

Songs from the Royal Court of Savalou

Ethnic group: Fon

Language (dialect): Fongbe (Mahigbe)

Country: Benin

Recording date: April 28, 2017

Recording location: Savalou, Benin

Total Recording time: 11:02

Technician: Brian Nowak

Group Members:

Ayabanom - lead vocals (second from the right)

Chorus - Assibanom, Tine, Sossi, Dekoukoue, Desse (left to right, skipping 2nd woman-the lead singer)

Group Organizer -- Gbettolossi Maw Gbodo

Track names -- duration

1) Alouasio - 2:14

2) Makanmakan - 2:08

3) Mioudie - 1:40

4) Hilebabawa - 3:00

5) Interview with Togbui Komi Dognran III - 2:00

Group Introduction:

Royal Courts for Fon chiefs typically feature a women's chorus. The Savalou king, like all in the greater region, is believed to have power mandating his leadership. Alters reinforcing the lineage of previous kings are housed in a shrine room with the staffs displayed in succession. Tradition in modern cement statues painted with bright oil paint, a reminder of Mouammar Kadhafi's political reach in his vision of a United States of Africa through allying with political leaders in West Africa in particular. The chorus however represents a traditional character with rhythms that have become popularized and prevalent. Including even simple English by counting one to five comically expands their reach beyond their francophone education system.

Recording Context:

The King's Palace in Savalou is at the top of an overpass on the South end of one slope along the chain of hills that run predominantly North-South along the paved road from Djougou to Dassa-Zoume. The entrance is next to a road heading West in to the countryside. The gate and the wall flaunt brightly painted animals and objects, symbolic on multiple levels in the Mahi, and greater Fon culture. Some of the symbols represent an individual king whose reign has been

consolidated into one or several symbols, or representative of an event or characteristic associated with a certain king's. An elevated porch in front of a large, open pave (cement cobble-stone) courtyard overlooks the walls and beyond the main entrance to the road and offers sufficient space for a large ceremony. The women sit in front of one of the vodun shrines on the palace grounds.