



(LYRCD 7328)

## **AFRICAN RHYTHMS AND INSTRUMENTS VOLUME 1** **Mali•Niger•Ghana•Nigeria•Upper Volta•Senegal•Liberia**

The primary scope of these records is to document highlights of one of the most important cultural events in the history of contemporary Africa; a Festival which, from July 26th through August 1st, 1969, brought together in Algiers political and cultural representatives of Africa as well as those of various black liberation movements for both a confrontation and a celebration. Joining together in the Algerian capital and forming an immense, exciting political and cultural manifestation were well over five-thousand persons from the entire African continent and for ten days the city was transformed into an enormous stage for music, dance, cinema and theater of the Negro people. Ten days of almost uninterrupted performances and contemporaneously, political and cultural discussions.

The recorded documents contained in these albums seek to recreate for the listener the emotional atmosphere of those days, but with full awareness that recorded sound alone can never sufficiently project the full impact of the actual performances, with all their color, gestures, dances and the crowd - as well as music. But despite the limited scope of sound alone, these highlights of African life contain an emotive force and documentary value of inestimable importance. Although it would be incorrect to consider the various selections contained herein as authentic ethnological documents insofar as the performances offered by the various countries in Algiers were, for the most part "mystified" (i.e., in more than one instance the groups were almost semi-professional and at times the choreography quite sophisticated), on the other hand one can certainly consider them significant examples of the attempts of the African nations to develop their own modes of expression and communication, based on their individual traditions and revindicated (in keeping with the spirit of the Algiers Festival) as a foundation for their emancipation from Colonialism. The fact remains, however, that the greater part of the music to be heard here is authentic African music as it actually exists in the every day reality of the Negro

people.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that these recordings were under very difficult circumstances, during the actual performances which took place on an enormous platform in the center of the Algiers Stadium, or in the midst of the crowd in the city squares- For this reason the sound levels, particularly between voices and percussion instruments, are not always perfect. From forty hours of recorded tape, the final selection eliminated those pieces which suffered most from the not always perfect position in which the microphones had to be placed. At all times, however, an attempt was made to preserve the atmosphere of enthusiasm and participation in which these performances took place.

#### A. MALI

The Republic of Mali, formerly the Sudanese Republic (1959-60) and a one-time French Overseas Territory in West Africa, is a landlocked nation with an area of 464,000 sq. Miles and a population of about 4,400,000. Its capital is Bamako (120,000 inhabitants).

Historically Mali is one of the most important centers of Sudanese culture, a cross-roads of various civilizations, and with strong Islamic influence. As a result, the music of Mali a quite varied and predominantly traditional.

At the Algiers Festival Mali was represented by a semiprofessional group called the "Ensemble Folkloric National", which, despite its professional status, offered some fascinating examples of authentic music. The predominant instrument in the first piece is the xylophone (balafon), with a drum background. The balafon is present in almost all of black Africa, and exists in various models, depending upon the area. Many examples of music for xylophone can be found throughout this anthology.

In the second piece the main instrument is the drum, and here it displays a broadly interesting range of rhythmic interplay.

The third piece is the accompanying music for the dance of the sacred bird of the Bambaras (one of the peoples of Mali). The sacred bird, Kono, is represented by an enormous mask, on which is mounted a small marionette, Farima, the insolent carrier of magic messages. Various percussion instruments accompany a female singer.

#### B. NIGER

The Republic of Niger is also a former French Overseas Territory situated in the heart of West Africa, with an area of 489,189 sq. Miles and a population of 4 million. Its capital is Niamey (43,000 inhabitants).

Like Mali, Niger's history is also a part of the great African empires and its culture today bears marked Islamic influence (about 80 percent of its population is Moslem).

The group representing Niger at the Pan-African Festival was the "Ensemble Artistic Regional", comprised of several separate groups from various ethnic and cultural segments of the Republic. The first piece is performed by the Orchestra of the Sultan of Zinder, from the Central-Southern part of the country, slightly north of the Nigerian frontier. The orchestra, which is bound to the ceremonial traditions of the Islamic sultanates of the Sudan, consists of two kakakis (long, straight trombones made of copper), of an algaita (a kind of oboe), a set of drums and another set of metallic percussion instruments. The second piece is the accompanying music of the dance of the young girls of Ouallam. Ouallam, to the north of Niamey on the highlands of Zermaganda, is one of the cultural centers of the Djermas. In this region can be found enormous stone tombs (up to 16 miles. in length) in which are supposed to have been buried the Djerma ancestors. This dance (accompanied by a set of drums) symbolizes, in stylized form, the bori dances, ancient

dances of possession.

