

African DRUM



The Beat of Music Africa

July 2010

It's Afrofest time!

- **Amazing Music!**
- **Fantastic Food!**
- **Africa's World Cup!**

You have been waiting a long time, but at last, the best weekend of the year is here: **Afrofest!** Music Africa is once again pleased to bring you a fantastic line up, featuring both stellar performances and intimate musical workshops.

With main-stage performers The Occidental Brothers Dance Band International featuring Samba Mapangala, and 'Zimbabwe's Rebel Woman' Chiwoniso, along with JP Buse (Congo), French-Cameroonian singer Muna Mingole, Masaisai (Zimbabwe), Waleed Abdulhamid Kush (Sudan), Mohamed Diaby & Manding Foli Kan Don (Guinea), Doody Le Tigre (Haiti), Kae Sun (Ghana), Dramane Kone (Mali), Nati Haile (Ethiopia), Jabulani (South Africa) and Soul Influence, Afrofest's musical line-up is as powerful as ever.

Afrofest is a showcase of the richness and diversity of African culture. It is an event of song, dance, drumming and theatre, featuring world-renowned African music acts as well as dozens of highly-rated African musical groups based in Canada. With a bustling African marketplace, food and craft vendors, artistic displays, a Children's Village, a drum stage, music and dance workshops, and organized fun and educational activities for youth and children.

Discover Africa in the heart of Toronto!

Mainstage Schedule

SATURDAY JULY 10

- 1:00 Isaac Akrong and the African Dance Ensemble
- 2:00 Masaisai
- 3:15 Mohamed Diaby & Manding Foli Kan Don
- 4:15 Waleed Abdulhamid Kush
- 5:30 Doody Le Tigre
- 7:00 Dramane Kone
- 8:40 JP Buse

SUNDAY JULY 11

- 1:00 Muhtadi and the World Drummers
- 2:00 Soul Influence
- 3:00 Kae Sun
- 4:15 Nati Haile
- 5:30 Muna Mingole
- 7:00 Chiwoniso
- 8:50 Occidental Brothers Dance Band International with Samba Mapangala

THE NEW FACE OF AFROFEST

AFROFEST



by Marwan Kassay

The newly acquired Africa design adopted by Music Africa is an insignia of creativity, identity, and shared experiences. Africa is more than gorgeous, colourful clothing and delicious cuisine; it is a land of narration, through oral transmission and other cultural artifacts including masks. These aspects have been captured by Barbara Klunder, award-winning graphic designer and illustrator who has designed for virtually every big festival and cultural institution in the city.

The design was specially commissioned to celebrate Africa's first World Cup and the rich diversity of African musical forms. It skillfully and playfully incorporates these various elements: the range of African music expressed through the indigenous and modern instruments like djembe, balafon, kalimba, oud, udu, gourd rattle, banjo, and guitar among others scattered throughout the map of Africa; a soccer ball strategically placed inside South Africa, the host of this tournament; the vuvuzela-shaped horn instrument connecting music and sports as social and community-gathering events.

Stunning t-shirts with this design will be available at Afrofest for \$15, and \$20 for a glow-in-the-dark version.

Waleed Abdulhamid tells it like it is

Few Afrofest musicians come to the stage with as diverse a set of accomplishments and talents as Waleed Abdulhamid. Already known for his compositions for film (Whiskey Echo, 2005), Abdulhamid has just won an Award of Excellence for his work on a new film called "Art of Work" which was recently featured at this year's Luminato Festival. "I do a lot of music for film," says Abdulhamid, "I've also worked as a consultant for films for the Discovery Channel and the History Channel."

In addition to working in a variety of media, Abdulhamid is renowned as a multi-talented musician, playing guitar, harmonica, marimba, flute, bass, drums and in fact almost any percussion instrument you can think of - one suspects it would be easier to compile a list of instruments he doesn't play.

Not content to simply be an accomplished performer himself, Abdulhamid is well-known within music circles for developing the talent he finds around him - he has been a long-time collaborator with Sudanese singer Ruth Mathiang, is a resident artist at the Young Centre for Performing Arts, teaches "World of Music" at the University of Toronto, has taught in several Toronto high schools, and facilitates workshops in music schools. In addition to all the above, he is now producing Fatima, a half-German, half-Sudanese singer/actor who operates out of New York, and is considered something of a rising star.

So who is this wunderkind? Waleed Abdulhamid was born in Sudan in 1968, and was performing on a weekly children's television show there at the age of six. As a young man he played in many communities across his country, and toured Egypt, Syria, Kuwait and the Emirates. After the obligatory time spent touring and recording in Europe, he immigrated to Canada in 1992 and quickly made a name for himself. He was a founding member of several now-classic afro-Canadian bands, including Tikisa, Radio Nomad, Kings of Kush, and Balimbo.

And all this time Abdulhamid has grounded his life and art firmly in reality. His songs reflect what he sees. "I'm influenced by the environment around me," says Abdulhamid, "Society, my family, my sisters, my daughter, my wife... all are major influences. Right now I'm trying to write something about the leaking oil in the Gulf of Mexico." He is not likely to run out of song material any-



Photo: Jack David Savage / images in perspective

time soon in that case. "Most of my stuff comes from the reality I see," he says with a smile, "I am almost a reporter."

Fuelled by a passionate concern for justice and human rights, he has been something of an activist for some time now. In February 2003 he organized a 100-drummer contingent to march in the Toronto setting of the great world-wide antiwar protest against the looming invasion of Iraq. He has also written about the plight of immigrants leaving Africa for what he calls "the fantasy" of a dream life in Europe, and the kind of racial profiling that led to him suddenly finding himself surrounded by a dozen police cars while innocently strolling down Queen Street one night recently.

