

The Afro Celt Sound System

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Three years and over 200,000 record sales from the release of their critically-acclaimed debut album, **VOLUME 1: SOUND MAGIC**, Afro Celt Sound System are widely acknowledged as one of the most innovative and pioneering groups to emerge from the increasingly eclectic cross-cultural experimentations at the cutting edge of "world music" in the 90s. **VOLUME 2: RELEASE** is the result of a year spent writing collectively, after much soul-searching and reorganization following the sudden tragic death of keyboardist Joe Bruce. The group has re-emerged with a dynamic and emotionally charged album that weds the delicacy of their acoustic instruments – harp, kora, bodhran, djembe, uilleann pipes, talking drum – with the multidimensional, layered production of Simon Emmerson and Martin Russell. The band's characteristic Celtic-West African fusion, inherently joyful and high-energy, is offset by a discernible bittersweet quality, darker and more melancholic than the first album's effusive spirit – expressively



The members of the British band are (from left to right) Simon Emmerson, James McNally, N'Faly Kouyate and Iarla O Lióbaord.

underscored by the performances of guest musicians Nigel Eaton on hurdy gurdy; Michael McGoldrick and Ronan Browne on uilleann pipes; Youth on bass; Dhol Foundation's Johnny Kalsi on dhol drums & tabla,

and Sinead O'Connor on vocals. Afro Celts are a paradox – firmly rooted in some of the oldest musical traditions on earth, yet colliding head-on with cutting-edge electronica. Iarla is among the foremost purveyors of West Ireland's ancient unaccompanied sean nos vocal style; Myrdhin plays an ancestral Breton harp, and both N'Faly and Moussa are venerated griots from West Africa's esteemed bardic schools of master musicianship. Conversely, Simon comes from the context of experimental dance music, and James' background was with the Pogues and the Irish hardcore hip-hop group Marxman. From these far ends of the musical spectrum comes the entity that stormed the stage at the Cambridge Folk Festival, played to a full-on dance crowd at Tribal Gathering, and played to a widely enthusiastic crowd of 20,000+ MTV rockers at Holland's Lowlands Festival. As Martin Russell says, "Everyone wanted the album to be hard and kicking, to reflect the live attitude of the band. However, we didn't want huge Thunderous beats with token African and Celtic soundbites over the top."

The Story behind Santana's guitar

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Carlos Santana knows what he likes in a guitar. And one thing he likes is wood from Olympic Peninsula big-leaf maples. Santana, who won Eight Grammy Awards, performed his single "Smooth" at the recent awards ceremony in Los Angeles. The guitar he used a Paul Reed Smith was made from wood produced by Tim Wilson and Greg Lippincott, owners of Maple Valley Tonewoods. The two fashion maple slabs with the prized fiddleback design at their small mill two miles west of Port Angeles. "I think it's terrific what that model has done for us," Lippincott said. "This block of wood has been seen all over the world," Wilson noted, and that's been good for business. The company usually purchases wood from loggers in log or stump form, then cuts and fashions it. Completed slabs are sent to guitar maker Paul Reed Smith Manufacturing in Stevensville, Md., where the finished product is

created. Maple Valley has been working with PRS, as the guitar maker is known, since about 1987, said wood-purchasing agent Michael Reid from his home in Upperco, Md. It's no accident that the company keeps coming back to Lippincott and Wilson. "With Greg, you know it's quality you are getting," Reid said. "They don't compromise their standards. I know exactly what to expect from them." The purchasing agent said buying wood is like buying fruit. "Just like bananas, wood can be stained, molded or discolored. But with Greg, I am getting a consistent, quality product every time," Reid said. Paul Reed Smith, who founded PRS in 1985, has been making guitars since the 1970s, but business has boomed since the company's client list acquired industry standouts Santana, jazz guitarist Al Di Meola, Dickey Betts of the Allman Brothers and the Rolling Stones. Reid said he doubts that Santana

knows where the wood for his guitars comes from. But he knows what he likes. And what he likes, what he comes back for, is the wood produced by Maple Valley. "Artists like him will be very specific about what they want a guitar," Reid said. When Lippincott describes something, even if a bit unusual, "it's always quality and is pretty much as he described it," Reid said. "He never overstates it. If anything, he understates it." Reid added that "if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have the success we have today." Wilson and Lippincott started their business in 1991. They have had ups and downs, with more than \$1 million in sales three years ago and a bit of a slump after the Asian economic crisis of 1998. "The economy really hit us hard," said Wilson. But sales have been picking up in the Far East and the company has been doing better financially – especially with the exposure by Santana's guitar.

World Renowned Drum Master Visits Portland

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Johnny Carson did it on his show. Rosie O'Donnell has done it on her show. Now we hear that Tipper Gore does it in the privacy of her living room. What do they all have in common? They all like to play drums. In the past decade, drums and drumming circles have become very popular. Why? According to world renowned drum master Reinhard Flatischler, "...rhythm is a power which unites all living things." What better demonstration of that fact than ABC's powerful coverage of various drumming groups throughout the twenty-four hour broadcast of the new millennium! Austrian born Reinhard Flatischler will make a rare Portland visit to conduct a three-day workshop on "The Forgotten Power of Rhythm," March 10-12, 2000, at Still Meadow Community. Improve your confidence and ability in movement, rhythm and musical creativity. Learn "Rhythmic Archetypes" at the heart of all music. No music or dance experience needed to enjoy this workshop. For more information, call Cedar Mountain Drums at 503/235-6345 or visit their website at www.cedarmtndrums.com

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