#### C. GHANA

The Republic of Ghana was formerly the British Gold colony with its territories of Ashanti and British Togoland. It has an area of 91,843 sq.. Miles and a population of about 7,350,000. Its capital is Accra. With its various populations, Ghana belongs to the cultural area of the Gulf of Guinea.

Representing Ghana at the Algiers Festival was the "Ghana Dance Ensemble", a professional group (as were the majority of participating groups) which nevertheless has very strong ties with village culture and interprets, albeit with stylizations which are more easily detected in the dances than in the music, its principle characteristics.

The piece selected for this album offers an excellent example of the work of this group and is very interesting instrumentally (percussion) and vocally, and for traces of acculturation which it bears. The drums which can be heard are vertical, resting on the ground, of various sizes and tuning, and played by both the hands and sticks. Ghana boasts a rich tradition of percussive music.

#### D. NIGERIA

The Federation of Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, became independent of Britain in 1960. Its area is 356,660 sq.. Miles with a population of 55,655,000. Capital is Lagos (with 500,000 inhabitants). At the Festival Nigeria was represented by various instrumental and dance groups, from various states of the Federation. Nigeria is also a part of the cultural area of the Gulf of Guinea. The first piece is a performance of extraordinary intensity, offered by the Tiv ethnic group. One oboe player is accompanied by a set of percussion instruments (drums held between the legs and played with the hands, together with a metallic percussion instrument).

The second piece is a dance of the Bachama people, from a North-western state (in the Province of Adamawa, a division of Numan). The dance is called wurukaduwai, and in the Bachama villages, is performed only once a year, in February, before the traditional 'heads of the community. The music is expressed by dance-songs (men only) and by rhythm cadenced with their feet by stamping on the ground. The dancers wear many rattles on their legs.

#### E. UPPER VOLTA

The Republic of Upper Volta, a one-time French Overseas Territory, is an inland plateau region in West Africa. It has an area of 105,869 sq... mi., and a population of 4,800,000. Its capital city is Ouagadougou. In the heart of Sudan, Upper Volta belongs to the Sudanese cultural region with Islamic influences.

The dance which is documented here is accompanied by an instrumental group consisting of a xylophone (balafon}, three horizontal wooden drums, and one vertical drum. The wooden drums are played with sticks, the vertical one, skin-covered, with the hands. The rhythm is further cadenced by rattles worn by the dancers on their legs. Two whistles are also utilized, and the male voices appear in antiphony.

#### F. SENEGAL

A former French Overseas Territory on the Atlantic Coast of Western Africa, Senegal covers an area of 75,750 sq.. Miles and has a population of 3,400,000. Its capital city is Dakar (400,000 inhabitants).

Senegal became an autonomous state in 1958 and with the Sudanese Republic formed the Mali Federation; the two members became completely independent in 1960.

The music and dance group from Senegal has a long professional experience and has performed in almost the entire world.

In Algiers it offered a greatly varied series of performances, in which participated musicians-from various regions and cultural extractions.

The dance, which is documented here is accompanied by a set of drums and is of Peuls cultural origin, one of the most culturally interesting ethnic groups of Senegal.

#### G. LIBERIA

Liberia has a long history of independence; it was in fact, founded as a Republic in 1858 following a settlement made at Monrovia by Negro freedmen from the United States with the assistance of American colonization societies.

Its total area covers 43,000 sq. Miles with a population of 1,100,000. Its capital is Monrovia (100,000). Liberia was represented at the Festival by its national troupe, with performances divided into descriptive ballets representing the cycle of seasons.

The first piece is an acrobatic dance performed by young men, accompanied by a set of drums played by the hands and with sticks. The dance consists of a series of acrobatic figures and high somersaults. The second piece is a fragment of a lengthy ballet dedicated to the season cycle. The instrumental group is similar to that of the preceding number. There is also a participation of alternating male and female voices. In both pieces the rhythmic interplay of the percussion is very interesting.

#### THE TRACKS

##### A. NIGER

1. Orchestra of the Sultan of Zinder 1:10

2. Quallam girls' dance 3.00

##### B. GHANA

3. Voices and percussion 3:57

##### C. MALI

4. Xylophone, percussion and female voices. 6:55

5. Drums and rattles. 6.37

6. Kono, the sacred bird of the Bambaras (percussion and female Voices) 1:48

##### D. NIGER

7. Tiv Music (oboe and percussion) 4:13

8. WURUKADUWAI 3:17

##### E. UPPER VOLTA

9. Xylophone, drums, rattles, whistle and voices. 6:53

##### F. SENEGAL

10. Peuls Dance 2:03

##### G. LIBERIA

11. Acrobatic Dance of the Youths 1:53

12. From Dance of the Seasons

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## Lyrichord Discs Inc.

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: [nick@lyrichord.com](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://www.lyrichord.com)

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