Review
Author(s): Andrew Eisenberg
Review by: Andrew Eisenberg
Published by: VWB - Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41699636
comment, I will add to Gründ’s speculation about the origins of the cushion percussion used by batukaderas. She suggests that it could be linked to either taboos against women drummers in Africa, or to economic factors: drums are expensive on an island without plentiful resources including trees. Perhaps the drumming traditions of slaves in Cape Verde suffered the same repression that they encountered in North America, and drums were forbidden for both sexes. Illustrations of men playing funerary drums similar to djembes and talking drums do appear in some old Cape Verdean sources (for example, in Doelter 1888), but the drums are no longer part of the folk tradition. Was there once an active male drumming tradition? Military-style snare drums are used in some local musical genres, but additional evidence for a sophisticated polyphonic “African” ensemble in the male domain is not easily found. I think the history of the drum in Cape Verde is a topic to be more fully explored.

Overall, this new compact disc is highly recommended. It adds to a fine foundation of traditional Cape Verdean music released on the Ocora/Radio France label in recent years, represented by the work of French ethnographers Viviane Livre and Jean-Yves Loude (see references). These excellent new recordings begin to fill a serious void in the world music scholarship.

Susan Hurley-Glowa

References

Cap-Vert: Un Archipel de Musiques: Ocora: C 560146/47 1999
Cap-Vert: Nha Mita Pereira: Batuque et Finaço; Ocora: C 56015 2001
Cap-Vert: Ntoni Denti d’Oro: Batuque et Finaçon; Ocora: C 560132. 1998
Cap Vert: Kodé di Dona: Ocora C 560132 1997
Cap-Vert: Traditions de L’Île de Fogo: Ocora C 560150 1999
Doelter, Dr. C.

Hurley-Glowa, Susan

Zantzinger, Gei
1986 Songs of the Radius. Film produced, directed and narrated by Gei Zantzinger. Devault, PA: Constant Spring Productions.


Living in New York City means always standing at the edges of unfamiliar cultural worlds, peering in from time to time, usually entering only out of stark necessity or within the mediat-
A New Yorker confronts these foreign worlds inquisitively, voyeuristically, fearfully, disdainfully, or—stereotypical amongst New Yorkers—with jaded disinterest. Rarely, an individual or group with an appreciation for intercultural awareness finds a way to engage meaningfully with cultures other than his or her own, whether through political organization, spirituality, ethnography, art, or personal passion. Even more rarely, the results of such activities can be tangibly positive. Such is the legacy of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD), the small organization in lower Manhattan who are the producers of the Smithsonian Folkways CD series “New York City: Global Beat of the Boroughs”. For over three decades CTMD (first known as the Balkan Arts Center [1968-81], then as the Ethnic Folk Arts Center [1981-98]) has worked directly and collaboratively with many of New York’s immigrant and ethnic communities to encourage and cultivate performing arts held as deeply meaningful within those communities.

Badenya: Manden Jaliya in New York City is the second release from the CTMD-produced “Global Beat of the Boroughs” series. It presents Manden jaliyu (sing. jali), practitioners of jaliya, the verbal/musical art of epic, historical, and genealogical narrative as well as praise singing. \(^2\) Jaliyu are understood to comprise a hereditary caste, which is itself part of a larger caste of craftsmen and artisans that developed within the Empire of Mali during the 13th century. Depending on their region of origin, a jali specializes in one of several musical instruments. Perhaps the most renowned jali instrument is the distinctive 21-string harp lute known as the kora. Also central to jaliya are the balafon/bala (a xylophone with vibrating resonators) and a lute known as the ngoni. Because they are weaving stories when they perform, jaliyu sing in a declamatory manner that can sometimes seem harsh to unaccustomed ears. However, jali singers generally have resonant but grainy voices that have been proven quite amenable to international audiences.

