



VINCENT FOURNIER/UA

DRUM LINE

Percussionist Didi Keita followed his destiny and now teaches drumming in Paris and Guinea, imparting not just the rhythms but their stories and meaning

I grew up in Conakry, Guinea, my mother Senegalese and my father Guinean. Guinea is a very musical country and when I was about six years old I started playing around on metal boxes and various objects. When I was 12 I started learning from master Lansana Dioubaté and soon knew that music was my destiny. He initiated me to the djembé and everything I do today is thanks to him.

Lansana was from a family of artists. In contrast, I was the first musician in my family. I wasn't meant to be a musician with the name Keita, and my father wasn't happy with my decision. Luckily my mother encouraged me to follow my passion. Without her I would now probably be in an office somewhere, not following my true path.

When I was 20, music became my profession. I worked with the

group Kaloum Loele, and then with the National Theatre, playing doundou, gongoma and bolon. I founded a workshop and began making instruments by day, from 8am to 5pm, and rehearsing and playing music at night.

I had the chance to come to France in 2003 with my djembé. Since then I've been back and forth participating in and organising festivals, workshops and concerts in both countries, as well as in other places around the world.

RHYTHM IN CONTEXT

Music is my purpose and I love teaching it. But I'm not just teaching the rhythms; I teach the stories behind the rhythms and their meanings. My master taught me this: Every rhythm has its story and significance. If you dance you need to know why you dance, or if you cook it's because you're hungry; it has a purpose. Rhythm is like that; it is used for a specific occasion.

I have received warm hospitality in France and learned French culture, and so one of my greatest pleasures is to introduce my international students to Guinea. I organise a few workshops in Dubréka each year, not for my commercial gain but because sharing my culture makes me extremely happy. The students discover local musicians and dancers as well as the beaches, the food and the people. They begin to understand the rhythms in context.

Today I join my fellow Guinean artists to present our culture to the world. We're not at all government-funded so we mostly finance and produce ourselves. I'll continue to push my projects as long as I can.

I would love to become an ambassador for Guinean artists. My dream is to have funded music and dance schools, rehearsal spaces, festivals and more workshops and concerts in Guinea to nourish and create work for all the talent that exists. God willing, I will be able to help create more opportunities. ●

Interview by **Ruby Boukabou**