

# Dancer, choreographer from West Africa teaches locally

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Wantanara means “we’re together, we’re a family” in the Susu language of Guinea, in West Africa. Accompanied by the light tap of closed fists, this small gesture shared by passersby is this nation’s effort towards solidarity, to avoid conflict between ethnic groups. It’s this sense of peace and happiness Soriba Camara, 37, brings to others here through the traditional dance of his country.

He began his traditional African dance training at the age of 5 in Conakry, Guinea, where he was born. He said he was the only artist from his generation to belong to both of the national ballets of Guinea. He became director and choreographer of Ballet Sourakhata de Guinee.

He and his wife, Lynn Camara, 40, originally of Charlotte, met in Guinea while Lynn was there studying dance. She is a counselor at the Hinesburg Community School. They have a daughter, Safi, 2, and another baby on the way. They live in Bristol and also have a home in Guinea.

“At home we speak what we call Franglaisu,” Soriba Camara said. It’s a mixture of French, English and Susu. He also speaks Peul and Malinke. “My country has a lot of ethnic groups and those are the three most popular,” he said.

After studying African dance in Burlington for a while, Lynn Camara decided to head to Guinea. “I had been to Tanzania, Guinea and the Ivory Coast in college,” she said. “I went back to Guinea a few times and found that was where my heart was.”

While there in 2004, Soriba invited Lynn to watch a production that he choreographed. “He was training teenagers,” Lynn said. “I was amazed. He was strict, but you could see these 40 kids dancing and drumming their hearts out, and you could see the love between them and the excitement.”

Soriba said dance is his life. “You know my country is a poor country and when you dance you don’t think about anything, only happiness.”

Still teaching and performing around the world, Soriba also teaches African dance and drumming in Chittenden County, having just completed a residency with HowardCenter for Families and Children in Burlington. He offers classes in South Burlington and Charlotte.