

echoes OF **TIMBUKTU** AND
BEYOND
in
CONGO SQUARE
U.S.A.

AFRICAN AMERICAN
MUSICAL ROOTS
REVISITED

by **BILAL**
Abdurahman

M
1627
A137
E18
1979

MUSIC LP

SIDE 1 CONGO SQUARE REVISITED

1. Images
2. Interlude-Ugandan harp. Bilal harp
3. Lament — Ugandan harp. Bilal voice & harp
4. The transition — The essence of Jazz
5. The blues is born — Bilal (halam solo)
6. Spirituals — voice and halam accomp. Bilal
- 7a. Fiddler of Congo Sq. Bilal (gogi)
- 7b. Gogi solo. Bilal (gogi and voice)
8. Spirits of Congo Square — Bilal
9. Ancestral Ode — African Antelope horn. Bilal

SIDE 2 ECHOES OF TIMBUKTU

African Balaphone solos by Bilal

1. Variation I African Balaphone & shakers
2. Variation II African Balaphone
3. Variation III Clarinet & balaphone

Blues Suite

4. Narration, humming, African balaphone, tenor saxophone. Bilal
5. Nice Moan'in—Three Blues Narrations by Bilal
6. Afriscat Rhapsody—Composed & played by Bilal
7. Fusion—Bilal
8. Congo Square procession—Bilal
9. African Memoirs—tone poem. Bilal

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

**ECHOES OF TIMBUKTU
AND BEYOND**

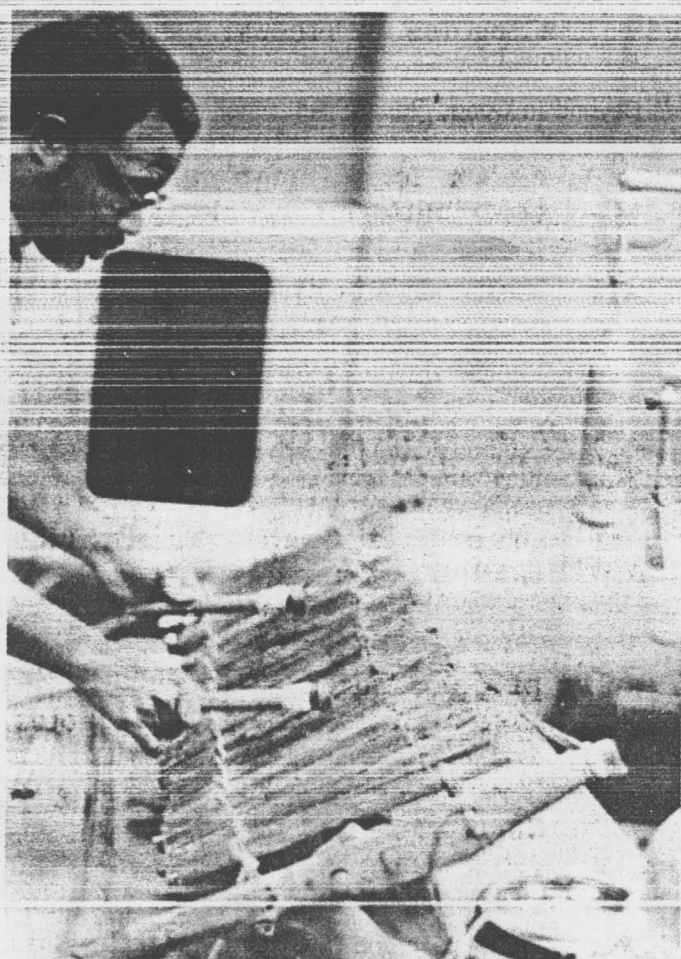
in CONGO SQUARE, USA

*African American Musical Roots Revisited
Music & Narration by Bilal*

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ECHOES OF TIMBUKTU AND BEYOND *in CONGO SQUARE, USA*

African American Musical Roots Revisited Music & Narration by Bilal



Mr. Abdurahman the creator of this album is teacher, musician—graphic artist. He has illustrated for such publishers as Harper Bros. Magazine, Scholastic Magazine, Folkway Records, worked in numerous art studios and created sound tracks for film. He and Mr. Abdullah, percussionist and accompanist on this album, in the past two years have demonstrated African instruments at Public Library Branches in New York and performed at the recent opening of the African Sculpture exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum. A frequent recording artist of both jazz and ethnic music he also performs at public schools and colleges welcoming new challenges in innovative curriculum research.

