
Souleymane Badolo MFA '13 Honored with Visionary Leadership Award

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Photo: Visionary Leadership Award honoree Souleymane Badolo MFA '13, left, with Susan Sgorbati, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Public Action

Bennington, VT: Dancer, choreographer, and activist Souleymane Badolo MFA '13 has been named the 2023 recipient of Bennington College's Dr. Elizabeth Coleman Visionary Leadership Award. This annual award recognizes an engaged Bennington alumni who has successfully demonstrated leadership and confident willingness to step forward and take risks in order to solve problems and achieve results in the areas of education, government, the arts and sciences, or industry.

"Souleymane is a visionary leader who embodies the values and achievements of the quintessential Bennington graduate," said President Laura R. Walker. "Through movement, gentleness, and creativity, he is improving the lives of villagers in his home country of Burkina Faso."

Badolo started his professional career as a dancer for the DAMA, a traditional African dance company, and danced with world-renowned contemporary African dance company Salia ni Seydou, worked with French choreographers Elsa Wolliaston and Mathilde Monnier, and performed with the National Ballet of Burkina.

Since moving to New York City in 2009, Badolo's solo and small ensemble projects have been presented by Danspace, New York Live Arts, Dance New Amsterdam, Harlem Stage, the 92nd Street Y, the Museum of Art & Design, River to River Festival (R2R), and BAM. He has collaborated with Nora Chipaumire, Ralph Lemon, Reggie Wilson, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar of Urban Bush Women. His ongoing research in Africa has been supported by The Suitcase Fund of New York Live Arts.

Badolo received the Juried Bessie Award. *Yimbégré*, his dance for two dancers and one percussionist, was recognized with a Bessie Award for Outstanding Production in 2015.

Badolo graduated from Bennington College with an MFA in Dance in June 2013. He has returned several times as a recurring visiting faculty member. Of Badolo, dance faculty and colleague Dana Reitz wrote in his nomination, "He became an electric teacher, and he began to formulate and develop ideas for helping others in his native land."

In May of 2021, Badolo embarked on a project to help bring water to the drought-stricken village of Kya in Burkina Faso, West Africa, where his parents were from. He bought farmland in Kya with the intention of aiding the community by drilling a well for everyone's use. There was no well in the Village of 1,300 people, so farmers and families were dependent upon the 2-3 month rainy season, which is more and more unpredictable due to climate change. Badolo engaged international partners and persevered through challenges to find water in December 2021.

“Bennington college is one of the coolest places that gives you more opportunity for creation and experimentation,” Badolo wrote. “[It] gives you space, time to dream and have real experiences with talented teachers who inspire all students. I learned these human values only with Bennington.”

Badolo continued, “I am grateful for this award and how it will help me bring water and farming to villagers in Kya.”

Susan Sgorbati, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Public Action, shared that, “Solo is one of those human beings that is multi-talented as an artist, a community activist, and a visionary that imagines what is possible from what seems impossible. I am so pleased that he is getting recognition for the outstanding work that he has done and will do in the future.”

Badolo has been a guest instructor at The New School and Williams College and now teaches at Bard College. Badolo was honored at a presentation during Bennington College’s Fall Weekend, held September 29-30 on the College’s campus.

Past recipients of the award include founder and CEO of ECO City Farms [Margaret Morgan-Hubbard '67](#), Healthy Humor co-founder [Deborah Kaufmann '74](#), cardiologist [Jennifer Mieres '82](#), Bash the Trash co-founder [John Bertles '81](#), human rights and racial justice lawyer Gay Johnson McDougall '69, chef and activist [Ben Hall '04](#), The Chocolate Factory Theater co-founder [Sheila Lewandowski '97](#), Voices Unbroken founder emeritus [Victoria Sammartino '99](#), and the late [Holly Block '80](#), former executive director of the Bronx Museum.

According to the award parameters, the selected individual will be an engaged alumni who has successfully demonstrated leadership and confident willingness to step forward and take risks in order to solve problems and achieve results in the areas of education, government, the arts and sciences, or industry. Established by the parents of a Bennington College graduate, the \$10,000 award has no restrictions on how it may be used.

The 2023 honoree was invited to campus to meet with current students, allowing them to connect with an exceptional leader who is affiliated with the College.

About Bennington College

Bennington College is a liberal arts college in southwestern Vermont that has distinguished itself as a vanguard institution within American higher education. It was the first to include the visual and performing arts in a liberal arts education. It is the only college to require that its students spend a term—every year—at work in the world. Bennington students work intensively with faculty to forge individual educational paths around their driving questions and interests.

Rooted in an abiding faith in the talent, imagination, and responsibility of the individual, Bennington invites students to pursue and shape their own intellectual inquiries and, in doing so, to discover the profound interconnection of things. Learn more at bennington.edu.

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