



(LYRCD 7345)

AFRICA, NEW YORK

Drum Masterpieces Ladj Camara, Master Drummer

LADJI CAMARA:

Ladji Camara was born in 1923 in Norasuba, Guinee. He is of the Malinke Tribe and speaks the Malinke language. He is Moslem. His grand uncle on his mother's side had a prophetic dream and told Ladji's father that his third born child would be a son and to prepare a drum for him before his birth. Ladji began playing drums by himself at the age of 2 1/2, and by the age of six was participating in village musical activity as one of the lead drummers.

Ladji began traveling in 1946 when he went to live in the Republique du Mali where he pursued both farming and drumming. In 1953 he had the opportunity to join the 1st Les Ballets Africains de Guinee and he traveled all over the world with them for ten years. For one year, in 1962, he came to California expressly to work with Katherine Dunham, an early modern choreographer who did research in the West Indies and South American on African cults.

Ladji joined the Nigerian drummer Olatunji in 1963 and traveled with his group for seven years. In 1970, Ladji Camara opened his own school and began his own dance company - LADJI CAMARA AFRICAN DANCE STUDIO, located at 1753 Boston Road in the Bronx.

Ladji has also performed with Nina Simone in Jamaica in 1972, Alvin Ailey in 1974, and did a tour of Japan in 1976 with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.

I first saw Ladji perform in 1975 when Milford Graves presented him on a joint program at Loeb Student Center of N.Y.U. He was one of the featured drummers in a “Festival of Drums” concert, which I produced in 1979 in association with Theatre of Latin America, and also in 1979 he was featured on a program of percussion music at the Julliard School of Music at Lincoln Center during a performance for the annual meeting of the Percussive Arts Society.

Ladji has become an important cultural resource for New York City. His lack of commercialism made him readily available to the black community seeking closer ties with traditional African culture. All of the musicians on this record are black Americans with the exception of Ladji, who has also brought an African/American musical experience out of the black community into the community at large, appearing in a broad variety of programs in many diverse locations in the city. In addition to being available for performances in universities, festivals, concerts, he also maintains his studio where he teaches African music and dance, as well as giving workshops at other locations. The selections on this record were recorded for a WBAI Free Music Store, which I produced in November 1975. Ira Weitzman was the Executive Producer of the series. The engineer was David Rapkin. It was recorded in the wonderful old Studio C when WBAI was located on east 62nd Street.

TRACKS:

1 - LAMBAN - Pre-circumcision ritual music. Both boys and girls are circumcised before the age of 12. There is a mass circumcision every four years. This is a song to the mothers of eligible children to call them to begin preparations for the circumcision rites. Beginning three months before the circumcision, there is dancing and other festivities every evening. The Noumoun performs the circumcision. (17:47)

2 - SAA – (Traditional) the title of this song means ‘snake’. This is a social dance for two close girlfriends who seem to be like twins because of their closeness. The dance they do resembles the movements of a snake. (6:42)

3 - KOMA means fetish and this is a woman’s secret society. This dance takes place once a year only. The women dance nude covering their faces with masks, which are made to resemble them. No men are allowed to witness this dance, however the men carve these masks for the women ornamented with beads and raffia. The dance is performed for a full day during the month of January. This song is to the God Koma, a woman’s fetish that oversees women’s affairs. (19:51)

4 - NOROULE is a protest song of slavery during the period of French colonialism in Guinee. After independence of Guinee this song became a folk song and is now performed in the cities by the young people. The words say: Please make me free. Take off these shackles. (3:54)

CREDITS:

This record is dedicated to Ladji Camara's children who live in Senegal with their mother: Fanyuma Mamadi Camara, Mai Maouna Camara, and Sekou Nfaly Camara.

Notes by Ladji Camara (as told to Verna Gillis)

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Recorded in New York City



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