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The Stunning Masks and Vibrant Music of the Congo Take Center Stage in MIM's New Exhibition Presented by U.S. Bank

One of Africa's most powerful and enduring art forms

PHOENIX (October 8, 2019) – Beginning on November 8, the [Musical Instrument Museum \(MIM\)](#) will offer a glimpse into the dramatic and lively masquerade traditions of Central Africa at its newest exhibition [Congo Masks and Music: Masterpieces from Central Africa](#), presented by U.S. Bank.

Curated by Manuel Jordán, PhD, MIM's deputy director and chief curator, and Marc Felix, MIM board of directors member and international expert on African art, this exclusive exhibition features more than 150 stunning and rare masks, instruments, and costumes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) dating from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. It also includes 12 mannequins in full, authentic outfits worn in ceremonies.

Masquerades are one of Central Africa's most vibrant art forms and take place for a variety of reasons—to educate, entertain, demonstrate power, promote fertility, and connect humans with the spirit world. Masks represent powerful supernatural beings that come to life in human, animal, or hybridized form in masquerades. Through music and dance, they express different peoples' worldviews, histories, religious beliefs, and morals. Constructed out of materials including wood, feathers, beads, fiber, and metal, the intricate masks on display in the exhibition showcase remarkable artistry and craftsmanship representative of dozens of Central African cultural groups.

Congo Masks and Music is the first exhibition to fully contextualize masks alongside musical instruments in their authentic performance settings. The collection features an array of musical instruments, including drums, bells, rattles, whistles, thumb pianos, xylophones, and harps, and many visually reference particular masks. Archival photography and video footage featuring masks and traditional music performed in ceremonies will allow guests to fully experience one of Africa's richest traditions.

"I hope that when guests walk into the exhibition, they feel like they are stepping into the performance arena. Being in the presence of these full-body masqueraders, they'll get a sense of how impressive this art form is," says Jordán.

Highlights of the exhibition include:

- **Mamboma mask, Woyo (Kongo) people** – The mighty male spirit Mamboma enforced laws maintained by the Ndunga, an association for social control which worked on behalf of chiefs. The mask's large face, imposing facial features (including chipped teeth), and symbolic colors and motifs reflect the spirit's powerful nature.
- **Male Kifwebe mask, Songye people** – This mask represents a spirit that is partly human, with reference to a number of animal forms. Its protruding head crest is associated with a male gorilla; animals such as crocodiles, birds, and insects may account for its very stylized facial features and complex meanings. The male mask belongs to an association (also called Kifwebe) that acts as a counterbalance to the power of chiefs.
- **Ngady Mwaash mask, Kuba people** – Ngady Mwaash, a female mask, is extensively decorated with painted motifs and shell and bead ornamentation. Its painted parallel lines below the eyes represent tears lamenting

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the death of an initiated man. Funerals of the men's initiation society are the primary context of Kuba masquerades where Ngady Mwaash performs with at least one male counterpart.

- **Harp, Zande people** – Zande harps are very sophisticated instruments, manufactured with attention to material quality and detail in construction. They also maintain an elegant feel for aesthetically pleasing forms and shapes. This includes the beautifully shaped skin-covered resonators, well-crafted pegs, and necks topped with finely carved figurative heads. The tonal sounds produced by these five-string harps match their material quality.
- **Figurative rattle, Lega or Bembe people** – This large, one-of-a-kind musical instrument is a complex rattle. Its figurative head is reminiscent of Lega masks used in the Bwami association. Inside its hollow body, iron bells hang alongside long wooden beaters, padded with fibers that may serve to dampen the rattle's sound or keep parts from moving.
- **Figurative aerophone, Pere people** – This rare type of instrument is in the form of an antelope and painted with bands of red ocher and white kaolin. The figure's body is hollow and features a large hole under its belly. It may have served as a form of trumpet or aerophone, with sound produced by the musician blowing air through the hole into the body.

MIM is grateful to U.S. Bank for their support of *Congo Masks and Music* as presenting sponsor. "We know that our communities are more connected when they have opportunities to experience culture and the arts. We hope *Congo Masks and Music* provides the residents of the Phoenix area a chance to come together and experience the creativity and enduring traditions that make up Central African masquerades," says Joshua Shade, U.S. Bank Market President for Arizona.

Congo Masks and Music will be on display from November 8, 2019, through September 13, 2020. For information about opening weekend and other supplemental programming, visit exhibition.MIM.org.

Admission

\$10 for special exhibition only

\$7 when purchased with general museum admission

\$4 for children/teens (ages 4–19)

Free for children (ages 3 and under)

In partnership with Africa Museum

Presenting sponsor U.S. Bank

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The Musical Instrument Museum is located at 4725 E. Mayo Boulevard in Phoenix (corner of Tatum and Mayo Boulevards, just south of Loop 101). For general museum information and a full schedule of events, visit MIM.org or call 480.478.6000.

About MIM

The Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) enriches our world by collecting, preserving, and making accessible an astonishing variety of musical instruments and performance videos from every country in the world. MIM offers guests a welcoming and fun experience, incomparable interactive technology, dynamic programming, and exceptional musical performances. MIM fosters appreciation of the world's diverse cultures by showing how we innovate, adapt, and learn from each other to create music—the language of the soul. To learn more about MIM, visit MIM.org.

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