

*“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”*

**P s a l m 3 0 : 1 1 - 1 2**

## “U Sabi Dance O”

**S**ierra Leonean music makes up the majority of what I listen to. Most mornings, if I sleep through the Islamic Azan at 5:00 am, the unique layering of percussion and rhythms of Salone music awaken me shortly after. Regardless of the genre, hearing music in the streets causes everyone to dance. Wherever there is music in Sierra Leone, dance surely accompanies it. Music and dance together play a significant role in how people interact, celebrate, mourn, tell stories, and worship.



NIA SULLIVAN

Every Sunday morning at my church in Makeni, we meet in the courtyard of a local primary school. When I arrive, a joyful atmosphere greets me. The scene is vibrant with walls decorated with colors from the national flag, children running and dancing, and congregants dressed in traditional fabrics. Loud worship music is heard from tall speakers and people sing along. The music has a tropical sound and is sung in different languages including Krio, Limba, Temne, and English. I’m greeted by my worship family with a hand squeeze or a hug, then prompted to join in the dancing. Dance, for some churches in Sierra Leone, is how people praise God and pray.

On my first Sunday at church, people assumed that I was from Sierra Leone because of my appearance, but my American accent and my poor Krio language skills revealed that I was an opoto (foreigner). Young children approached me with smiles and laughter, naming me the “black opoto.” While introducing themselves, people also started to instruct me on different dance moves. As we danced together holding hands and smiling, women yelled, “U sabi dance Oo! U na Salone titi now.” (You sabi dance! You are Sierra Leonian girl now!)

There are several ways to say thank you in the area I live in. The most common phrases are plenti tɛnki, momo, and inwale. Each expression of gratitude applies directly to me, for I am thankful to God for my time in Sierra Leone.

*Nia Sullivan serves with the Council of Churches, Sierra Leone, Girls Access to Education Program (GATE).*

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