



KO~THI
DANCE COMPANY • EST. 1969

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**KO-THI DANCE COMPANY LAUNCHES “\$56 FOR 56TH” CAMPAIGN TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONS
AFTER LOSS OF FEDERAL FUNDING**

MILWAUKEE, WI, June 2025 — Ko-Thi Dance Company, a beloved Milwaukee-based African dance institution, is calling on the community to rally behind its work in the face of a devastating funding loss. The organization today announced its \$56 for 56th campaign — a grassroots effort to raise \$100,000 and safeguard its future after the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) abruptly withdrew its funding due to shifting federal priorities.

For 56 years, Ko-Thi Dance Company has stood as a pillar of healing, cultural preservation, and artistic excellence. Founded in 1969 by the renowned choreographer and educator Ferne Caulker, Ko-Thi has served over one million children through school residencies, workshops, performances, and arts education programs. The company’s rich body of work has elevated African diasporic dance and music to national prominence, inspiring pride, creativity, and resilience in communities across Milwaukee and beyond.

“This is not just about dance — it’s about preserving a vital piece of Black culture and community history,” said Caulker. “Ko-Thi has helped generations of children and artists see themselves reflected in the art world. We cannot allow that to be erased.”

Earlier this year, Ko-Thi received a letter from the NEA stating that its federal funding was being terminated, not for lack of artistic merit, but because the organization’s work no longer aligned with a newly redirected list of federal priorities. While the NEA now emphasizes projects that



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elevate HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and other select initiatives, Ko-Thi's African-rooted art was deemed outside of this scope.

As a result, the company was forced to cancel the remainder of its Ngoma concert series and now faces an existential threat.

In response, Ko-Thi is turning to its community with a simple ask: Support the "\$56 for 56th" campaign by donating \$56 (or more), honoring Ko-Thi's 56 years of impact and helping sustain its mission. Through its website Ko-Thi.org, the company is seeking 2,000 supporters to commit to \$56 donations in honor of Ko-Thi's 56th year, with the option to give monthly or as a one-time contribution.

Donations can also be made in person, as the organization will take part in several summer events, starting with Milwaukee's annual Juneteenth celebration along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. The WNOV Radio booth will serve as a donation site during the festivities, where Ko-Thi board members will collect in-person donations from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Additionally, staff members will be present at all Summer of Soul events, held at the Marcus Performing Arts Center's Peck Pavilion (325 E Kilbourn Ave.) on July 2, 16, 30, and August 13 and 27.

"If Ko-Thi has ever moved you, inspired you, or made you feel seen — this is the moment to give back," Caulker urged. "Our art must not be silenced. Together, we can ensure that Ko-Thi thrives for another 56 years and beyond."

To donate or learn more, visit **Ko-Thi.org**.

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About Ko-Thi Dance Company

Founded in 1969 by Ferne Caulker, Ko-Thi Dance Company is one of the nation's leading African and African diasporic dance ensembles. For more than five decades, Ko-Thi has preserved and advanced African-rooted art through dynamic performances, educational programming, and community engagement. The company has impacted more than one million children and countless artists through its work, serving as a beacon of Black cultural pride and artistic excellence.