See also *The Jenbe Realbook Vol. 2* a book of music notation closely corresponding to this CD. It contains the complete transcriptions of all its tracks.

Read more about the musicians and music presented here in Rainer Polak’s ethnomusicological study of traditional celebration music in Bamako: *Festmusik als Arbeits, Trommeln als Beruf* (Reimer Verlag, Berlin 2004).

**The editor**

Dr. Rainer Polak studied social anthropology, African linguistics, Bambara language, and History of Africa from 1988 to 1996 at Bayreuth University (Germany), and jenbe music performance from 1991 until today in Bamako (Mali). All of his studies and work in Bamako were accomplished with the help of the musically outstanding, yet rather locally and traditionally minded drummers whose playing is presented on this CD. Polak has worked as a professional jenbe player in Bamako for one year in 1997/98, performing at well over a hundred traditional weddings, spirit possession dances and other celebrations on the basis of being hired by the late Jaraba Jakite, most of the times, and occasionally by the late Yamaa Dumbia, by Jeil Madji Kuyate, and by Drissa Kone.

The ethnomusicological book he wrote on that experience earned him a doctorate and won the academic prize of the German African Studies Association in 2003/04. Polak ranks as an outstanding jenbe soloist in Germany. As a teacher he has specialized in giving focussed classes on micro-timing, and master-classes in jenbe solo performance. Polak wants to dedicate this CD to the musicians: May their work find customers, promotion and respect, aka k’an dëmë.
The ensemble

This CD presents masters of the jenbe in duet performances with an accompanying bass drummer – one jenbe, one dunun, no bells. Playing in this, the smallest version of a jenbe drum ensemble, was typical for the celebration music style of Bamako in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s. Today, trio, quartet, and even larger ensembles are the rule. The Bamako style has changed under the influence of ballet music, the playing styles of Conakry and Abidjan, and the international jenbe scene based in the rich West. The recordings featured here represent an aesthetic ideal of Malian jenbe music, as crystallized in its capital Bamako after independence. This ideal has become fairly classical by now.

Only mature musicians can master duet playing, creating its typical captivating musical density, balancing the tension between flow and transition, between communal groove and individual expression, between tradition and improvisation, between form and trance. The “challenge of the void” that duet playing presents to many holds no threat for the drummers of Baladan, because their playing is based on decades of experience as performers in this kind of ensemble. Fabulously sure of their instruments, guided by close communication even in the boldest passages, the void represents space they enjoy filling with sound.

The reduced line-up also has the advantage of allowing very clear and transparent sonic reproduction. Thus, the listener not only can perceive the fundamental musical structures, but also experience the high art of drumming, the “talking of the drum”, in its finest rhythmical nuances and timbral shades.

The musicians

Jeli Madi Kuyate was born in approximately 1949 in Sagle, a village near the town of Sibi, in the Manding mountains, some 50 km southwest of Bamako. When he was twelve years old, Kuyate went to Bamako on his own to seek paid labor. It was there that he discovered that one could earn money by playing the jenbe – an idea completely alien to village drummers at the time (and even quite new to musicians in the urban centers). In the 1960s, the enourmous popularity the jenbe drum enjoys today had just begun to emerge. At that time, skilled drummers were scarce in the city and those who played well had the chance to earn a good deal. So Kuyate switched from washing clothes and driving cargo donkey carts to playing the jenbe professionally. But this decision caused him a lot of problems. Jenbe players had very poor reputations – they were considered lazy, unintelligent good-for-nothings – and Kuyate experienced severe and even violent conflicts with family elders who tried to force him to find more “respectable” work. In fact, many professional jenbe players went through similar trials at this time. Nevertheless, Kuyate made his way and, a student of Yamadu Dunbile’s, he was an early success. He was appointed to the National Ballet of Mali in 1966 and toured many countries, including France, China, Canada and Korea, in this position.

