



# DJEMBE

# SG

## A Djembe Master's Gift to Singapore

*Drummer (idiom) - "march to a different drummer, to be motivated by a different set of values than the average person."* ("drummer." Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 26 Jul. 2010)

To call Mamady Keita a mere drummer, is probably like calling chili padi a mildly spicy ingredient. Both will blow your socks off!

If you visit Mamady Keita's website ([www.mamadykeita.com](http://www.mamadykeita.com)), you will see his biography. It starts with:-

*Mamady Keita was born in 1950 in Balandugu (Guinea), a village of the Wassolon region, near the Fé River. His father was a master hunter and a fida tigi (master of the plants, that is to say a healer). His mother, wishing to know the destiny of the child that she was carrying, consulted a sooth sayer who announced that it would be her last son: "The child must be left to amuse himself because it is there that he will make his name."*

This gives you a picture of a man who, at a very early age, seemed destined to take the djembe around the world. A Djembéfola (djembe player) whose life was the djembe, and who has shared the history and culture of this instrument with thousands around the world. He is indeed someone who "marches to a different drummer", and his calling has resulted, through Kelvin Kew, in the building of a strong and close-knit djembe community here in Singapore.

But what does it really mean to take one of his workshops, and have the Mamady Keita djembe learning experience here in Singapore? I ask this question due to a conversation I recently had with a friend from the US. He said that for a workshop in the US, he "got 7 hours in class, but no hanging out social time unfortunately."

That made me think that perhaps one of the greatest aspects of experiencing Mamady Keita's workshops in Singapore was that it was more than just a workshop. As William Morton so eloquently stated it, "I did not expect a 'Grandmaster' of Mamady's stature and repute to be so down to earth, so friendly, so giving and with a great sense of humour to boot."

A number of us recall humorous events and stories from the workshops in Queenstown (2008) and Kallang (2009) Community Centres. We had the opportunity to exchange cultural and personal idiosyncracies with him, and some will fondly recall our Kah Heng trying to teach



Singapore Drumfest 2008

him Singlish, or a certain female participant getting very tense and being told a number of times "Relax!" Perhaps it is because we have the opportunity to share our community with this Grand Master of the djembe, that he feels inclined to share something back?

I don't think I'm alone in this feeling. When asking fellow Lila Students about how they felt attending Mamady Keita workshops over the last two years, these are some of the responses that I received...

*"It's thrilling to be taught by Mamady in person! He patiently works with the students to create rhythms and sounds we didn't think we were capable of producing. His vibrant energy is infectious and he challenges us to be the best we can be." - Cheryl Carruth*

*"Performing in front of the grandmaster was a nervous moment for the LDE members. We pulled it through with great energy. Mamady's smile was a sign of appreciation during our performance." - Lee Kah Heng, referring to the Tam Tam Mendingue Singapore opening at the Blu Jaz Cafe*

To say that the djembe is 'just another drum' takes away from the fact that it's a community instrument - meant to be shared and enjoyed with others. To say that Lila Drums is 'just another drum school', removes the sense of family and fun that Kelvin and Fanka Fellas have created in our small island community of djembe players.

To say that experiencing a Mamady Keita workshop in Singapore is 'just like any other of his workshops' takes away from the personal feeling that we all seemed to walk away with after the event. More than just learning a few rhythms, this was something that was, in Kah Heng's words, "an unforgettable encounter."

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## Welcome!

Welcome to the second edition of Djembe SG - the newsletter designed for students and fans of African drumming in Singapore. We've just had our annual Drum Camp, and are looking forward to Mamady Keita coming in September. We hope you like what you see, and if you have any suggestions for future editions, please get back to us at: [djembesg@liladrums.com](mailto:djembesg@liladrums.com)

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## RHYTHM SECTION: DENADON

**History** This song is played to introduce the Mendiani dancers prior to the Mendiani (ceremony of female initiation).  
History courtesy of Paul Lee from [www.laladrum.com](http://www.laladrum.com)

### RHYTHM

CALL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
oO	-	O	O	-	O	-	O	O	-	X	X	X	-	-	-

1 <sup>st</sup> DJEMBE ACCOMPANIMENT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
X	-	-	B	O	-	O	-	X	X	-	B	O	-	O	-
X	X	-	B	O	-	O	-	X	X	-	B	O	-	O	-

2 <sup>nd</sup> DJEMBE ACCOMPANIMENT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
X	-	-	X	X	-	O	O	X	-	-	X	X	-	O	O

\*Repeat from 1<sup>st</sup> time only for continuous play.