The jali job description has remained virtually the same over the centuries, though business has surely changed. Jaliyu are musical vessels of pertinent history and lore. Their patrons (whether long-term benefactors or one-time tippers) can draw on this powerful knowledge to settle disputes or increase their own public standing. Historical evidence seems to suggest that the heyday of the Malian Empire, with its hierarchical and bureaucratic social structure, offered jaliyu ample opportunities for finding generous patronage. Since the fall of the Empire at the turn of the 17th century, jaliyu have had a somewhat harder time. In present-day, economically depressed West Africa, jaliyu need to be very flexible, often cunning, just to get by. This has often led to a negative image of the jali as a hustler or mendicant. Jaliyu work hard to shake these connotations from their art for obvious reasons. In this way, the celebratory narratives inherent in projects such as Badenya have been a boon for jaliyu, as have the economic opportunities they sometimes afford. In general, Jaliya arrives in Europe or America as a respected, if exotic, traditional art form, even as many of its practitioners still find themselves pegged with the same hustler/mendicant image as struggling new immigrants.

Badenya features New York-based jaliyu from Mali, Gambia, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau, singing in three different Manden dialects. Most relocated to New York in the late 1980s to mid 1990s in search of new performance opportunities both within and beyond New York's growing West African communities. And most had already traveled extensively before arriving in New York. They moved to the American metropolis for the same reasons they had already moved to other African or European metropolises: to make names for themselves.

The repertoire presented on the recording offers an illuminating perspective of the contextual range of jaliyu. Portions of the Sunjata epic about the founding of the Empire of Mali (the most important historical narrative for the jali) are juxtaposed with songs about events in the
19th and 20th centuries. And there are also praise songs (not directed to any specific benefactor) and songs to teach proper morality. The mostly Malian group, Super Manden, performs the first five tracks, four of which were recorded at Ornette Coleman’s Harmolodic Studios. The group’s particular style involves a solid but relaxed pulse that saunters steadily forward, propelled by the interlocking rhythms of electric bass, balafon, and kora. As is typical with multi-instrument jaliya groups, there are noticeable discrepancies in tuning that supply a certain shimmering timbre to the overall ensemble. There is a female singer featured on a few tracks, but the group’s frontman is the male singer, Abdoulaye Diabate, whose picture graces the cover of the CD booklet. His voice is powerful and dramatic; it comes as little surprise that he is the younger brother of the world-renowned Kasse Mady Diabate.

After Super Manden’s five tracks, a track by Gambian jali Mahamadou Salieu Suso provides a stark contrast with his gritty voice and kora tuned to the distinctive Gambian system. The final five tracks, three of which feature kora player/singer Keba Cissoko from Guinea-Bissau, present more contrast and include a few interesting oddities. One song is performed as a balafon duet; another features a Fulani flutist, which is not typical in jaliya. The flutist sings some of the text of a 19th century Guinean song through his instrument. The final track is an early 1960s Mandinka-Portuguese creole song, performed with bracing drama by kora player and vocalist Keba Cissoko and a backing ensemble that includes Manden and Western instruments. It is an uncharacteristic jali song, but it provides a fitting finale with an anthetic refrain: “Naam o Africa! Naam Africa!”

The jaliya presented on Badenya is of a particularly urban and transnational variety. After all, it is only in the metropoles (African or Western) where one encounters such flexible orchestration and driving, interlocking grooves. At the same time, however, this jaliya is (for the most part) uncontroversially “traditional.” Thus, in a world where migration and urbanism seem always to present a crisis to tradition, Badenya stands as one fascinating example to the contrary. In each track one can hear these musicians skillfully negotiating the seemingly oppositional roles of cosmopolitan professionals and bearers of tradition. Not that this is unusual in jaliya: if anything, cosmopolitanism is inherently traditional for the jali. The present-day transnational movement of jaliya can be linked to the historical role of the jali as a culture broker within the large, heterogeneous Empire of Mali. In the 21st century, as in the 13th, it is the jali’s job to negotiate essential questions of history and tradition across time and space. Thus, not only are the tracks on Badenya examples of traditional jali practice, but, it can be argued, the entire project—that is, the recording itself and all the social relations that it represents—is essentially an example of traditional jali practice, even if some aspects are innovative. That said, I now turn to a somewhat broader discussion of this Badenya project, which is at once so traditional and so untraditional for both jaliya and ethnomusicology.

