

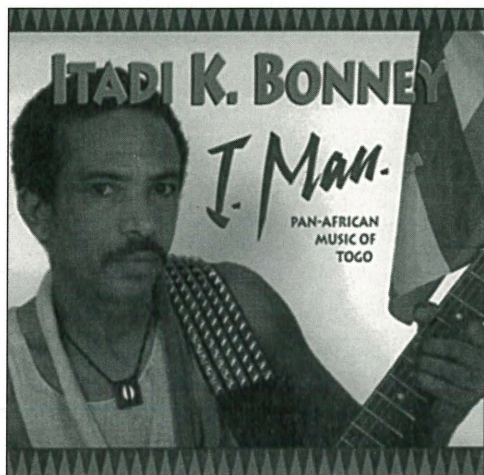
African Immigrant Music & Dance in Washington, D.C.

*From a Research Report by
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and skills to the regional economy and enliven the local cultural environment through their art, clothing, adornment, and food. It is their music and dance, however, that have most strikingly transformed the cultural terrain. The

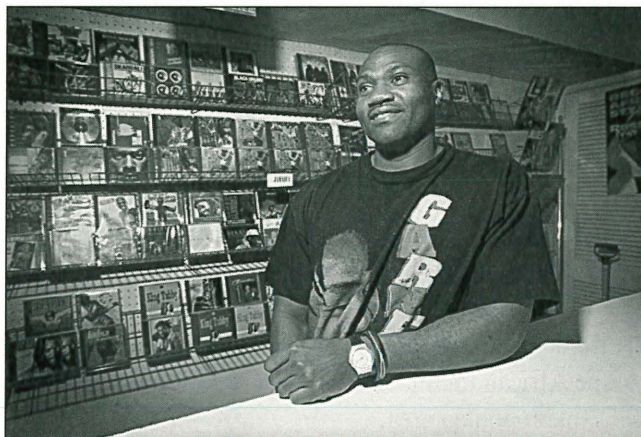
As African people have migrated to different parts of the world including the United States, their artistic expression of their values and beliefs has helped them to survive. Recent immigrant Africans in the Washington, D.C., area contribute labor

broad range and the wide variety of contexts of African music and dance styles to be found in and around the city reflect the cultural diversity of its African-born residents. African immigrant music in metropolitan Washington includes sacred music such as Coptic liturgical music in Ethiopian churches, Muslim devotional chanting in Senegalese Sufi gatherings, Nigerian and Ghanaian gospel music based on popular highlife rhythms, and ceremonial music like praise songs and epic poetry. Popular dance music such as Zairian *soukous*, Cameroonian *makossa*, *shaabi* from Egypt and Morocco, and Nigerian highlife are also part of the area's musical soundscape. Musicians perform live at local community events, at restaurants, in homes, and in places of worship. Music circulates via



(above) The increasing appreciation of African polyrhythms has created a demand for live music. During any spring-summer season, the sounds of Majek Fashek, Soukous Stars, Aster Aweke, and Lucky Dube can be heard at concert halls and music festivals throughout the city. In addition to the African musicians who visit annually from Africa and Europe, a number of local groups have sprung up. Itadi Bonney and the Bakula Band play African highlife and soukous music. The recordings of Mr. Bonney, an exile from Togo, include *Mayi Africa* and *I-Man*, both produced in Washington.

Photo courtesy Itadi Bonney Productions



(left) Large music stores carry African music of internationally known popular artists like Fela Kuti, Miriam Makeba, and Salif Keita. But new specialty retailers such as Simba International Records are making a wider range of African music, artists, and videos available to area residents. Photo by Harold Dorwin



(left) Much of the production of African music in the area has been the effort of enterprising individuals. Ibrahim Change Bah and his African Music Gallery Productions, for example, have not only provided a retail outlet for music but also produced Syran Mbenza on the CD *Bana*, the Soukous Stars in *Soukous Attack*, Thierry Mantuka and Gerry Dialungana in *Classic O.K. Jazz*, and Tabu Ley Rochereau in *Baby Pancake-Aba*. Eddie Asante's labors produced *Timeless Highlife* by C.K. Mann and *Nkai* by Pat Thomas of Ghana. Lately, System 77 of Yaw Acheampong Sekyere has been reproducing and marketing Ghanaian highlife music. In this photograph, Ibrahim spins discs on his weekly radio program on WDCU. Photo by Harold Dorwin

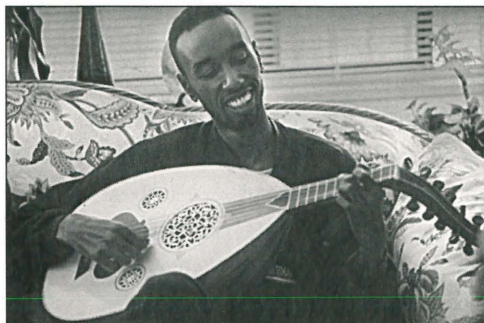
African Immigrant Folklife

audiotape and videotape cassettes, CD, community radio, and cable television programs. Events like independence day dances bring together people who have come to the United States from the same country of origin. In the Washington area, immigrant Africans celebrate themselves by coming together and sharing traditions within a new community. They create ethnic music and dance troupes to educate their children and others unfamiliar with their cultural heritage.

Tastes in music and knowledge of dance can be markers that define boundaries between community insiders and outsiders. They can also bridge communities. Jamaican reggae music, for example, in which Ethiopia is a central symbol of African world heritage, is embraced by young

Ethiopian immigrants in Washington, D.C., and performed as part of the musical repertoire of Nigerian, Gambian, and Ghanaian musicians. The messages of African music have found many an ear in metropolitan Washington. The photographs and descriptions that follow illustrate some of the varied contexts of African music in the area.

Cece Modupé Fadopé is a Nigerian-born journalist and host of the radio program "African Perspectives" on WPFW. In addition to his role as the originator and host of WPFW's "African Rhythms and Extensions," Kofi Kissi Dompere, who is of Ghanaian origin, teaches economics at Howard University. The essay by Ann Olumba on community radio profiles these authors at greater length.



(above) Somali oud musician Hasan Gure plays for friends at an informal gathering in Falls Church, Virginia. They sing songs from their childhood in Somalia, songs composed during their struggles for independence, songs of praise and advice to their sons and daughters, and songs of their experiences in exile. Photo by Harold Dorwin



(above) Young members of an Ethiopian Christian congregation play the kebero, a traditional drum, and sing during a service celebrating the new year. Photo by Harold Dorwin

(right) Ethnic and regional community organizations like the Volta Club organize traditional Ewe music and dance groups to create an atmosphere of family from which members derive support, assistance, and cultural fulfillment in time of need, sorrow, or joy (see Joan Frosch-Schroder 1991). Photo by Ebo Ansah

