



UNITEDPERFORMINGARTSFUND

## Ko-Thi Dance Company Strengthens Roots with Traditional Musical Art and Dance

**In our vibrant city of the arts, the uplifting dance and musical forms of the African Diaspora can often go unseen and unheard. DeMar Walker of Ko-Thi Dance Company seeks to change that.**



DeMar Walker

Ko-Thi Dance Company was created in 1969. Since its start, it has taught the history, mythology and art forms of the African Diaspora. It is Wisconsin's national and international touring gem that pays homage to its roots. Aside from its performing season, the studio also offers an educational program called DrumTalk, which teaches dance and drumming to children and adults.

DeMar Walker is one of the Artistic Directors of Ton Ko-Thi Children's Ensemble. Born and raised in Milwaukee, he received his Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications and Theater at the University of Central Arkansas. Auditioning for Ko-Thi in 2008, he has worked his way up the ranks. Starting as an intern assisting with class registration and backstage management, DeMar is now one of the company's associate artistic directors. You can view one of his performances below. He also took time to answer some questions about himself, Ko-Thi and the impact of UPAF.



DeMar Walker: Ignite

**Q: How did you get involved with Ko-Thi?**

**A:** I auditioned for the company in 2008 and started seriously training in 2010. I was so surprised when I was selected to be an ensemble member. I still remember that moment like it happened yesterday.

**Q: Why is Ko-Thi important?**

**A:** With the company's mission to preserve, promote, and uplift the dance and musical forms of Africa and the Diaspora, I believe Ko-Thi serves as an ambassador to a vastly rich culture that is appreciated yet often unseen and unheard. We are able to accomplish this through our educational outreach program called DrumTalk, studio classes, and concerts. With Ko-Thi, you're guaranteed to smile and learn something new.

**Q: Why did you choose Ko-Thi?**

**A:** This is what I call my "full-circle" story. When I was 10, my first exposure to African dance and drumming was Ko-Thi. I was enrolled in a summer school program where they came to teach and perform for us. I was completely mesmerized by the histories, language, dynamic rhythms and movement. When I returned to Milwaukee & began pursuing a dance career, it was a no-brainer. The rest is history. What an evolution it's been, too.

**Q: How has Ko-Thi impacted you personally?**

**A:** I can distinctly remember having a conversation with Mama Ferne (Caulker-Bronson - founder of Ko-Thi Dance Company) and she told me, "Dancing is a giving art. Share your gift, DeMar." For a long time, I used dance as my armor. This



DeMar Performing

reminds me that I must continue to be courageous in my vulnerability as a creative being (performer, educator, and choreographer). Thankfully, Ko-Thi has given me the foundation to be an artist, the ability to earn that title, and finding balance in all that comes with it.

**Q: How Has UPAF's funding helped with Ko-Thi?**

**A:** Recently, we had the opportunity to perform at the UPAF campaign kickoff for Harley Davidson and BMO Harris. I believe this is great exposure for potential donors to support current & future Ko-Thi initiatives.



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