

Five Masquerade Films

Masquerade performances include masks or ensembles covering the head, face, or entire body. In addition to the individuals wearing masks, the dynamic, multisensory performance also includes musicians, spiritual practitioners, libations, and the audience.



Ijo Water Spirit Masquerade (Ofurumo)

Ondewari, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
1992

© 1992 Dr. Martha Anderson

On the central platform to your right is a sawfish mask, which embodies one type of water spirit. The first film shows additional Ijo water spirits, including a shark and mullet. The spirits arrive by boat, and an elaborate reenactment of fishing expeditions takes place. Additionally, the masquerade performers drink medicines and chase spectators, both signs of their power.



Ancestor Masquerade Festivals (Odun Egúngún)

Porto Novo, Benin, and Oyotunji African Village, Sheldon, South Carolina, 2020

© 2014 Dr. Henry Drewal, University of Wisconsin; Oyotunji performance courtesy of LEVR Studios

The second film features egúngún, a manifestation of an ancestor, in the diverse city of Porto Novo. The performers may be from the Yorùbá, Egun, or Adja peoples. This film also shows egúngún performances in South Carolina, where the Oyotunji African Village celebrates ties to Yorùbá traditions, as found in the US, the UK, the Caribbean, and South America.



Little White Masquerade (Lo Gbe)

Sya District, Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso
2021

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The third masquerade is performed by adults and children on moonlit Saturday nights in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. Throughout the night they spin, twirl, and dart about to honor the most elderly and distinguished of individuals who endeavor to improve their communities.



Leaf Masquerades (Koro) with Entourages

Tondogosso and Baré, Burkina Faso
2009 and 2015

© 2009 Dr. Lisa Homann, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

The fourth masquerade is danced in late spring to call for rain, vital to agricultural communities. Constructed primarily of leaves and reaching fifteen to eighteen feet tall, these Koro ensembles are destroyed after each performance. Many spectators film the proceedings on phones, tablets, and cameras to create their own documentation of these spectacular processions.



Gongoli Masquerade Performances

Aberdeen (near Freetown) and Kenema District, Sierra Leone
2009–2010

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The fifth masquerade is a comical mask known as gongoli. An example is on view in this gallery. Gongoli is a beloved character of Mende origin (Sierra Leone). Always the buffoon, he is performed as drunken and bumbling, to the delight of any children witnessing his antics. Gongoli also routinely performs at funerals to lighten the seriousness of the mood.