This state-sponsored troupe put on stage traditional genres of dance, music, and theatre to various parts of the country. The intention was to culturally represent the nation to the world, and to reinforce the process of nation building inside the country. In the 1970s, Kuyate was the first ballet player in Bamako who started a parallel career as a local celebration drummer performing at weddings, name-givings, circumcisions and other...
celebrations “in the streets.” The ballet drummers before him thought that they would be able to live on their status as “national artists.” Yet since the ’70s most national artists could no longer afford to ignore the more commercial sources of income from the markets of either private celebration, culture or pop music. By working in the ballet and on the streets at the same time, Kuyate contributed a lot to the artistic interaction and feedback between the more arranged and folkloristic artistic form of the ballets and the rougher, more lively local celebration culture. For instance, he became popular for introducing to the street celebration music some of the more sophisticated arrangement techniques which were developed in the ballet scene, and its preference for enlarged drum ensembles and mixing rhythms from diverse regional and ethnic backgrounds.

In the 1980s, Kuyate was the first jenbe player to be invited to join the Ensemble Instrumental, a department of the National Ballet that had been dominated exclusively by jell (griot) instruments such as kora, balafon, niken, and khasone dunun. But despite these professional successes, other drummers — for instance Drissa Kone’s — success in the private international jenbe market turned out to be by far the better prize than Kuyate’s lot of being a “national artist!” who earns little income, and whose fame diminished as the memory of the golden decade of African independence dwindled. Kuyate in the end turned out to be disappointed with life as a jenbe player, so let us thank him all the more for sharing:

jenbe, ni ce, ni mara, ale k’i’era.

His dexterous, elegant style of playing gives joyful life to selections 1-3, as if no hardship or negative thoughts ever affected his life, his mind, his spirit.

Drissa Kone was born in 1960 in Kourouba, a small town some 100 km south of Bamako. Kourouba is situated close to the towns of Kangaba and Kayla. It is assumed that Kangaba had been the capital of the great medieval empire of Mali (13th - 16th centuries), and Kayla is the seat of the most respected lineage of Kuyate jell (griots) who, to this day, hand down from mouth to ear the epic of Sunjata Kella, the hero-founder of this empire.

In 1973 Kone was sent to Bamako to begin an apprenticeship with the late grandseigneur of Bamako jenbe drumming, Yamadu Dunbila (1917-2002). At thirteen, Kone already knew how to play the jenbe and dunun and how to dance in his native village style. In Bamako, he became Dunbila’s most loyal apprentice, accompanying his master and patron for over 14 years without daring to buy his own jenbe, that is, without daring to work on his own. He also turned out to be Dunbila’s most successful apprentice: Kone has taught and performed all over Europe since the early 1990s (Austria, France, Spain, Netherlands, Germany), and is the most internationally-minded player featured on this CD. During the studio sessions presented here (tracks 4-14), however, he performed with the intention to honor his former master, Yamadu Dunbila, and the great style of jenbe playing he shaped in the 1970s. Let us thank Drissa Kone for keeping the tradition of grandmaster Dunbila:

karambôle, i ka fôl basigilen don, i hakil ka di, i ni baara kosâbbâ.

Jaraba Jakité was born in Kourouba, as Drissa Kone was, in approximately 1953. He moved to Bamako in 1984, simply to look for work, any work, as so incredibly many young people do, turning their backs on their villages, their families, on agricultural engagements and commitments, migrating to the city in hopes of earning a bit of money and finding some liberty. In the long run, the city didn’t provide the expected liberty; the need for money was greater than ever, and jobs became scarce. Jakité’s story was an ambiguous one, and in some ways typical of a larger, sad aspect of modern life in Africa: rural youth wants to get out of the country and goes to the city, urban wants to get out of the city and nobody feels at home.

Like many urban drummers of his generation, Jaraba Jakité took various jobs — washing dishes, harvesting cashcrops like tomatoes and peanuts — before he started to make a métier out of his childhood passion: playing that irresistible instrument called jenbe. Jakité’s drumming style was sensationally physical, often as nervous as a 100m sprinter jumping the gun, at times almost aggressive. He had the reputation of a great “worker of the drum,” and was the only one of the three jenbe players on this CD who never played anything but local celebration music; he didn’t speak a single word of French, he did not know how to read and write even his name, did not rehearse in ballets, did not shine on stages, did not teach foreigners. These were not worlds he was comfortable in or aspired to be part of.
The rhythms presented on this CD were chosen with two things in mind. First, a couple of rhythms that had not been part of "The Mali Tradition Vol.1" simply could not be ignored again because they are standards or classics in Bamako, the capital—and what is termed "Mali tradition" in the title of this CD (and often termed "Mali style"), or the like, elsewhere largely is Bamako style. Among the jenbe classics of Bamako put forth here count rhythms such as suku, dansa, manjani, garanke, sunun, or sanja. A second criterion of choice was the wish to reflect the diversity of Mali's various regions and peoples, and generational change that is so typical for an urban popular culture as is jenbe drum/dance celebration culture in Bamako and other cities of West Africa.

