



(LYRCD 7419)

LES BALLETS AFRICAINS DE PAPA LADJI CAMARA

Guinea was part of the great empire of Mali, which dominated most of the western Sudan and the Sahara from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. The Malinke of Guinea are the descendants of these illustrious rulers. The Malinke (or Mandingo), Fula and Susu constitute about three quarters of Guinea's population. All three groups are predominantly Muslim, and perhaps it is that unity of common religion that has contributed to the relative social harmony that these tribes enjoy together. The musical traditions of the Mandingo and Fula, particularly in regards to kora playing, are among the richest and most influential in West Africa. It is into this wealth of tradition that Ladi Camara was born.

"Papa" Ladi Camara was born in 1923 in Norasuba, Guinea. He is a Malinke tribesman and speaks the Malinke language. Ladi began playing drums by himself at the age of two and a half years, and by the age of six was participating in village musical activity as one of the lead drummers.

Ladi began traveling in 1946 when he went to live in the Republic of Mali where he pursued both farming and drumming. In 1953 he had the opportunity to join the first Les Ballets Africains de Guinée and he toured the world with them for ten years. Ladi then joined the world famous Nigerian drummer Olatunji in 1963, and performed with his group for seven years. Ladi 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.

Settling in New York City, Ladji Camara opened his own studio/school and began his own dance company – LADJI CAMARA AFRICAN DANCE STUDIO. The school's first location was in the Bronx, but it then moved to Lower Manhattan. Ladji's classes became something of an institution in New York, teaching drummer, musicians and dancers, from all backgrounds in the traditional rhythms, techniques and styles that he has maintained and performed his whole life.

For this recording, Papa Ladji has formed a unique and diverse ensemble of musicians and singers from his own country, from Mali, Gambia, Senegal and the United States. Two duets with the great Mandinka Griot Kora player and singer, Salieu Suso (see Lyrichord's LYRCD 7418, Griot - Salieu Suso), are featured, as well as the intricate Balaphon stylings of Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura.

The arresting and thoroughly traditional backup vocals are by three female Malinese singers, Lansana Kouyate, N'Mah Bangoura and Aiba Bangoura. Tom Rossi, a gifted young American clarinetist, performs a haunting duet improvisation with Papa Ladji, entitled "Sansou Ba," a love story-song between a man and a supernatural being.

In West Africa tribal culture, the story-song is one of the most important tools of social and moral education. The process of teaching through song from the elder to youth is vital to the enculturation and maturing process of the younger generation. The stories in these songs are the same ones that Ladji heard as a youth, and has continued to hear and repeat throughout his life. The descriptions of the stories were translated from Malinke by Mohamed Baro, as told to him by Ladji.

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TRACKS

1. LADJI MANAMA – 7:15

"...A beautiful jewelry...a beautiful dress...a beautiful flower. That Ladji, always a new man (Manama). Everything you love is Ladji Manama."

(Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura – Balaphon, Lansana Kouyate – Sangba, Papa Ladji – Jimbe, N'Mah Bangoura, Aiba Bangoura, Papa Ladji, Vocals)

2. DJO TE GBALA – 6:42

This song is a celebration of human sexuality. No matter what happens, men and women will always love each other. In the tradition of the people, women have always been fishing experts. This song is a boost to their morale and energy. In Malinke language in Guinea West Africa "coomon" means fishing.

(Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura – Balaphon, Lansana Kouyate – sangba, Papa Ladji – jimbe, N'Mah Bangoura, Aiba Bangoura and Papa Ladji – vocals)

3. KELE MAGNY – 10:39

“Kele” the ware is senseless “Magny” – No matter what the cause, fighting between brothers or neighbors, or was between countries of nations does not make sense.

4. COURANKO SAYON – 7:01

Sayon is a young man from a race called Couranko in Savana (Republic of Guinea). He left his village, his friends and his family to mine gold. He was going to realize his lifelong dream and make his fortune. His journey kept him away from his village for a long time and all in his village missed him. This song is a tribute and expression of love to him.

(Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura – Balaphon, Lansana Kouyate- Sangba, Papa Ladjji – jimbe, N’Mah Bangoura, Aiba Bangoura, Papa Ladjji, Vocals)

5. DAN MONSON – 6:43

This is a song about a chief warrior Dan Monson who is from the Bambara race in the Republic of Mali. Dan Monson lives in the city of Segou. In this empire the chief philosophy is...”do not take a woman you have not married,” and “...only consider yourself a parent of a child if you are his or her biological parent.”

(Papa Ladjji - vocals & balaphon, Salieu Suso – vocals and kora)

6. TOUBA KA – 6:48

Touba Ka literally means “a man from Touba.” He is the symbol of trust and he loves to travel. Anytime he arrives in a village it is an occasion to celebrate. But the village members are also eager to know when the Touba Ba will leave so that they can give him messages to bring to family members living far away.

(Lansana Kouyate – Sangba, Papa Ladjji – jimbe & vocals, Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura – Balaphon)

7. SANSOU BA – 8:28

This is a love story between a man and a different kind of being. It is a cry from a man to his lover beast Sansou Ba, “where are you Sansou Ba? Come to me my love!”

(Papa Ladjji – jimbe & vocals, Lansana Kouyate – sangba, Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura – balaphon & ensemble)

8. Koumbe - 7:13

This is a dance from Senegal called “Wooloffo” that the Maninka young men and women enjoy every night in the moonlight. The dance is a twist, a body twist from head to feet.

(Papa Ladjji – Jimbe & vocals, Lansana Kouyate – Sangba, Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura – Balaphon, & ensemble)

FAMILY LIST:

Fanyuma Camara

Bakary Sidiki Camara

Sekou N’Faly Camara

Seydina Oumar Camara

Aminata Camara

Mai'Mouna Camara
Gnouma Koroma Camara
Lansana Kouyate
N'Mah Bangoura
Aiba Bangoura
Tom Rossi
Abdoulaye Epizo Bangoura
Salieu Suso

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