Behind the Scenes. The encounter between New York City’s jali community and CTMD began in 1996. Formally, the relationship was forged under the auspices of what CTMD calls a “Cultural Community Initiative” (CCI). A CCI is designed to position the Center as a temporary collaborative partner within a given community for the purpose of organizing performances and events geared toward “a primarily community audience” (Center for Tradition Music and Dance 2004). After about four years, CTMD disengages itself from its relationship with the community, leaving in its place a group of community members (ideally a proper nonprofit organization) with the experience, skills, and reputation necessary to secure funding and organize future events.

The community organization put together for CTMD’s West African CCI named itself the Organization of Badenya in the Americas (OBA). Its membership consisted of media and per-
formance mavens, a small assembly of men (there were no women to my knowledge) with the interest and understanding to put together performance events showcasing various West African traditions. These men were expatriates from various West African nations; the majority, however, were from regions that are loosely tied together by a common history (the Empire of Mali) and a language group (Manden). Badenya is a Manden term that literally means “mother-child-ness” (Charry 2000:54). It refers to the harmonious relationship between children of the same mother; more broadly, it connotes the centripetal forces of society (Keita 1995:141). The term was employed with the feeling that traditional performance—and perhaps especially jali performance—could bring a sense of unity to African expatriates in New York.

For a brief period in 2000 I was involved with CTMD’s West African CCI, which was in its final (fourth-year) stage. I was brought in temporarily to replace Tom van Buren while he organized the CTMD archive and worked on the production of the Global Beat of the Boroughs series. My job was to aid in the production of a concert entitled “Badenya 2000: Voices of Hope,” which featured South African icon Miriam Makeba. While part of my position entailed playing the host for Makeba’s band, most of my time was spent with the members of OBA, the New York-based jaliyu (many of whom are now featured on Badenya), and the CTMD staff (minus van Buren). Each of these parties was also aware that I was simultaneously conducting fieldwork for an unpublished Masters thesis (Eisenberg 2001). Though I do not draw directly on any of my fieldwork data here, the perspective gained from my examination of CTMD’s history and practices, as well as their relationship with the Manden musicians featured on Badenya, certainly informs my reception of the album currently under review. From my privileged perspective, the sounds, images, and texts, packaged in Badenya are unusually polysemic, evocative, and, I believe, good to think with. Thus, at the risk of overstating the problematic aspects of what is overall a wonderful addition to the discography of African music, I would like to take a more critical stance for the rest of this review. My aim is to seize this opportunity to highlight some issues that are not just relevant to those interested in the jaliyu scene in New York City⁵, but increasingly relevant to the field of etnomusicology as a whole.

Presenting Badenya. Perhaps the most admirable aspect of CTMD has been the way the leadership of organization have walked the thin line between collaboration and curation, always with a view toward the former. They have been proactive in planning and implementing programs, but at the end of the day they have usually tried to share or even relinquish creative control to members of the communities they have partnered with. While I was not present at the recording sessions for Badenya, it seems entirely possible to me that the production of this recording generally followed in this tradition, involving a level of collaboration between CTMD and the jaliyu. If my assumption is correct, then it is unfortunate that the accompanying text shows no sign of this being the case. Badenya includes a booklet with notes by Tom van Buren, CTMD’s resident etnomusicologist, which provide a overview of the Manden social institution of jaliyu and its instantiation in New York City. These notes, while clearly written and informative, are in my view incomplete. There is no discussion of how the repertoire was chosen, how the recording sessions were conducted, or whose ears provided the testing ground for the final mixes. These absences coupled with the overall monologic tone of the booklet signals a turning away from collaboration and a move toward curation. One is left with the impression that these musicians are not all in control of the way they are being presented or defined.

