


LENI STERN JELELL




1. Safal – 1:49
2. Baanaan (Rain Song) – 5:27
3. Gnate Yone (How Many Times) - 5:58
4. Babacar - 6:44
5. Jellell (Take It) – 4:22
6. Bubbles - 5:08
7. Sumol Dafon (If I Were Crazy) – 6:09
8. Demal Tedi (Lights out) - 5:18
9. Dimbali Ma (Save Me) – 5:18
10. Rabbit - 5:17
11. Rann - 1:53



Produced and written by
Leni Stern (SESAC),
Mamadou Ba, and Alioune Faye

Executive producer - Mike Stern
Photos by Sandrine Lee

Mamadou Ba plays a Fodera bass
Leni Stern plays Fender amps and guitars
and D'addario strings
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Leni Stern – guitar, baritone guitar, n'goni, vocals
Mamadou Ba – bass
Alioune Faye – djembe, calabash, percussion

Gibi Faye, Moussa Faye, Babacar Faye,
Baye Demba Faye, Elhadji Faye, Rich Baba Faye,
Sing Sing family– sabar percussion ensemble

Haurona Samake – camele n'goni
Jazz – rap vocals
Leo Genovese - keyboards
Idrissa Diop – vocals (how many times)
Marieme - backing vocals

Recorded by Abou Cisse in
Dakar, Senegal at Brams Studio
Additional Recordings:
Jonathan Goldberger at
DownHomeAudioLab
and Daniel Schlett at
Strange Weather
Mixed by Abou Cisse at Mofou Studios in
Bamako, Mali
Additional mixing by Glenn Ianoro. NYC.

Mastered by Fred Kevorkian at
Kevorkian Mastering

Jelell! This Wolof expression means something along the lines of “Take it!” or “Grab it!” or “Seize the moment,” but, like so many of the world’s great untranslatable words, carries a richer, deeper, contextual meaning. It’s that contextual core, that powerful frame of reference, that drives this album, Leni Stern’s 20th full-length release and her deepest foray into African music yet.

On *Jelell*, German-born Berklee-educated guitarist and n’goni player Leni Stern’s African Trio is completed by world-renowned electric bassist Mamadou Ba, a pillar of the NY African music scene and long-time musical director for Harry Belafonte, and Alioune Faye, who lives in the Bronx but comes from a large Senegalese family of musicians. Also featured on the album, which was recorded in its entirety in Dakar, Senegal, is a sabar ensemble made up of Faye’s five percussionist brothers.

The complex but seemingly effortless rhythm patterns played out by this band of brothers provides the spine of the music, a polyrhythmic foundation stone from which Stern’s elegant, jazz-infused melodic improvisations can spring. This combination makes for a beat-heavy get-up-and-move album that is simultaneously profound and utterly danceable.

The songs on *Jelell* are topically diverse but all carry a fundamental theme of interconnectivity and the idea that life is, at its core, similar all around the world. Families, love, hunger, thirst, and even sport are touched upon and brought to life by the driving, rollicking rhythms of the band and Stern’s authentic, heartfelt songwriting, powerful vocals, and virtuosic playing.

“**Baonaan**” is a traditional rain invocation from Northern Senegal, given a contemporary, guitar-driven edge in this elegant reworking. Several years ago, during a period of painful and intense drought, Stern was invited by Baaba Maal to play a concert in the region to help raise awareness to the dire situation. “People were starving because all the livestock died. The rivers dried out and there were no fish.” She learned this song, which asks the Gods to send water, and made it her own, bringing in some English lyrics and her signature intricate guitar riffs. As of recently, the rains have, in fact, returned, but the region always remains at risk for further drought.

The late-night under-the-cover sussurations of children around the world, avoiding bedtime with whispers and giggles, is sweetly brought to life in ["Light Out."](#) "This is the first African-inspired song that I ever composed," says Stern. It's a favorite among her African band members, she says, who sing it to their own children when it's time to go to bed.

