



"Warriors of Circumstance"- The Women Master Drummers of Guinea

How does one save traditional African rhythms from being lost in modernity? How does one preserve the use of the rhythms in traditional ceremonies and cultural events? How does one keep alive the memories of the famous Guinean djembe players and their legacies as master drummers? How does one break through taboos stretching back thousands of years that prevent women from playing the djembe in Guinea? How is it possible to assure the independent income of young women, mothers and housewives struggling daily against poverty? How is it possible to empower women to speak out in an environment where women and children should listen and obey? How can Africa move beyond the pervasive images that are holdovers of colonization -- the caricature of a 'primitive native beating on a drum like a savage?'

For the most part, people who discover the djembe have little or no understanding of the cultural richness, or social and political complexity that define the history of the African continent. Few know that African rhythms are evidence of a rich musical heritage that recounts the history of the region, its people and their culture. Those who simply experience the rhythms on a physical, sensory level remain unaware of the extraordinary artistic talents of African musicians and the complexity of their polyrhythmic compositions. Thus, it is extremely important to teach the rhythms to women. Women, as mothers and primary caregivers, have the ultimate responsibility of educating their children. It is the job of women in Sub-saharan Africa to teach

values and cultural traditions and to ready the children for adult life.

Amazones is a daring response to archaic traditions. Never before have women pursued careers as djembe players in Guinea. They are participants in the development of a lucrative art-form capable of supporting women. Each 'Amazone' has chosen to break free of her financially precarious lifestyle imposed upon her by society. In choosing to become a djembe-player, each of these women shows her desire to control her destiny, support her children and preserve her cultural heritage by passing it on to the next generation.

Amazones marks the beginning of a brave new adventure, a socio-cultural and economic departure from tradition. Each Amazone woman is fired by a fervent determination to attain the level of the great djembefolas and to live by the sweat of their own brows. The name 'Amazones,' recalls the courage of the intrepid warrior-women of the ancient kingdom of Dahomey (now called Benin). Equally daring is their goal to 'demystify' the djembe, an instrument historically reserved for male players. With 'Amazones' the old preconceptions melt away and what is left is a powerful, energetic and grandiose spectacle, which sends to the world its message of peace and optimism.

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