



UMass Amherst
FINE ARTS CENTER
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 11, 2006

WHAT: Center Series presents: Mombasa Party and the Royal Drummers of Burundi

WHEN: Friday, September 29 at 8pm

**WHERE: Fine Arts Center Concert Hall
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets or
go online to www.fineartscenter.com/tickets**

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(PARTY AND DRUMS OPENS UMASS FINE ARTS CENTER'S 06-07 SEASON)

The Center Series opens its season on Friday, September 29th at 8pm with Mombasa Party and the Royal Drummers of Burundi. Mombasa Party is a get-together of some of East Africa's most well-known Taarab artists performing a wonderful mixture of traditional Swahili, Arabic and Indian songs. The Royal Drummers of Burundi are considered one of the greatest percussion ensembles in the world.

Mombasa Party features many of the major *taarab* artists from East Africa, including Maulidi Juma, Mohamed Adio Shigoo and Zuhura Swaleh. Maulidi and Mohamed met when both were members of the Zein Musical Party in the 1970s. They soon left to set up Maulidi Musical Party, the town's most prolific group in terms of recording output and wedding performances. Maulidi is also a renowned poet who composes not just his own songs but writes for a number of other singers as well. Zuhura Swaleh is one of the outstanding female voices in Mombasa *taarab*, as well as one of the music's main innovators. In the 1970s, Zuhura introduced elements of female wedding ngoma--dances and their sharp tongued songs into the *taarab* repertoire, creating the basis for the *chakacha-taarab* which developed into the most popular type of taarab for female wedding celebrations.

The music of predominantly Muslim, Swahili-speaking people of Tanzania and Kenya, *taarab* is linked to the trance state of dancers during religious or ceremonial rites. While

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contemporary *taarab* blends popular music from India and Lebanon with East African and Latin-influenced rhythms in performances that incorporate keyboards and drum machines, the aim of *Mombasa Party* is to return to the original acoustic traditions of *taarab*.

The Royal Drummers of Burundi have performed in the same way for centuries, passing down traditions and techniques from father to son. Their performances were traditionally a part of particular ceremonies, such as births, funerals and the enthronement of Kings. In Burundi, drums are sacred and represent, along with the king, the powers of fertility and regeneration. The origins of their performances shrouded in mystery, the Drummers channel the energy and creative spirit of a nation through these drums and the rituals surrounding them.

Since the 60's the Drummers have toured outside of their country, becoming a popular attraction at concert halls and festivals around the world. Their massed drum sound, or the "Burundi beat" as it became known, also caught the ear of Western musicians and they appeared on Joni Mitchell's, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975). Their distinctive sound also influenced British rock bands of the early 80's, such as Adam and the Ants, and Bow Wow Wow. It was seeing the drummers that inspired Thomas Brooman to organise the first WOMAD festival in 1982, an event that helped to spark the whole World Music boom.

Tickets are \$30, \$25, and \$15; Youth 17 and under are \$12; and Five College Students are \$15, \$10 and \$7. For tickets and information, call the Fine Arts Center Box Office at 413-545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS, or tickets may be safely purchased online at www.fineartscenter.com. This performance is sponsored by Finck and Perras Insurance, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, WEIB 106.3FM, and the Pioneer Valley Hotel Group

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