

'You Don't Need Feet to Dance,' reveals the life of Sidiki Conde

An intimate documentary about a man who overcomes his disability one day at a time in New York City, Alan Govenar's new film "You Don't Need Feet To Dance," opening at the Quad Cinema on Friday, March 22 reveals the extraordinary life of African immigrant Sidiki Conde.

Sidiki was born in 1961, in Guinea, West Africa. At age 14 polio left he almost completely paralyzed. Sent to live with his grandfather in a village deep in the forest, Sidiki learned to manage his disability, building his upper-body strength so that he could walk on his hands.

When faced with the dilemma of dancing in a coming of age ceremony, he reconstructed the traditional steps by dancing on his hands instead of his feet. In time Sidiki ran away to Conakry, Guinea's capital city, where he and his friends organized an orchestra of artists with disabilities recruited from the city's streets.

They toured the country, striving to change the perception of the disabled. He became a member of the renowned dance company Merveilles D'Afrique in 1987 founded by Mohamed Komoko Sano. Sidiki became a soloist and served as rehearsal master, composing and directing the company's repertoire. He also worked as a musician and arranger with Youssou N'Dour, Salifa Keita, Baba Maal and other popular musicians.

Conde's music brought him to



Sidiki Conde works with children with disabilities in New York City, as seen in "You Don't Need Feet To Dance," a documentary by Alan Govenar (Photos: Alan Govenar)

the United States in 1998 and he founded the Tokounou All-Abilities Dance and Music Ensemble. In the

United States, he has continued to perform and teach, instructing people of all abilities in schools, hospitals and universities, and served as artist in residence at a Bronx public school for children with multiple disabilities.

In the documentary "You Don't Need Feet to Dance," Sidiki balances his career as a performing artist with the almost insurmountable obstacles of life in New York City, from his fifth-floor walk-up apartment in the East Village, down the stairs with his hands and navigating in his wheelchair through Manhattan onto buses and into the subway.

Despite the challenges, Sidiki teaches workshops for disabled

kids, busks on the street, rehearses with his musical group, bicycles with his hands, and prepares for a baby naming ceremony, where he plays djembe drums, sings, and dances on his hands.

About the Director

Alan Govenar is a writer, folklorist, photographer, and filmmaker. He is president of Documentary Arts, which he founded in 1985 to present new perspectives on historical issues and diverse cultures. Govenar is the author more than twenty books and is a Guggenheim Fellow.

The Off-Broadway premiere of his musical "Blind Lemon Blues,"

created with Akin Babatunde received rave reviews in The New York Times and Variety. Govenar's film "Stoney Knows How," based on his book by the same title about old school tattoo artist Leonard St. Clair, was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and was selected as an "Outstanding Film of the Year" by the London Film Festival.

Govenar has also produced and directed numerous films in association with NOVA, La Sept/ARTE, and the corporation for public broadcasting. Alan Govenar recently directed "The Beat Hotel" and "Master Qi and the Monkey King," both distributed through First Run Features. (D.T.)

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Children are captivated by Sidiki's feet-less dancing skills