## DRUM WISDOM – DRUM SOLOING

Kelvin Kew

*"In order to play you have to be free"*

Drum solo, an expression of self through the drum, is not much different from painting a picture, writing a story and creating your sandcastle. The only difference is that all the latter can be done at your own pace and within your comfort zone. However, to most people, drum soloing (most of the time in the context of performance) is like public speaking.

### PLAY, NOT WORK

As many people there are that are afraid of public speaking, there are as many who are afraid of doing a drum solo. The actual fear is not in playing the solo. Like giving a speech, the real fear is in the fear of rejection, the fear of not being good enough and one's attachment to the result. When you first pick up drumming, it was a new thing and it was fun. Most importantly, you are playing, not working towards something. Many forget that it is the same thing for drum soloing.



### TECHNIQUE

When expressing through the drum, the right 'language' will have to be used. Just like story telling, you may have a moving story but without the right words, voice tones and speech dynamics, your audience won't be entertained. Thus a drum solo is not about free-style banging on your drum, it is the utilising of playing technique that works for the drum to express your desired rhythmic phrases. The djembe, for one, is the most widely played hand drum in the world and the great soloists are the ones who apply the proper technique to their playing. The proper techniques they use are 'tried and tested' for centuries, and passed down in tradition by djembe masters from Africa - you'll never go wrong with that! Thus, it is important to learn one's technique from the right teacher.

### THINK & PLAY OR PLAY & DON'T THINK?

Many find it hard to accept the idea of not thinking or planning what you are going to play. To think or not to think you still have to play, why not choose the less consuming one which is just play! Thinking or planning sets yourself up to follow a sequence and thus creates an expectation for yourself. Remember again, drum soloing is in the context of play, not work. In order to play you have to be free. Free from plans, expectations, results and what others might think. It is also important to know that freedom to play is not about having an empty mind and play from nothing. Freedom to play is really about looking at your possibilities and making your choice. With enough practice and learning, a whole variety of technique and rhythmic phrases would be accumulated in you, thus you'll be able to choose instinctively from what you have and play your solo.

To ultimately present a good drum solo, you'll need technique and creativity, which is impossible without play. I like to leave you with a quote from Stephen Nachmanovitch:

**"It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."**



## MAMADY KEITA'S MINI-GUINEA CAMP ASIA ASIA PACIFIC DJEMBE PLAYERS' CONFERENCE

<http://sept2010.ttmsingapore.com>

**DATE**  
10th-19th September 2010

**ORGANIZER**  
TAM TAM MANDINGUE  
SINGAPORE

Email: [play@ttmsingapore.com](mailto:play@ttmsingapore.com)  
[enquiries@laladrum.com](mailto:enquiries@laladrum.com)  
Phone: +65-63341430

**VENUE**  
TAM TAM MANDINGUE SINGAPORE  
KALLANG COMMUNITY CLUB  
46 Boon Keng Road Singapore 349771



More information on this event, including session timing and pricing can be found at <http://sept2010.ttmsingapore.com>

# SOLO Beat – Jenny

Stephanie McKern & William Morton

## My Friend, Jen

A romance with a twist...

In March this year, I had the great pleasure of attending the wedding of Gottfried Kaser and Nguyen Ngoc Diep. You may know this couple as Gotty and Jenny. There was a bride, and a groom. There were family and friends, food and wine... and djembes! It was a beautiful wedding, however the story that I will recount today is one of romance, not the one between Jenny & Gotty – but between Jenny and a drum! (Although we do wish the happy couple a life of joy, harmony, warmth and comfort).

