

Songs from the Main Tron Shrine in Savalou

Cervaux Gbaguidi

Ethnic group: Fon (Mahi)

Language (dialect): Fongbe (Mahigbe)

Country: Benin

Recording date: May 12, 2017

Recording location: Savalou, Benin

Total Recording time: 22:54

Technician: Brian Nowak

Group Members:

Cervaux Gbaguidi - Adodo Gan (large talking drum)

Florent Gbaguidi - Adodo Mile (small talking drum)

Prince Gbaguidi - Gon (gong)

Azui Euloge - Gon (gong)

Tossou Wilfred - Sangoue (gourd-net shaker)

Gaston Gbaguidi - Sangoue (gourd-net shaker)

Track names -- duration

1) Songs for Kofi Ganbada (medley) - 22:54

Group Introduction:

This group of young men is the heart of the energy offered to the Tron shrine through songs of worship. In particular, the powerful spirit of Kofi highlights the courageous power needed for combatting evil. The Tron family of spirits arrived later into the Mahi Fon pantheon, brought from Hausa migrants from Ghana, a migration over several generations as Hausa families left Nigeria and Niger to settle in Ghana, some later returning towards the West to settle. Papa Kunde, the head of the Tron family is a Muslim, compassionate and peace-loving spirit that is more mediator than warrior. This Muslim spirit clearly identifies the spirit family's origins from beyond the Mahi Fon Vodun tradition referring to its Muslim Hausa origins, clearly with plenty of room left for animist ritual.

The leader of the group is the son of the main Tron priest, and his younger brother joins him with other initiates for weekly ceremonies that take place outside the entrance to the shrine and then inside the small room filled with alters. Two of the young men are not even from the area. They came from Cotonou and Porto Novo to work in Savalou. Coming from big cities, the social network and bonds formed by spirit worship have formed as small, tight-knit core that can lead and sustain

songs as part of their own weekly offering of time and energy to demonstrate their devotion.

Recording Context:

From inside the room of alters, the atmosphere alone represents a sacred space with the symbols, ritual objects and all the sights and smells that separate a significant shrine of sacrifice from the everyday. The close quarters contain the energy following weekly ceremony, with this group singing in the dark room. Songs flow organically and individuals alternate with the older boys taking turns as lead singer. Being in the shrine is a unique experience rarely witnessed first-hand even by locals. The intimate portrayal documented here is as close as one can get to being there, quite literally as the camera was closer than any person would when inside the room.