

In 1973 a group of young artists from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, formed La Troupe Makandal, naming it after a renowned eighteenth-century revolutionary and mystic. They created a repertory that drew from Haiti's revolutionary legacy, and from oral tradition around the figure of their namesake. The company left Haiti in 1981 and regrouped in New York City, where it attracted new artists, both Haitians and friends of Haiti who are inspired by the company's dedication to black history and culture. La Troupe Makandal incorporated in the State of New York in 1984 and won its not-for-profit status a year later. The company has distinguished itself in the United States for its theatrical representations of Vodou, a powerful but poorly understood form of Afro-Haitian spirituality. Under the direction of Master Drummer Frisner Augustin, an NEA Heritage Fellow (1999), the company has produced performances that link Haitian history and culture, challenge ingrained stereotypes, and preserve and develop the remarkable music and dance traditions of Haiti and the Haitian community of New York City.

Makandal has received funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Brooklyn Arts Council, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Ford Foundation, JP Morgan Chase, American Music Center, and others. Its spring semester residency at University of Florida in 2003 was supported by a grant to the University from the Rockefeller Foundation. More recently, Makandal played a key role in Carnegie Hall's Global Encounters program, which introduced the performing arts of the Caribbean to thousands of high school students in the Greater New York area.

Frisner Augustin, Artistic Director, studied ritual drumming in the temples of Vodou. In 1972 he came to New York, where he established himself as a master drummer in Vodou rituals, as a performer for Haitian community festivals, and as a drum instructor. His recordings with the Troupe feature his settings of traditional Afro-Haitian dances. He has recorded as well for jazz artist Kip Hanrahan, for the soundtrack of the Jonathan Demme film *Beloved*, and most recently for Haitian American jazz drummer Andrew Cyrille. Mr. Augustin teaches a workshop in Haitian drumming at Hunter College, the *Krik! Krak!* workshop for children and adults at sites in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and classes, lecture-demonstrations, and residencies through the Brooklyn Arts Council, City Lore, and the Carnegie Hall Global Encounters program. Keenly aware of the negative stereotyping of Vodou, Maestro Augustin uses his drum to recast the mystery of the religion from a positive perspective. In 1999 the National Endowment for the Arts awarded him a National Heritage Fellowship, this nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts.

Steve Deats began his study of Haitian drumming and folk singing in 1984. From his classes with Master Drummer Frisner Augustin, he joined La Troupe Makandal's ensemble, and spent time in Port-au-Prince deepening his knowledge of Haiti's roots music. His engagements with Makandal include such venues as the Town Hall, Lincoln Center Out-of Doors, the Banlieus Bleues festival in Paris, and many more. Today, he holds a degree in music education for children from Empire State College; he instructs children in rhythm, movement, and song and directs his own children's troupe. Mr. Deats drums for the spirits in New York's Vodou houses, where he has won the respect and recognition of the community for his devotion to the culture.

Pierre Desrameaux, a native of Port-au-Prince, participated in the early pioneering of the staged representation of Haitian folk dance. After dancing with Troupe Ayida, he became one of the first artists to dance with the National Haitian Folklore Troupe. Photographs of his work appear in Lavinia Williams' *Haiti-Dance*, and these photos are also on display at the National Pantheon Museum in Port-au-Prince. Mr. Desrameaux became a professor of dance with Bacoulou, one of Haiti's premiere groups, and he has conducted master classes in recent years with Viviane Gauthier's company in the capital. He spends much of his time now in New York City, where he has taught master classes for La Troupe Makandal.

Smith Destin, Actor and Dancer, studied dance and theater in his native Port-au-Prince. In his late teens he worked with La Troupe Makandal in venues ranging from community centers to the St. Louis Gonzague School to the El Racho Hotel. He traveled with Makandal to New York in 1981 and continued to play with the company there. Mr. Destin's performing experiences include the American Museum of Natural History, the 92nd Street Y, the Town Hall, and many more. He conducts workshops, lecture-demonstrations, and staff development sessions together with Master Drummer Frisner Augustin, primarily through the Brooklyn Arts Council and City Lore. Mr. Destin continues to ply his acting skills on Haitian community television.

Marie Edith Jean studied folk song and dance in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, as a child. After coming to New York City, she continued to study with Louinès Louinis, and with others at New Dance School and the Djoniba Dance and Drum Center. At the same time, she pursued a career in teaching. After earning a B.A. with a concentration in Education from Hunter College CUNY, Ms. Jean went

on to complete an M.S. in Bilingual Teacher Education. She works for the New York City Department of Education. The Haitian community also knows Ms. Jean as an activist. She has helped provide immigrant services through such community organizations as the Haitian Centers Council and the Flatbush Family Center. As a cultural activist, Ms. Jean founded the children's dance company Tonèl Lakay in 1988.

Kesler Pierre, born in Port-au-Prince, is a self-trained artist who worked for a stained glass studio in Haiti, then continued work in that medium in the United States. His web site calls attention to the need to restore the stained glass windows of the Port-au-Prince Cathedral. Since coming to New York in the 1980s, he has compiled an extensive dossier of work in other media. Mr. Pierre played in Makandal's ensemble and specialized in frame drum and conch shell. Today he serves on the company's Board while pursuing his work in visual art. Mr. Pierre has provided the company with altarpieces, particularly sacred bottles. His projections of images from Haiti and the sacred diagrams called *vèvè* have added a new dimension to recent Makandal performances.

Dr. Lois Wilcken, Executive Director, has had the pleasure of researching the traditional music and dance of Haiti in Port-au-Prince and New York City's Haitian neighborhoods. In addition to administering and developing programs with La Troupe Makandal, Dr. Wilcken works for City Lore, a center for folk arts in New York City. White Cliffs Media Company published her book, *The Drums of Vodou*, in 1992. In 1998, University of Illinois Press published *Island Sounds in the Global City*, which she co-edited with Dr. Ray Allen. La Médiathèque Caraïbe has installed her exhibit, *La Musique Vodou en Haïti*, in its facility in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, and one may view an online version in French or English at www.lameca.org (link on home page under “nouveau/new/nuevo”).