["How Many Times"](#) has an unlikely origin, with the title springing from something that boxer Mike Tyson said in his Spike Lee HBO special, for which Stern was in the live audience. Tyson reiterated a phrase from his coach and trainer, told to him after a particularly intense fight which he won after being knocked down many times: "It doesn't matter how many times you go down, all that matters is how many times you get back up." This struck Stern as an important and powerful metaphor for life. "I just thought it was beautiful, and it left a real impression on me to see Mike Tyson say that."

Cut to Senegal, where a traditional style of wrestling is the country's most popular sport. Wrestlers are superstars, and during the matches themselves, they are accompanied by bands of drummers, sort of personal pep bands who provide a function that is ceremonial but crucial to the art of the sport. The Faye family, the percussionists who provide the rhythms on this record, are connected with a wrestler called Balla, one of the finest and most beloved of the wrestling champions.

Stern laughs as she tells the story of an afternoon rehearsal, where Alioune Faye kept pausing to watch Balla's wrestling match on his phone. "Can't you put down your phone and practice?" she asked. "No, I'm sorry, I can't," he replied. So she paused rehearsal indefinitely so the whole group could watch the wrestling, and she was struck by the power and intensity of the sport. Things connected, and this song was born. "You're going to become famous in Senegal," Mamadou Ba told Stern, "writing a song about Balla."

Though there's tremendous temptation to call any mixing of two genres "fusion," that term has come to imply something light – a little of this and a little of that – where Stern's music is less about fusing and more about finding deeply-rooted cross-cultural commonalities and using them as touchpoints for expansion and inspiration, be it melodic, rhythmic, or lyrical.



Baonaan

baonan dani baonan
maynoon doch mami yalla maynoon doch

softly softly rain falls on the field
turns the ground from grey to emerald green

baonan dani baonan

assaman china china china
taobi sobna, taobi sobna
mingi tao

mami yalla mainou wallangan

your gentle hand has wiped my tears away
softly softly love has come to stay

ngo kin gok mami yalla ngo kin gock
baonan dani baonan

Gnata Yone (How Many Times)

yaye sosse, yaye sosse sosse sindey sosse simbai

the sun is shining merciless on the circle in the sand
the crowd is buzzing, music plays, the fighter's rubbing dust
on arms and hands

it doesn't matter what they're saying about you
jealousy and gossip will never ever stop,
but it's not about how many times you're defeated
its about how many times you get back up.

the bets are closed now, time is up, the smell of money is in the air
the referee is pacing back and forth, he's making sure that everything is fair

it doesn't matter if the odds are against him
its a very long way from the bottom to the top
and its not about

winning or loosing, pleasure or pain, when all is said and done
its often the same
let them talk about their victories, let them brag, let them boast
it's the strength of your spirit that matters the most





Jell (Take it)

jellel jellel jellel bula neche jellel
fabbal fabbal fabbal bula neche fabbal

everybody's born and everybody goes
this is our only chance for all we know
so you might as well take it if you want it
jellel jellel jellel bula neche jellel

everybody is a universe everybody's got a song
everybody got a story to tell
everybody's weak everybody is strong
we can be each other's heaven or hell

Sumol Dafon (If I Were Crazy)

if i were crazy would i know it
if i loved you would i show it
would i tell you that the sun comes up
and sets with you
that you're a part of everything i do
if i were crazy

soumol daffon nach dinako cham
soumala nobbon dinala ko wach
dinala ko wach

squares and lines and circles in my head
symbols, numbers all connect
hazy colors shapes and sound
familiar faces lost and found
soumol daffon..

clouds and sky and trees and grass
thoughts that become clear at last
flowers swaying in the wind
where do you end and i begin
if i were crazy...





Demal Tedi (Lights Out)

Demal teddy guddi jatnam
Demal teddy faylen lampeyi

Dimbali Ma (Save Me)

save me, the sky is falling
save me, storm clouds and rain
save me, the devil's calling
save me, he's calling my name

dembali ma assaman sangi danu
dembali ma seitane nyangi niao
dembali ma balatchat dima dugu
dembali ma assaman sangi danu

teyell samalocho mangi doch chi safara
mangi fetch chi chotto boutelli
nya nall ma mangi jem chi talbi
dama jachley, denyuma lige

hold my hand, i'm walking through fire
i'm dancing on broken glass
pray for me, i'm walking through fire
i'm lost, the spell is cast