### Jenny's beginnings with music

Jenny was born in a town just outside of Hanoi, in Vietnam, and loved music from an early age. She remembers music blaring at 5.30am from speakers around the town, and people expected to get up to perform their early morning calisthenics. Jenny's love, however, began with classical music which she likens to a story where you can be swept up in the tale the musicians are creating.

Jenny had an early insight into how music could move people when she used to play guitar for her grandmother, who was housebound due to old age. Jenny taught herself guitar when she was 15 or 16. Her grandmother used to ask Jenny to play, and she looked forward to the daily music. Jenny was touched by the effect her playing had on her grandmother.

As I listened to Jenny describe her first visit to a Jazz Club, "on the fifth floor of the Phuong Dong Hotel," - she was taken there by her, now, husband Gotty - I hear the thrill that is present in Jenny when she is moved by the subject. Jazz obviously moved her... she was practically dancing in her seat with the memory of the musicians and the music. I could tell she was hooked!

"My mother and sister used to think I was crazy," she says. "You know, wearing the headphones and shouting because you can't hear yourself?" She mimes with her hands over her ears. I think most of us can identify with that.

### Jen & the Djembe

Jen hadn't planned on going to Timbre that night. She had tried several excuses to get out of going to the club... by HERSELF! Gotty, thankfully, talked her into it. She had to listen to the drums and even as she climbed out of the

Solo Beat is a regular article where we get to know new and regular players in the Lila Family. Say "Hi!" to Jenny when you get a chance.



cab and picked her way across the grass in high heels, trying to find her way around into the club, she could feel the rhythm. As she waited in the queue to enter, she was suddenly aware that her feet were tapping and her body moving to the rhythmic pulse of the music. When she entered the club and saw the then-called Lila Drums Orchestra (LDO) - now known as Fanka Fellas - and saw the people dancing, she was amazed.

"Wow!" Her enthusiasm leapt across the table at me as she recounted the story.

"And you know who I remember the most from that night," she asked me.

"Who?" I said.

"Serena," she said, nodding, "the way she played, her expressions. She just had it. Passion"

Jenny signed up for classes the following student performance at Marina Cove. She almost didn't find it because in her excitement she turned up very early with her cousin, and nothing was set up! Luckily Kelvin had the Lila Drums banner up, or otherwise she might have missed it!

### Mamady Keita Workshops

Jenny was at the first series of Mamady Keita workshops in 2008 and recalls how playful he was, especially with one of the participants, Carol. "Relax, Carol!" was a common quote from that year.

She also remembers Kelvin playing the sangban and Mamady playfully joking about him leaving if he made a mistake. Kelvin was pulling faces and joking as well - it made the atmosphere very fun and relaxed, which was really good considering that a lot of people were nervous about learning rhythms from Mamady Keita, djembefola!

The highlight of the whole workshop for Jenny was watching Mamady play the djembe on stage with his wife, Manette Marino-Keita at Blu Jaz. "They were fantastic!"

### The best thing about Djembe

Jenny loves the freedom and feeling that playing the djembe gives her - she feels it through her whole being. From the first time she was hooked! And now it's not just the djembe that keeps Jenny close to Lila Drums.

Before watching the LDE at Timbre, Jenny said that she had been feeling alone in Singapore. Alone in her work and alone with Gotty travelling. Since joining with Lila Drums, she now has friends in Singapore, and family, and a place, even a home here.

We say it often - the djembe is a community drum.

We're glad you're part of our community, Jenny!

(And good luck with the baby) :-)

## RHYTHM Workout

Contributed by Ian Mathews, Stephanie McKern  
Image courtesy of The Stretching Institute

Each edition we will take you through a series of exercises that will help you stretch before playing.

A healthy player is a happy player!

### ARM-up Rotator Stretch

Stand with your arm out and your forearm pointing upwards at 90 degrees. Place a broom handle (or dunun stick) in your hand and behind your elbow. With your other hand, pull the bottom of the stick forward.



# UPBEAT PHOTOS



Photos taken from the annual Djembe Drum Camp.  
Visit our Facebook page to learn more about these events, or see more photos!  
Visit [www.facebook.com/djembesg](http://www.facebook.com/djembesg)