



(LYRCD 7445)

LE MARIJA MUSIC OF MADAGAR

GAMANA (Gasy Manambara)

Madagascar is an enchanting land off the South-East Coast of Africa. Though part of the African continent, Madagascar is unlike any other country in the world. This is due to the island's isolation: separated from the mainland of Africa hundreds of millions of years ago, life on Madagascar was free to evolve in its own unique way. It is now home to many endemic species of flora and fauna. Its people are a mélange of African, Arabic, Malaysian, and Indian peoples. Throughout time they have united to form a distinct Malagasy society and culture, remarkable for its uniformity of one language (Malagasy) spoken all across the country. In history, Madagascar has been a stopping place for many travelers, including traders, explorers and pirates, and is considered beautiful and exotic by admirers around the world.

In 1794, the great Malagasy king Andrianampoinimerina united the then warring tribes of the country to form a single Malagasy kingdom. Madagascar was invaded by France in 1883. After twelve years of resistance, Madagascar was made a French colony in 1895. When Charles de Gaulle was elected president of France in 1959 he immediately gave Madagascar its independence. After some political turbulence, the new Malagasy Republic currently strives to maintain a multi-party democracy under Dr. Albert Zafy, but remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

Another problem threatening the Malagasy way of life is environmental decay. Currently suffering massive deforestation due to, among other things, rice farming (Malaysian ancestors passed on rice as a major staple of the Malagasy diet.) Madagascar's natural resources are threatened, and many unique species of plant and wildlife have already gone extinct, including several species of lemur, and a giant flightless bird called the Aepyornis, fabled to exceed the African ostrich in size and grandeur.

Madagascar's hardships are represented in her music. Gamana's traditional songs mourn for the dying land, they sing of heat and hunger. They also sing of Zanahary (the Malagasy god, most often the same as the Christian God), love and friendship – things the people of Madagascar cherish and draw strength from in the face of a dismal outlook.

I met the members of GAMANA in 1995 on a visit to Madagascar. When I became friends with Rola, Mbala, and Tiana, I saw their dedication to their music and their talent as musicians. I was immediately drawn to the Malagasy sound, and pledged to let them be heard by all who would listen. This is my tribute.

– G.S. Cram-Drach.

TRACKS

1. Volatiana (Always Alert) - 3:34

Written by Rola, arranged by Gamana

Money (Vola) has a harmful and disturbing effect on people. Many would do anything for money, but the Malgasy speak and sing of friendship (fihavanana) for, unlike money it exists now, and will exist forever.

2. Jangoany - 5:32

Written and arranged by Rola

This guitar piece symbolizes a long mountain to the west of Antananarivo called Bongolava. It tells the story of a hard life, where people must not give in to obstacles. If they unite, they will be strong as stone.

3. NY Hafaliana - 3:53

Written by Rola, arranged by Gamana

Like the sun, the moon, the air, we share happiness in Zanahary (God). We can also be happy during life. Sometimes man cannot resist happiness, and sometimes a joy that is too great becomes madness.

4. Rakotozafy - 4:43

Written by Mbala, arranged by Gamana

This is a song in homage to the virtuoso player of Valiha Gasy (a bamboo zither). He is called Rakotozafy. This is the only song dedicated to the legendary man.

5. Le Marija - 5:09

Written by Rola, arranged by Gamana

A circumcision song sung to wish strength, wisdom, and intelligence to a young boy. The song also symbolizes a weapon protecting our struggling country. Madagascar must always fight against extreme poverty and environmental decay. We use the Marija like a gun, destroying the bad spirits of negativity.

6. Tromakitrake - 3:45

Written by Mbala, arranged by Gamana

The south of Madagascar is the land of the Zebus (Malagasy cattle), and extreme heat. The peasants there want to work but there is not enough water. The people of the south never stop asking God for water.

7. Vanofotsy (Big Albucanus) - 5:05

Written and arranged by Rola

It is a story of a bird that does not go far, but always catches the prey he wants. It is a life of no nobility but a lot of money.

8. Ingahibe Masonandro (The Sun) - 3:40

Written and arranged by Rola

The sun created unforgettable moments of beauty, most strikingly the sunset. Malagasy people's customs and habits add even more beauty and meaning to the colors that finish the day. The sun evokes nostalgic memories of those far from the land of their ancestors.

9. Manatara - 4:26

Written by Mbala, arranged by Gamana

In Madagascar, there are many taboos (fady). When visiting a new village, it is necessary to ask the people there about all that is forbidden. Here, Manatara is a small lake that is attractive to tourists but dangerous because of crocodiles.

10. Nay Te Aombe - 3:34

Written and arranged by Mbala

In the south, cattle are considered the greatest riches. They represent the sacred-ness of God and the power of man. To get married... a man must have many zebus.

11. Pangalana (Roland) - 4:16

Written by Rola, arranged by Gamana

A great river of the East coast of Madagascar. The landscape is magnificent. Nature smiles on it. One must thank God, its creator, and be part of it; laugh, smile, love and share.

