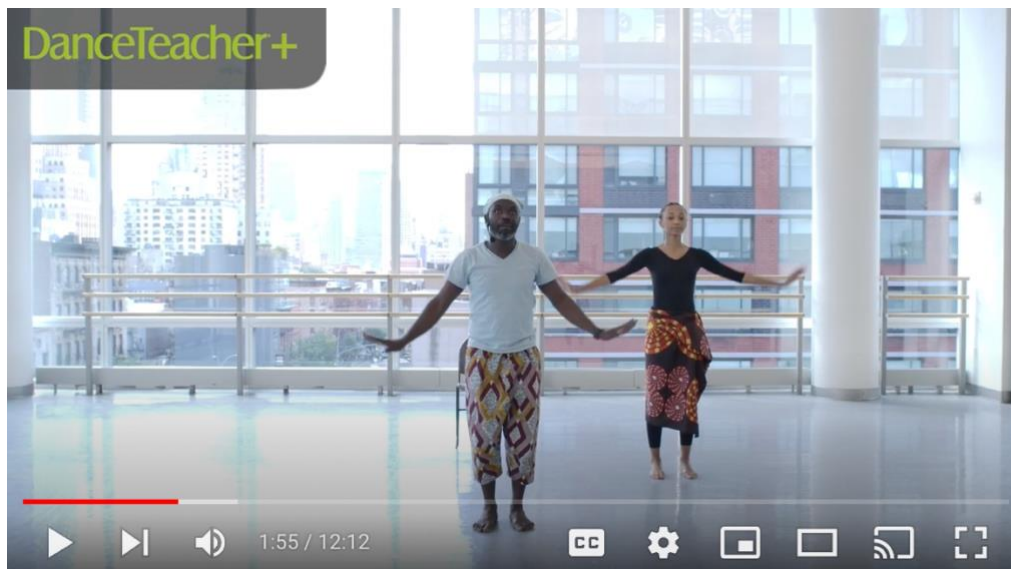


DanceTeacher

Lesson Plan: Maguette Camara Teaches a Traditional West African Dance

By: Lauren Wingenroth

November 17, 2022



This segment aired on 11/17/22: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9fsiRSesKM&t=298s> (12:12 minutes)



Maguette Camara prides himself on being “a really, really good beginner dance teacher.” It’s true: His high-energy, rhythm-filled West African dance classes burst with joy and community, and his patient, supportive demeanor reminds first-timers that dancing—not mastering every single step—is what’s most important.



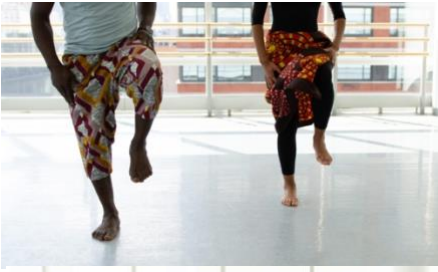
Originally from Senegal, Camara was a longtime member of the lauded Ballet Bougarabou Dance Company, where he also got his teaching start directing the second company. After moving to New York City in the 1990s, Camara soon became a beloved regular at studios across the city, and is currently a staple on the teaching rosters of The Ailey School, the Ailey Extension and the Barnard College dance department, alongside directing his own group, Manékadang Dance & Drum Company.



It was Camara’s own teachers who showed him that students learn better when they are enjoying themselves, which is why he tries to bring fun into his classes, and “push students while making them feel wonderful.” The result is classes that are highly social, where students enter as strangers and leave as friends, and people who’ve never danced before now know that they can. “If you can do one step by the end of the class, I did a good job,” he says.

Camara teaches a wide range of dances from West Africa. One that particularly reminds him of home: The lendjeng, a celebratory dance from the Mandinka people that looks like a bird flying. Traditionally performed at weddings, baby namings and other community gatherings, the lendjeng is a fun dance, says Camara, that starts off slow and builds to a joyful, energetic climax. “It’s almost like you’re flying while you’re doing it,” he says.

In his classes, Camara simulates how the lendjeng would be performed at a celebration: Starting in a large circle, students can come into the center and dance. As others join them, they interact and dance around each other, taking turns on the



inside and outside of the circle. Camara typically ends the class with this dance, a perfect encapsulation of his community-centered, festive approach.

Lendjeng Step by Step

Note: All photos below are by Grace Landefeld. The full-length video is by Coal Rietenbach.

Step 1: Stand in a relaxed position with the feet together.



Step 2: Begin with just the feet, marching in place: right, left; left, right; right, left; left, right, etc.

Step 3: Add the arms, which are similar to a bird's flapping wings: Each time you switch feet, the arms go up, and when your knee rises for the second time on the same side, they come down.



Tip: Coordinating the arms and the legs is the trickiest part of the step, says Camara. When students struggle, he tells them to imagine they are breaking a big stick with their knees: When the knee comes up for the second time, the arms come down to break the stick.

Step 4: Once you get the coordination, focus on finding bounce in the step. Make sure you are relaxed and grounded, rather than pulled up in the torso.

Tip: Resist the urge to rock side to side—instead the bounce should be up and down.



Step 5: Use the step to travel across the floor, or to turn around yourself.

Step 6: To advance the step, add a hop after each step, or add a triplet to the foot pattern.

Step 7: Or try these two arm variations:

Instead of moving the arms up and down, move them back behind you and then forward, leaning over slightly. Alternate the arms, so that one goes up as the other goes down.