It may seem a bit unfair to quibble with liner notes that are obviously geared toward a general audience and truncated for practical reasons, but what is lacking in my view actually has little to do with facts or data. The problem is more fundamental. While van Buren presents a
tidy and appropriately celebratory narrative of New York jaliya, missing are the perspectives of the practitioners themselves. Listening to the CD with the booklet before me, I found myself wondering. Why don’t we find the voices of the jalitu, voices so elevated in the sounds of the recording, in the booklet as well? One may argue that even in pop, jazz, and classical music recordings, the artist is not always (or even often) the author of his or her own liner notes. In world music recordings it may well be even more rare; and, of course, it is virtually unheard of in ethnological recordings. But Badenya is neither simply a commercial release nor an ethnomusicological document. It is, rather, something in between, a unique product of a long-standing dialogic and collaborative relationship between a small institution and a group of immigrant musicians. The history of the production of this album challenges notions of how a Western recording of “traditional African music” must come to be made. One might also expect that it might challenge notions of how an album of “traditional African music” must be presented.

Beyond answering the basic questions of who provided what creative input in the process of producing the recording, a more collaboratively composed booklet for Badenya may have offered unique information and perspectives of unquestionable interest to scholars and world music consumers. After all, this recording stands as one of the most direct ethnographic engagements with the New York City’s jali community. The professional bios that are provided are useful, but they are sanitized and ultimately limited. We can glean that these musicians, in a very general sense, share a particular cosmopolitan sensibility, stemming from their similar experiences of movement between different geographical regions (both within Africa and trans-continentially) and different performance contexts (traditional, professional, and intercultural). But we don’t learn how that sensibility informs their music and affects what their music means to them and others in their community. While a thin jewel case booklet may not offer enough space to explore these issues in depth, it can (and I think, should) go as far as to point us in the general direction. And this could be done without sacrificing accessibility. Jalilu are masters of historical and biographical narrative. Scholars and lay-listeners alike would no doubt be fascinated to read a jali’s own take on the place of “Manden jaliya in New York.” In particular, it would be nice to scratch the surface of the notion of badenya for a look at the messier reality underneath.4 Jaliya in New York is surely an expression of badenya, of social cohesion. But what about the experiences of change or fracture these musicians have also experienced as travelers? How is or isn’t this expressed in the sounds we are hear on this recording?

Badenya is a wonderful recording, one which I will be listening to for a very long time to come; however, it is also a missed opportunity. While the performances on Badenya speak for themselves in many powerful ways, they also raise a great deal of complex and immediately relevant questions about the nature of culture, tradition, cosmopolitanism, urbanness, and migration, not to mention the role of music and musicology in facing those questions. With a bit more of a collaborative spirit and greater attention paid to the multifaceted sociological context of the music, Badenya might have served as a model for how ethnomusicologists and musicians can work together to produce recordings that are as intellectually relevant as they are aesthetically pleasing.

Andrew Eisenberg
Notes

1 I would like to thank Ryan Skinner, whose ears and mind are well attuned to things Manden, for a stimulating discussion about the content and context of this CD. Some of the data and analysis in this review emerged from Ryan’s mental archive or dialogically between us; any shortcomings or mistakes are my own.

2 Readers may be more familiar with one of several other variants of the term Manden, such as Mande or Manding. Likewise, the terms Jali, Jalilu, and Jaliya have numerous variants, which may reflect both differences in Manden dialect as well as literary convention. Jalilu, of course, are more commonly known in the West by the French term griot, especially after Alex Haley’s Roots imprinted the word in the American imagination in the late 1970s.

3 Paula Ebron (2002) consulted with New York jalilu for her work on transnational jaliya. My own Masters thesis (2001) is focused more broadly on the politics of curatorial world music than the jalilu themselves. At the time of this writing, my colleague Ryan Skinner is beginning his own more thorough investigation into jaliya in New York City.

4 “Mother-child-ness” is only one part of a dialectic. There is also fadenny, “father-child-ness,” the centrifugal forces of society.

References

Center for Tradition Music and Dance

Charry, Eric

Ebron, Paulla Angelac

Eisenberg, Andrew

Keïta, Cheick M. Chérif


It is deeply satisfying for specialists in Cambodian or Southeast Asian musics finally to receive a recording entirely devoted to chapey, an instrument that is hardly known outside of Cambodia, and one that is relatively rare in its native land. On this CD it is also played by one of the few remaining masters of the genre alive in Cambodia today, Kong Nay.