12. Vaovao Tsara (Good News) - 3:52

It's a memory, a great memory when one has received good news of love and success.

GAMANA ARE:

Rasolofonirina Denis Roland (Rola)

GAMANA founder.

Rola studies musical expressions that have nearly been lost in history: upon the creation of GAMANA in 1993, Rola “visited every corner of Madagascar in search of music and instrumentation to form a clear and deep understanding of traditional Malagasy culture,” (Madagascar Tribune, 2/96). In addition to leading GAMANA, Rola has played percussion, flute, or guitar, composed, or sung with the following Malagasy groups: TELOZORO, RAJERY, SAMOELA, and LEGO. Most recently Rola is the composer for the dance sensation KILA, performing in Madagascar.

Miatrembala (Mbala)

A specialist of the Valiha marovany and a singer of songs of the South, Mbala also plays the three stringed Antandroy violin. An author and composer and a founding member of the group GAMANA. Mbala has traveled very far away from his country performing the vahila marovany in Europe and the isles around Madagascar giving concerts under the name “The Star of the South.” According to him: “I did not choose music, it chose me.”

Ramarokoto Tiana (Tiana)

Tiana is a musician, singer, dancer and composer who is known throughout Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo. In addition to teaching music and dance, Tiana has been performing professionally since 1986 with the following groups: RAKOTO FRAH, RAJERY, AKOM-BALITA, and ROSSY. He has also been a musician for the Malagasy dance sensation KILA. Currently Tiana is working with SAMOELA and RARY, and he plays a vital role in the group GAMANA.

Rajoroarivony Manitra (Baby)

Bassist and percussionist of the group. A self made man who went through many levels in his career from jazz to rock fusion and beyond. He is now a very courageous bass player and percussionist of GAMANA. He also expresses his heritage in his music. Maitra sings as well and holds the bass part in Volatiana, Le Marija, and NY Hafaliana. His enthusiasm and ambition have been an invaluable asset to the creation of this recording.

GUEST ARTISTS:

R. Serge (guest artist)

Tsivitsoke (guest artist)

THE INSTRUMENTS:

Raloba: Raloba means funeral song in the North and East regions of Madagascar. It is also used in those around the Sakalava people. It is on Track 1.

Katrabe: A rattle that sounds similar to a murmuring stream. It can be heard on Tracks 4 - 12.

Kahiambarambo: This kind of percussion is used in the South-East of Madagascar. Kahiamba is a rattle but using clumps of grass instead of grains.

Tskadraha: Bamboo scrape as heard on Track 5.

Patrakala: Bamboo rainstick heard on Tracks 9 – 12.

Kaboasa: A guitar-like stringed instrument that typically but not always has a very unusual fretting system and is turned to a major triad. Used on Track 5.

Jeju Lava: “Musical arc” used among the tribes of the East coast and the South of Madagascar: it has a very soft sound and is played on Track 3.

Gitara: “Guitar” tuned two different ways: (E-B-G-D-G-D) (E-B-G-D-G-C). The Gitara is played on Tracks 2, 5 and 7.

Marovany: Used among the Antandroy and the Setsimisaraka people (North and East coasts). It is a resonant drum of wooden planks in the shape of a suitcase, with strings spread across and down the drum. This instrument is played on Tracks 4, 6 and 10.

Jejuvatoavo: Sitar on a stick, typical of the High Plain (Central Madagascar) and has migrated towards the mid-South to the Betsileo area. Played with both hands, it has seven cords and is on Track 9.

Lokangatandroy: Violin used by the Antandroy in Southern Madagascar. The three strings are usually tuned to different keys: Tonic, Minor Third, and A Fifth. Heard on Track 9.

Bolobolo Tavo: A flute made with a Bolobolo calabash. Bolobolo means soft as cotton.

Tavo: Calabash. Made into a rare flute, unique to Madagascar and heard on Track 9.

Aponga: “The Drums” – Djembe, and a new “female drum called N’ampela that was invented by Rola and played on Tracks 1,3,6, 8, and 9.

THANK YOU

I thank all of you who helped us in the making of this album “Le Marija.” Thanks to Miasy Raolison for his technical talents in the studio. Thank you Serge and Tsivitsoke for your good will and friendship. Special thanks to Manitra Rajoro.

Gudrun-Cra-Drach (Lyricord Discs) is the one I will never forget as she has so much courage in her heart.

CREDITS

Le Marija was recorded and mixed at Nada Studio, Antananarivo, Madagascar, June 1998.

Produced by G.S. Cram-Drach

Executive Producer, Nick Fritsch

Digital Mastering, Vivian Stoll

Booklet and cover design, G.S. Cram-Drach

Notes written by ROLA

Notes translated by Nouzha Khadri

Photos taken by GAMANA and G.S. Cram-Drach



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 Web: www.lyrichord.com

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