Having performed and played for such renown dance teachers as the great Katherine Dunham, Mr. Abdurahman has acquired a great admiration and insight into the worlds of creative, modern and related forms of the dance. These experiences and more he brings to the field of creative education and is currently a teacher coordinator of African Studies for the N.Y.C Board of Education in Brooklyn, N.Y.

*Kings, Queens and lesser royal-emesed in
a web of til and toil.*

*They crossed a sea in great despair from
Timbuktu to Congo Square.*

*Entombed in hellish hulls baptised in
muck and mire . . . yet a spirit was
born that would one day sire a musical
heritage never to expire.*

*In Congo Square they rocked and reeled
But in their hearts they did conceal a
yearning for freedom and liberty - for
they were bred on such a philosophy
They called upon Allah and all else they
knew and conjured magical music to help
bring them through . . .*

*Undaunted by their cursed plight of
loosing every human right, these uprooted
souls kept alive by a magical will to
survive.*

*Watch them . . . Stately, strong and tall . . . men
from Upper Volta and Senegal . . .
and from Gambia too, a Manding Prince . . .
Wolof women with beauty and grace the
pride of any human race . . . Fulani,
Ashanti, Nagoe and Ibo . . .
Luba and Bushongo from the Congo
These and more shared a common
plight - which upon our world has
left a blight*

*Yea in Congo Square did Africa seek to
conjure magical images of a new
mystique*

*Yes! Congo Square in old New Orleans, that
magical bit of American soil that
witnessed the ceremonial
gyrations of scores of African and
their descendants*

*Hear the drums . . . do-do-do-do . . . din din
they speak of a time when everything
will be all right . . . they talk of
Shango and Onyami . . . and yes of
Timbuktu and Beyond in Congo Square
U.S.A.*

Bilal Abdurahman

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New African American musical forms have continually developed throughout the past three hundred years here in North America. This has been due to the intellectual growth and pioneering spirit of its creators. Early spirituals, blues, work-songs and songs of protest were often conceived under in human work conditions on docks or chain gangs - under searing sun or in maddening rains. Jazz, also a composite of all these musical elements, and now classic in its own right - had its basic roots in the 'African soul'. An innate feeling for improvisation and in addition a systematized knowledge of rhythms and related musical activity, continues to be the mystic fount from which such musical forms emanate. In traditional settings music is an integral part of African society.

Let us recall the great oral art of the Griot (Jewel) whom we meet in African countries such as Mali, Senegal, Chad and Gambia. These men and often women are highly skilled in the art of orally relating traditions, tribal histories and similar commentaries. These bards accompany themselves on a variety of stringed instruments such as the Kora, Khalam and Goji. A variety of drums and unique reed instruments such as the intriguing sounding oboe-like Al Ghaita also enhance these performances. In the above mentioned countries another fascinating sounding instrument the zylophone also called balaphone is often played in combination with other instruments. Traditionally made balaphones require years of work before one is completely constructed and ready for use. They are played as background to funerals and many social functions in Africa. Balaphones sensitively compliment and accompany praise chanting of the Griot. They also melodically and rhythmically add spirit and dynamics to active periods of the dance. The balaphone when being played as a melodic instrument, can at the same time be used as a rhythmic and percussive accompaniment to the melody. This is accomplished by the players particular use of the left hand. A steady rhythm is often kept by hitting on the largest keys with the wooden handle of the beater. The balaphone which I play on this recording is of the fourteen keyed Lobi-Dagarti type from North Western Ghana.