1. "sanja" is the jeli's (giote's) rhythm. It is also called jeli-dun ("griot's dance"). The jeli are a social group that specializes in oral history, political mediation, praise poetry and music. The status of a jeli is not acquired through professional activity, but inherited by birth. If your father is a jeli, you are born a jeli and will remain a jeli for the rest of your life. Traditionally, you can only marry a jeli, though this custom has lost its obligatory character in the cities of today. Like the numu, the jeli too, belong to a social strata called nyamakula. The nyamakula are socially situated between the free-born farmers and nobles (bokorun), and former serfs and captives (man) in the highly stratified and hierarchical Manding societies.

The rhythm sanja comes from Western Mali and originally was performed on the large jeli-dun (also called khasoke-dunun) bass drum ensemble. Jeli Madi Kuyate is a jeli by birth and plays his group-mates' rhythm with particular verve. The Kuyate have been the foremost jeli lineage ever since the legendary Sunjata Keita founded the medieval Mali empire in the 13th century.

2. "sunun" comes from Kaarta, a region in the north-western part of Mali where the Banana ethnic group had a powerful kingdom in the 17th and 18th centuries. Kaarta may be the northernmost region where the jenbe was played traditionally before it went global. The feeling of this rhythm is rather special and typical of the Mali style of jenbe playing.

3. "suku" (also called soil or fura) is definitely among the most important of all jenbe rhythms. Traditionally, it was performed in the context of circumcision and exilcation rites among the Maninka in Mali and Guinea. Today it has become extremely popular, and is played on almost any occasion that Maninka communities celebrate, both in Mali and in Guinea. In the countryside and in urban centers like Bamako or Conacry. In some parts of southern Mali, suku is often preceded by the rhythm fura, which also is featured on this CD. The version of suku presented here originates from the rural Maninka-populated area south of Bamako where Jeli Madi Kuyate, Dilsa kone and Jaraba jakate all come from. The performance of suku includes a change from the basic rhythm to a second part meant to cover the extremely fast tempo of solo dancing at the end of a suku performance. This second part of the piece sometimes is called farababa ("man from Farabab") since it was Madi "Farabab" Sylla, a legendary jenbe player of the Mallian National Ballet, who made it popular in Bamako (Sylla's birthplace is a village called Farabab). The night-long celebration (called soil-si or fura-si) that precedes the actual operation traditionally is held to be the most typical celebration where solo jenbe players can show their presence, power and sheer physical force; to say, "And he stood in front of the gathering after sunset and started to play and did not stop playing until daybreak" is about the highest praise one can give a jenbe drummer in traditional Mande society.

4. "numu", in the Manding languages of Mali and Guinea, designates a social group with a professional specialization in handicrafts, numu often is translated as "blacksmith" (French: forgeron). This translation is too narrow, since numu do not specialize in forging only, but in all kinds of metalworking, as well as in healing, carving, and the female numu's specialty—pottery. In the countryside all numu work as farmers, too, while in the city they might take any job. There are various dances and jenbe rhythms associated with numu from various regions and ethnic groups. The numu of the Soninke people from western Mali, for instance, dance to a certain jenbe rhythm called tooka, which is different from the one presented here. The very graceful, solemn, almost majestic rhythm presented here is simply called numo-dun — dance of the numu. Even in Bamako today, this rhythm is danced exclusively by numu people; in contrast, many other rhythms are not associated with a single social group, and maybe danced by anybody.

