

FOCUS

Holding Traditions Dear



I was raised around drums, that's where I came from.

-- West African native and northeast Portland resident Obo Addy

continued from Metro

under the sponsorship of the country's Art Council.

Even today, Addy's talents are still sought after. Last August he played with his African Band mates at the prestigious Lincoln Center in New York City and he is currently booked to play ten shows in February at The Kennedy Center in Washington DC.

Music and dance has sustained Addy not just financially but spiritually and physically as well. When he plays, he forgets his aches and pains.

"When I play I feel stronger," he explained. "If I'm sick, I feel better."

Addy is adamant about keeping the old ways alive. It hasn't always been easy. Traditional ways were frowned upon by the British who

were the colonial rulers of Ghana for many years. It wasn't until 1958 That Ghana finally gained its independence. It was the first African nation to gain independence from the British.

But Addy said he plays for all of Africa.

"The freedom of Ghana is meaningless until the whole continent of Africa is free," he said.

Addy has always believed in his roots and the drumming passed down by his ancestors all the way to his father and ultimately himself.

Now Addy keeps it alive by passing it on to others through lessons and workshops and performances in schools and churches.

Addy is the artistic director of Homowo: African Arts and Cultures. He created the organization to promote the sounds and

culture of Ghana.

Often Addy plays for free. His goal is not to generate a lot of money for himself or to create a big name, he just wants to keep the traditions alive and share the richness of what Africa has given to his character and soul.

Homowo is a traditional festival of the people of Accra. It is said that founders NiiKoilai and Niiakushie brought the festival to the shores of Accra while escaping drought in central Africa.

In early spring the people start planting gardens. In May, there is no music in Ghana.

"The quietness signifies starvation," said Addy.

At the end of 5 weeks the people start harvesting and once again drumming and music fills village and town.

Addy brings his own Homowo festival to the park blocks annually at PSU through the second week of August.

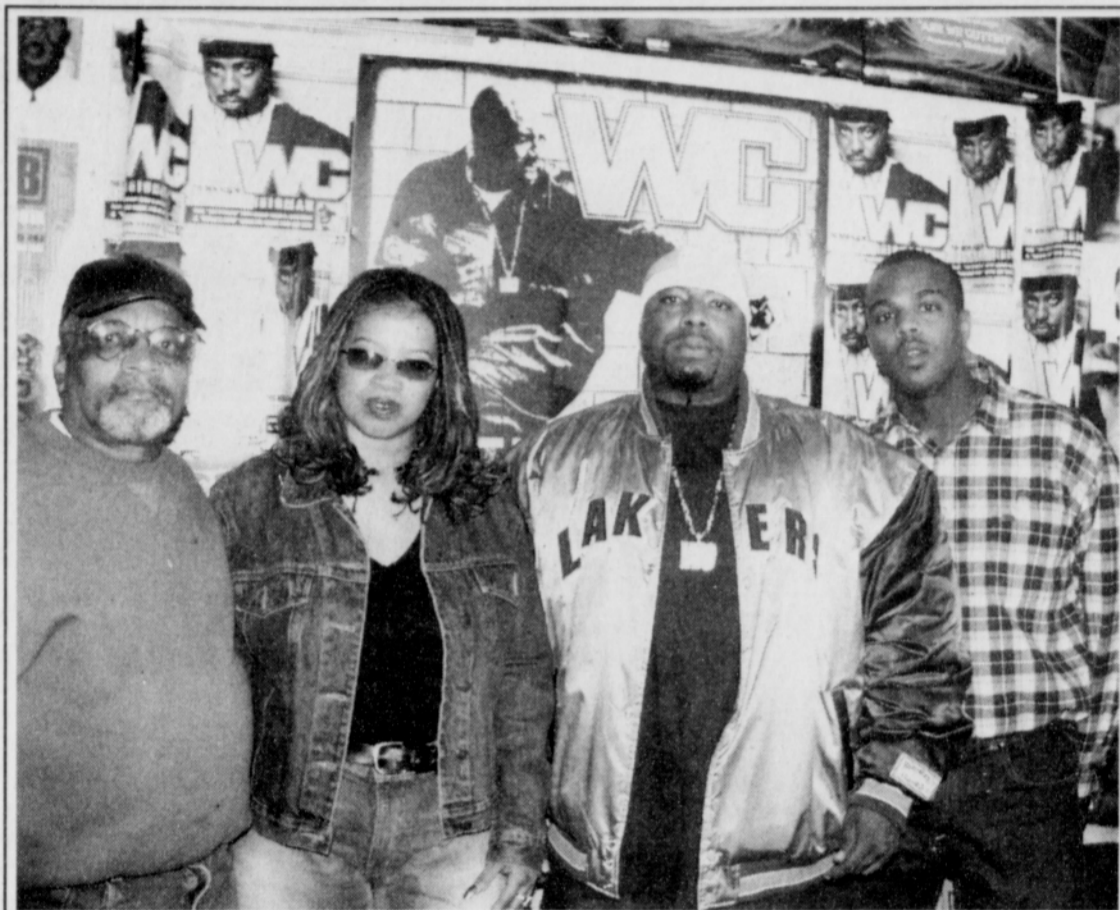
"I do this to promote more African music," he said.

A number of high schools and colleges have been very interested in Addy's workshops and performances. "The kids love it," he says, "they love learning the rhythms."

At a recent concert at PSU students seemed awe struck but Addy's drumming at a noon concert. After the show Addy entertained questions from the curious students and faculty.

One woman was troubled by the dominance of western music over ethnic music, but Addy said that it does work both ways. He cited the sampling of traditional African rhythms in rap.

"I heard something that was my music," he said smiling, "but it was too short to make any money from."



WC Makes Stop at One Stop Records

Mr. James Barry (left), the owner of One Stop Records at 1615 NE Killingsworth, Angela White of Portland Music Scene and Tim Spence (right), regional director of marketing for Universal Music, pose with Def Jam recording artist, WC, during a recent visit to Portland. WC was in town Thursday, Oct. 10 to promote the Oct. 22 release of his new album, Ghetto Heisman.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Reality TV in Space Race

'Survivor' producer Mark Burnett is resurrecting a long-planned reality show that will send a winning contestant orbiting to the International Space Station on a Soyuz rocket. Burnett signed a deal this week with Russia's space agency and the country's largest TV network to train 20 contestants, who will gradually be eliminated by a panel of space officials. Co-producer Conrad Riggs says a launch of the show in November 2003 is planned.



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