Bilal Abdurahman

Timbuktu

I have choosen to symbolically link the ancient city of Timbuktu in Mali with America's colorful Congo Square in the city of New Orleans. Both are reminders of diverse but historic aspects of African history. Early accounts of the famed city of Timbuktu describes it as having many examples of fine architecture and a thriving trans-saharan trade. Mosques, libraries and universities of the highest caliber flourished. Timbuktu was a perfect example of a Sudanese City. Scholars came from distant lands of the then known world to exchange and compare manuscripts and study with its African teachers.

Visiting foreign dignitaries were dazzled by the pomp and granduer displayed in court ceremonies when an audience was granted by the Sultan (Sool-tahn.) Though Mali had become an Islamic country in the 11th century, it always retained its own African character. The Sultan sat on an impressive throne and addressed his audience through his official spokesman. Royal trumpets and drummers clustered around him as well disciplined cavalry and courtiers, all bestowed their utmost attention upon him.

**Bilal Abdurahman
March 1978**

Congo Square

Congo Square is recorded as having been a large empty lot in a field adjoining Rampart Street in Old New Orleans. After the Louisiana Purchase was made in 1803 BY THE U.S.A. the Africans were permitted to assemble on Saturdays and Sun-

days in Congo Square. The location was first popularly known as the Place des Nègres and later as the Congo Plains. The area to which the Africans were restricted was called Congo Square. Such dancing and performances continued for more than twenty years. Performances of traditional African dancing accompanied by singing, drumming, the playing of stringed instruments and rattles were displayed here. Specific types of African drums or drum playing styles have been documented as seen in Congo Square.

Calabash as well as the jawbone of an ox, mule or horse were rhythmically shaken for the rattling of teeth while empty casks or barrels were sometimes beaten upon with the shank-bones of cattle in support of the drums. Two to four stringed instruments of African origin were also played. Small bells or pieces of metal were attached to the ankles of male dancers who leaped and displayed feats of gymnastic dancing as can be seen throughout most of Africa today. Congo Square has left us a unique heritage of African musical, song and dance experiences on American soil. Perhaps 'Echoes of Timbuctu and Beyond In Congo Square' will recall a fleeting glimpse of this legacy.

Bilal Abdurahman

Comment on Jazz

The terms Jass, Jas, Jazz in my estimation are very significant. I feel certain that earlier generations of Africans on American soil may have coined the term as an exclamation or expression describing the overall spontaneity or vitality of the 'then newly formulating music'. The New Orleans of Congo Square fame, probably still harbors many such secrets. Another probability is that the word Jazz may have stemmed from an Arab source due to the early intermingling of African and Arab culture through Islam. In Arabian music each scale of seven (tones) is called a maqam. 'Maqam' originally being the name of the stage on which singers performed for the Caliph. Hijaji is the name of one such magam.

Musical Example

D, E^b, F[#], G, A, B^b, C[#], D

This hijaji maqam is said to 'fill the soul with grief', note the close affinity with the so called blues modes of the African American tradition. During the slave trade, thousands of Africans arriving in America from Gambia, Senegal and other areas where Islamic and African cultures mingled - brought their ornate oriental tinged style of singing and chanting here with them. Housa, Mandingo and other African musicians highly skilled in the playing of the goji, khalam and numerous other string instruments transported their unique musical arts to American soil. While here in Bolgatanga, Northern Ghana my wife Rahkiah and I were entertained by excellent Fra Fra musicians playing the dulna which in all appearance is like the goji of the Hausa people. On one such occasion an accompanying musician played a large egg shaped gourd rattle called cinyarri in the Fra Fra language. In these performances the artists quickly improvised songs for or about the two of us. The dulna is a one stringed horse hair viol. Both young men also proved to be skilled leather workers and served as excellent craft instructors for us also. Much is yet to be reported on the nearly direct carry over of many string instrument playing styles yet intact in rural African American communities.

In its new world setting, African chanting, humming, hand clapping, foot stomping and numerous other musical devices soon became deep rooted musical expressions displayed in African American music. In the church, at camp and jubilee meetings or similar congregational gatherings innermost feelings were expressed by long sorrowful wailing or soul stirring shouts.

**Bilal Abdurahman
Bolgatanga Northern Ghana 1976**

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