5. "fura" literally means "leaf". In a wider sense it designates (herbal) medicine. The rhythm fura is associated with the context of circumcision and exilcation rituals, in which medicine is of importance in order to stop bleeding and to heal the wound after the operation. The night-long celebration before the operation, which takes place in the early morning, is called fura-si: "spending the night of the medicine." The rhythm somewhat corresponds to a rhythm called soil-si in parts of northern Guinea. Soil means "to get up/being up very early"; soil-si refers to the night-long celebration before the "being up early" (for the operation), and soil-si means "great/big soil." Today, fura is only performed for boys' circumcision. While female circumcision is still widely practiced in...
Mali, it is no longer publicly celebrated, probably due to international pressure to ban it.

6. **bûbû** is a Manding speakers’ term for ethnic groups calling themselves “Bwa.” Since colonial times, the Bwa have been called Bobo in French, and thus in much of the international literature on West Africa. Self-designation and foreign-termining of ethnic group names differ a lot in West Africa. For instance, Manding-speaking groups such as the Bamana and Maninka, as they call themselves, are notoriously called Bambara and Malinke, respectively, in the international literature because the French colonial administration used these terms. Even native Bamana and Maninka speakers adopt the foreign terminology when speaking to foreigners or in foreign contexts (as when they speak French in jembe workshops, for instance), introducing themselves as “Bambara” or “Malinke.”

The Bwa, who live in southeastern Mali and western Burkina Faso, are famous for their xylophone music, and they have many additional musical traditions in their original regions. The jembe rhythm called bûbû-föl ("rhythm of the Bwa") is performed as a cultural representation of the Bwa only in Bamako, the Malian capital, where so many people meet, mingle, and want to dance to the talk of the jembe.

7. **dansä** is among the most popular of all jembe rhythms of Bamako. Like suku and maraka (denba-föl), dansa, too, is performed at almost every celebration, irrespective of the social occasion and the social, ethnic, or regional origins of the organizers and participants. If there are any jell (griot) singers at a celebration in Bamako, you can be sure that dansa will make up a substantial part of the performance, since many jell song and a lot of praise singing and narrative eulogies are set in this rhythm. It might seem surprising, then, to know that dansa originally was not a jembe rhythm at all. It was created in the Khaso region of western Mali between the cities of Bafulabe and Kayes, and was a rhythm for the ensembles of large dununa called jell dunun ("griots’ dunun") or Khaso dunun (Khaso people’s dunun there). The jembe did not form an integral part of this dunun-ensemble originally. Like bûbû-föl, bara, sogolo, tansolé, sanja, gankan-dön, maraka, and other rhythms, too, dansa had been integrated into the repertoire of jembe ensemble music only in the large cities, such as Khaso and Bamako. Nevertheless, it has become a part of the living, changing tradition of celebration culture in these cities since three or four decades. Traditions do change, slowly or quickly, in the cities as well as in the countryside.

8. **bara**, a drum made from a calabash, is also the name of a dance genre, as well as of the cultural association of the Bamana from Segu in Bamako. The rhythm originally was played by instrumental ensembles of bara drums and ban drums, the latter resembling in shape and playing technique (one hand, one stick) the sabar drums of the Wolof and Mandinka peoples from Gambia and Senegal.

9. **sogolo**, a rhythm of the Sonome fisher people living along the river Niger, originates from the same region and instrumental ensemble, from central Mali, that bara does.

10. **kirim** — also spelled kirin or ngir — is the onomatopoeic name of a variety of percussion instruments that sound dry and wooden because, unlike drums that have a membrane, they are beaten directly on the resonating body. In German or English, kirim thus would sound like something, “click-e-dick.” In parts of Guinea, kirim refers to a wooden slit-drum hit with wooden sticks. The rhythm presented here stems from the Guinean region of southern Mali, bordering Guinea and Ivory Coast. In this region, kirim designates a calabash bowl, which is laid upside down on the ground and hit with small wooden sticks. Female percussionists often perform party music on just a couple of these instruments. The kirim ensemble also can be supported by a jembe. In Bamako, the kirim rhythm as played by jembe ensembles became an emblem for the cultural identity of Wasulun people. Thus, the rhythm kirin also is called wasulunka (“many, woman from Wasulun”) in the city and the (inter)national jembe scene.

