dehkontee Artists Theatre was established at the University of Liberia in 1977! So, it is somehow divine that he appeared to audition for an organization the same age as him. Well, we wish the two forty-one-year-olds the best of luck as they collaborate to promote and enhance the rich cultural traditions of Africa!

Without a doubt, Silla comes with a wealth of experience as an African Master Drummer. His knowledge about his specialty is immeasurable and he is as well a very resourceful intellectual with the will power to succeed. He also portrayed a spirit of self-awareness and commitment to his lifetime career to become a successful and independent professional African dance and musical artist.



Anssumane obtained his high school certifications in Traditional and Contemporary African Dance in his home country (Guinea Bissau). He also held leadership and teaching positions when he worked as a Dancer and Choreographer with the National Ballet of Guinea Bissau from 1986-2008. Here in the United States and on the local scene in Pennsylvania, Master

Silla performed with Theater Horizons of Norristown, PA, and as Djembe Percussionist in 2015. He was also the Lead Percussionist for Barrymore Award winning theatre's revival of Langston Hughes' musical, *Black Nativity*. From 2009-2011 Silla was contracted as Artist Teacher for African Dance replacing gym required curriculum class with 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes at FACTS (Folk Arts Cultural Treasures) Charter School in Philadelphia.

He also presently participates in LiveConnections.org Bridge Sessions— which include interactive performances that bring together musicians with students and special needs populations for explorations of music and cultures. The Sessions show how different musical styles relate, how music connects different peoples and how the building blocks of music can be combined. Anssuamne also taught a four-week dance workshop for 21 hours each week to students involved in the Philadelphia Summer SLAM program. He served as visiting artist at Niles West High School, Skokie, Illinois, among many other distinguished accomplishments.



During the auditions, Anssuamne literally made his drum to talk! He produced a variety of African rhythms that were electrifying. It almost felt like the spirits of our African ancestors were awakened by the deafening sounds of his rhythmic drumbeats accompanied by loud cheers in the room. The Executive Director and members of the panel watched in awe and the decision to welcome Silla was immediately unanimous. In response, the Master Drummer thanked the management team for warmly welcoming him into their midst and he promised to remain committed to the goals and ideals of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI). Dr. Gbaba told Mr. Silla about the vast opportunities that are out there for serious-minded African artists who are willing to collaborate with their colleagues to promote African arts and culture in the diaspora. Indeed, Mr. Silla will be a great addition to DATI's diverse talent pool.

*Kormassa Bobo: Republic of Liberia*



Madam Kormassa Bobo is DATI's Honorary Cultural Ambassador. She breathes a breath of fresh air in the artistic productions of Dehkontee Artists theatre, Inc. (DATI). Kormassa is one of very few traditional Liberian artists admitted into the Honorable Body of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, a body of distinguished scholars, statesmen and women and members of the intelligentsia of the Republic of Liberia.

Kormassa hails from Malima, Lofa County, Liberia. She is the daughter of one of Liberia's traditional magicians named Korlubah Bobo. Dr. Gbaba had the privilege of meeting the great Korlubah Bobo in Malima in 1988 while conducting a Rural Communications Network Research project in that culture-rich region of Liberia. By then Old Man Bobo was ill, feeble, and weak, but, one could see within his unsteady eyes that he possessed great strength, agility, and supernatural powers when he was in his hey days. However, just merely seeing and meeting Old Man Bobo on his dying bed was great blessings the playwright and theatre director and actor deeply cherishes.

As a great traditional dance artist, Madam Bobo was a member of the famous Liberia National Cultural Troupe based in Kendeja near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. She had the opportunity to perform for African heads of states, diplomats, and diverse audiences throughout the globe before fleeing to the United States due to the Liberian Civil War. She is a

single parent who raised two children, Saigay and her brother named David Sawo who currently lives in California. Also, Madam Bobo has taught traditional African dance lessons at various schools in Pennsylvania and is a recipient of many honorary awards from the State of Pennsylvania.

In total, Madam Bobo is a living embodiment of the rich cultural traditions of Liberia and a true daughter of the soil from Lofa County in Northwestern Liberia. As a well-trained Sande graduate, Kormassa is very humble, knowledgeable, and resourceful. Her numerous contributions toward the advancement of Liberian history and culture as Traditional Dance Instructor with Dehkontee Artists are immense, and she is a gifted artist that needs more material, moral, and financial supports than what she is presently receiving.



In addition, what is very fascinating about Kormassa is her deep love for her craft. Whether rain or shine she is ever ready to perform and exhibit her cultural heritage in a dignified manner. She is always willing to teach those who are interested in expanding their knowledge about other cultures from around the world and her word is her bond! Kormassa was happy to meet Anssuamne Silla, an African traditional Master Drummer. Together both will collaborate to interject the life beats of our African ancestors in DATI's future productions. This collaborative processe commenced immediately when Kormassa got up to do her auditions and kind of interacted with and requested Silla to please play a rhythm to enable her to perform appropriately. Hence, the collaborative process effectively began on a good foot as well.



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