One of his biggest concerns is the ongoing AIDS crisis both here in Canada and around the world. He recently directed a short film called "Let's Find a Way - An AIDS Anthem," featuring a dozen musicians working together to record his song of the same name (the film can be viewed at cultureunplugged.com).

As for Afrofest 2010, it makes a lot of sense for such an engaged musician to be performing in the aftermath of Toronto's G20 civil rights debacle. Scheduled to appear on the Main Stage at 4:00 on Saturday July 10, Abdulhamid promises "I am going to bring a really solid band. Music is a universal language. We try to bring rhythm to our protests, and it's really peaceful. We talk about conflict, about the struggle for food. Art is the best way to fight any regime." At Afrofest, be prepared to get down and stand up. Waleed Abdulhamid keeps showing us how it's done.

Having our cake and eating it too

You don't have to choose between Afrofest and the World Cup final!



The final of the World Cup of Football, this year for the first time being hosted by an African nation, is on the same day as Sunday's AFROFEST.

Ghana may be out, but African eyes are still on the World Cup, and there's no need to miss any of the action. Two large screens will be showing the final game in our beer garden. Music Africa thanks media co-partners CBC Radio 99.1 for endorsing the broadcast of the final live in Queen's Park. Follow all the World Cup action on CBC 99.1 FM, your African World Cup station in Toronto.

On the line with Masaisai

Afro-Zim combo aims to fuse tradition with modernity

by Marwan Kassay

Masaisai music is a perfect blend of Afro-Zim mbira, chimurenga, traditional and modern music. You could spend all day embraced within their "energetic vortex and tantalizing melody," a classification they prefer over all others. As soon as you hear their creative expression via the mbira (also known as the kalimba or thumb piano) and modern instruments, they will spin you 180 degrees and you will find yourself taken from a traditional African village to a jiving African Motown.

Labelling Masaisai an African band is safe, albeit lazy description. For Masaisai is much more; composed with six musicians from Zimbabwe and one Canadian, they display traditional music and dance from Zimbabwe with dazzling conviction, talent, energy and contemporary flare.

"In some ways it sort of had to be that way to create the right sound," says Larry Lewis, the lead guitar in Masaisai. "It is so grounded in tradition, yet when we translate it to electric, with a drum kit and electric guitar it becomes something else"

Masaisai formed in Toronto in 2007 to get involved in the town's music scene and expose the diverse, yet still in some ways culturally limited scene of Toronto to the fusion of traditional and contemporary Zim music.

"Music is an integral part in shaping our culture. We used to be taught stories that teach about life through music." say Tichaona (Tich) Maredza, percussionist, guitarist and lead vocal in Masaisai. "In gatherings music would be played; congregations like funerals, where music would be played to comfort one another."

Tich says that musical instruments, in particular the mbiras, in Zimbabwe is used to send messages of all sorts, from parental wedding warnings, to recount of Diaspora experiences, to spiritual callings or simply to exhort listeners to just "have fun."



Photo: Jack David Savage / images in perspective

Back: Larry Lewis Middle row: Tichaona Maredzam, Evelyn Mkwedeya, Memory Makuri, Tichaona Gombiro Front row: Rainos Mutamba, Gordin Mapika

"The mbira is a very spiritual instrument" says Evelyn Mukwedeya, one of the mbira players in Masaisai. "When we hold ceremonies to call onto the ancestor, such as rain making ceremonies and the like, mbira is the central instrument played"

Playing the mbira is a tradition that goes back to the misty origins of musical culture in Africa. A typical mbira consists of between 22 and 28 keys constructed from hot or cold forged metal affixed to a hardwood.

"Thomas Mapfumo (Zimbabwe's biggest musical star) started out as a Rhythm and Blues singer," says Larry. "And one of the things he did was exercising the traditional sounds of the mbira and singing Zimbabwe music. As if to say, yes it is not just music from the west that has value; our own music has value. Just by doing that, there is something intrinsically political about it."

Masaisai songs mix confidence with coyness. On stage you can see and hear the beauty in their art as the

band fuses the different musical traditions. Irrespective to the wonderful dancers, you can see songs from the likes of Zim music star Oliver Mtukudzi played with integrity, respect and love; a musical fortress of Zimbabwe artistic expression.

"A major influence for the style of music the band plays is Thomas Mapfumo because he is the pioneer of fusing traditional music with modern instruments. As a composer I also look to Oliver Mtukudzi for inspiration" says Tich.

In Toronto, Masaisai has just completed a gig at the Harbourfront Centre for Canada Day, and will be gracing the Main Stage at AfroFest on Saturday July 10 at 2:00. They will be performing alongside many other great artists. "We promise the people of Toronto to be at our best" says Tich with a grin. "We'll give them a real taste of Zimbabwe."

Marwan Kassay is a Music Africa-Afrofest Youth Intern in partnership with the Sesheme Foundation.

Bana y' Afrique continues the festivities!

Africa New Music presents Toronto's 11th annual **Bana Y'Afrique Festival**, a celebration of African music and culture, FREE on **July 24th & 25th at Metro Hall Square**.

Highlights include: **M'biliala Bel** – a Congolese soukous singer, known as the Queen of Congolese rumba. **Ethio Stars Band** – playing popular Ethiopian songs from the 1960's to the

current sounds heard today. **Afrafranto** – performing authentic acoustic palm wine style music from Ghana. **Donné Roberts** – this Toronto based guitarist has refined popular Malagasy sounds in his repertoire adding components such as blues, rock, aboriginal chants and contemporary African guitar.

Plus many more! Check www.africanewmusic.org for details.

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