11. **jina** designates supernatural creatures (genies, spirits, ghosts); jina is one of the many words of Arabic origin (jin) in Manding languages. In Mali, as in many countries south of the Sahara from Senegal to Ethiopia, there exist cultural institutions that organize healing and religious rituals based on trance and ecstasy. These altered states of consciousness are worked out dramatically and are interpreted as spirit possession. The meetings of jina-cult groups are called jina-dön (“spirit’s dance”) in Manding languages, and the music performed in this context is labeled jina-föl. Only the most prominent of jina-rhythms is presented here. A selection of several jina rhythms and songs can be heard on the CD Donkili Festival Music from Mali (PAN CD 2060).

12. **tansolé** is a Bamana rhythm that, like bara, has been reused into Bamako jembe playing only in the past two or three decades. The basic dunun pattern of tansole ([C0→X], also is used in rhythms for the kôma initiation society, mask and ritual in Wasulun and Mandinka dialects, the ritual is called kômba in Bamana). The rhythm presented here stems from the Wasulun region of southern Mali, bordering Guinea and Ivory Coast. In this region, kirim designates a calabash bowl, which is laid upside down on the ground and hit with small wooden sticks. The same dunun patterns certainly
can appear in different rhythms if we talk of different historical times, regional styles, or social contexts, or of the city. Only in smaller communities, social and ritual groups, such as komba, nyawadu, or jina cults, do have the power to control musical repertoires and other customs. In a place where the komba cult, mask and ritual is still active – which is the case in quite some Bamana, Wasulunika and Mandinka villages, but not in Bamako – nobody would dare to "steal" the komba rhythm's dunun part in order to use it in another, secular entertainment rhythm, because the komba's threats and curses are terribly feared, even today.

13. "nyawaw" is a female initiation society, mask, and ritual which, among other things, is said in the societies of Manding-speaking peoples to be able to detect and fight sorcery. It is somehow comparable as a female counterpart to the komba society/mask/ritual that is the most powerful male initiation society. It's said that in former times when jenye players (all male) were to perform nyawaw, they were not allowed to see the mask dancing, and had to play blindfolded.

14. "manjanay" (also spelled mandjai or mandjani) is a classic among Maninka jenye rhythms. It is traditionally performed for the dance of two girls of pre-marriage age, who are chosen for the role of the manjanay – a kind of "village princess" and her "servant!" – for a period of time. Many parts of the dance are extremely fast, and some are acrobatic: the girls dance on the shoulders of strong men who also throw them in the air. While there are reports that in the past manjanay used to be a secret, ritual art form associated with magic, historical photographs from Bamako and other colonial centers show that it was performed publicly as a folkloric genre of cultural reenactment of the Maninka ethnic group as early as in the first decade of the 20th century. In the 1960s, manjanay developed into one of the most popular genres of the Jenja-based National Ballets of Guinea and Mali. The way manjanay is played in Bamako was established by Daba "Manjinay" Keita, a Guinean born in the region of Siguiri in the 1920s. Daba, together with Ladi Camara, had been among the very first players in Fodeba Keita's legendary Ballets Africains (later transformed into Ballet National de la République de Guinée) in the early 1960s. In 1956, after disputes within the Ballets, Daba left Conakry and established himself in Bamako. First, he accompanied griot singers and guitarists as a kind of all-round percussionist, yet when the jenye began to boom in the 1960s, Daba was among the pioneers who took the lead in creating an urban style of playing, and in new forms of professional organization. In particular, Daba was the first to found a private ballet troupe – Le Ballet Mandjai – which successfully toured Mali and neighbouring countries throughout the 1960s. Daba's jenye soloist was Faseirman Keita who, after Daba's untimely death in 1971, chose to work with the then most successful jenye player of Bamako, Yamadu Dunia. Drissa Koné presents a classic version of playing Bamako style manjanay – that is to say, Daba's style – which he has mastered through decades of learning from and performing with Faseirman Keita and Yamadu Dunia.

15. "garanke-don" means "dance of the garanke." Like the numu and the jeli, the garanke are a sub-group of the nyamakala, i.e. they are a hereditary social group of people specializing in handicrafts. In particular, the garanke specialize in leather working, producing, for instance, sheaths, sandals, and amulets. As is true also of rhythms danse and sanja, garanke-don stems from the khasonek-dunun tradition of Western Mali and has been fused into the jenye repertoire, mainly in the urban centers, for only three decades or so. Nevertheless, today garanke-don, as well as danse and sanja, have developed into classics of Malian jenye music.