

ASSAMA and the BEADED CALABASH



Producer, text, performer: Lua Shayenne

Music: Cécé Haba

Director: Karine Ricard

Dramaturgy and educational consultant: Lynda Hill

Translation Dramaturgy: Djennie LaGuerre

Costumes: Rachel Forbes

Backdrop Design: Quentin VerCetty

Lighting: Logan Raju Cracknell

Stage Management: Joey Lau (2023-24), Kimberly Moreira (2022)

Costume Sewer: Carlyn Rahusaar Routledge

Yassama and the Beaded Calabash was commissioned and developed with the support of the WeeFestival of Arts & Culture and Théâtre Français de Toronto.

Recommended for children 3 to 6 years old and their families
Length: 40mn with pre and post interaction with the audience

*“Once upon a time in a not so distant past,
somewhere in a village in a land
far away, there lived a young girl named Yassama”*



Yassama and the Beaded Calabash is the story of a young girl who, with the help of the old Baobab tree, saves her village from drought and delivers a powerful lesson about the importance of respecting and honouring Mother Earth.

Rooted in African oral tradition and created especially for very young audiences, acclaimed artist Lua Shayenne invites children into storytelling as active participants through rhythmic language, lively song, engaging movement and dance accompanied by live drumming and a rich percussive score.





THE CALABASH



The BEADED CALABASH that the old Baobab gives to Yassama is magical. When Yassama shakes it three times, fresh water appears. When Yassama shakes it four times, the most delicious bowl of hot stew appears.

But the calabash only works if Mother Earth is honored and celebrated.

What is a calabash ?

The calabash, also known as a gourd is a plant native to sub-Saharan Africa. It's in the same family as squash, pumpkin and zucchini.

In Africa, calabashes are used in a variety of ways. First, a calabash is cut up, hollowed out and dried.



- In the kitchen, calabashes are used as utensils. The different varieties of gourds can be used to make ladles, bowls or salad bowls.

- For music, they are used to make stringed instruments such as the kora and ngoni, and as percussion instruments such as the balafon, maracas and certain drums.

- Engraved or pyrographed, the calabash also serves as a decorative object.

SYMBOL OF FEMININITY and ABUNDANCE:

The calabash is reminiscent of a pregnant woman's belly. As such, it evokes cooking, abundance and fertility, and symbolizes the woman, the mother and the home.

The calabash is also considered sacred and is used in traditional ceremonies and rites.



COWRIE SHELLS



Cowrie or cowry shells are small shells. Cowries were used as currency.

Cowrie shells are also used in traditional rituals and in the making of jewelry and ornaments.

Cowrie shells have many different meanings and properties, depending on the country and even the village.



Cowrie shells therefore have an important symbolic value in Africa, directly linked to the spirits of the earth and the oceans, and to traditional religions.

The cowrie is a symbol of fertility and also brings good luck. Consequently, people who wear cowrie shells are assured of powerful protection from the ocean spirits.

SONGS



Yassama's storyteller shares Yassama's favorite songs:

“YASSAMA” (Lua Shayenne and Cécé Haba)

This song is about the joy of singing and dancing

“UNDER THE BAOBAB” (Lua Shayenne and Cécé Haba)

This song shares a message of unity and solidarity, in love and joy.

“YANKADI” et **“MACRU”** (Traditional rhythms and songs)

These two festive rhythms originate from Guinea in West Africa, and belong to the Soussou ethnic group.



INSTRUMENTS



Yassama's musician plays several instruments such as:

THE DJEMBE



The Djembe is played by a djembefola (djembe player). In Yassama, the djembe accompanies Yassama's songs.

The Djembe is a percussion instrument (from the membranophone family) originating in West Africa, where it is thought to have appeared around 700 years ago in Mali. It was subsequently introduced in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal. It is used in ceremonies such as weddings, christenings and other popular celebrations to accompany traditional dances, as well as in dance and percussion companies. The Djembe is made from a solid piece of wood, the barrel (often mahogany or acacia) whose resonance box resembles a mortar or chalice. Originally, it was

covered with the skins of bush animals such as gazelles and antelopes. Today, goatskin is more commonly used. It is attached to the barrel with iron straps and ropes. The rope is also used to tune the instrument.

The djembe is played with the hands. The djembe has three main sounds. Striking with the full palm in the center of the skin produces a low-pitched sound called BASS. Striking the skin with the hand cupped slightly and the fingers open only slightly on the rim produces a higher-pitched, snapping sound called SLAP. Striking the rim with the flat hand produces the TONE.

THE BAFALON



The Balafon is used for Yassama's transition music and for the story's theme song.

The balafon is a percussion instrument from West Africa, belonging to the idiophones family of instruments. The balafon is the ancestor of the xylophone. Balafon comes from the Malinké terms "bala", instrument and "fon", sound.

On a wooden structure tied with leather straps, hardwood strips are arranged according to size. The shorter and thinner the slats, the higher the sound. Pairs of calabashes, placed beneath this wooden structure, form resonance boxes. Traditionally, these are pierced with holes covered by spider-web or bat-wing membranes known as mirlitons, now replaced by

cigarette paper or thin plastic. As calabashes get bigger and bigger to produce a deeper sound, the balafon is higher on one side than the other.

THE BELL



The bell is the instrument of the rooster who loves to wake up early in the morning and sing at the top of his voice!

The Mandingue bells ('kenkens') (West Africa) resemble cowbells. They are forged (hammered) from raw steel. They are equipped with a curved steel hook at the end, to be able to attach them with a rope. Their sound is therefore very crystalline, especially if they are thick, and this characteristic is accentuated by the traditional striking with an iron rod as well. Each bell is associated with one of the three dunun drums according to its size.

The RAINSTICK



The rain stick signals the arrival of the rain as well as abundance in the village of Yassama.

A rain stick is a percussion instrument or idiophone. It can be made from materials such as cactus, reeds or bamboo. The rainstick instrument is a long tubular instrument that belongs to the rattle family. Rain sticks hold cultural significance in various rituals and ceremonies. In certain cultures, they are used symbolically to honor and celebrate water, rain, and their connection to the natural world.

THE CAXIXI



The caxixi highlights the appearance of the beaded calabash emerging from the earth!

A caxixi (pronounced ca-chi-chi) is a percussion instrument consisting of a closed basket with a flat bottom filled with seeds or other small particles. The round bottom is traditionally cut from a dried gourd. The caxixi is an indirectly struck idiophone. Like the maraca, it is sounded by shaking. Variations in sound are produced by varying the angle at which the caxixi is shaken, determining whether the contents strike the reed basket (softer sound) or the hard bottom (louder, sharper sound). In West Africa, it is used by singers and often alongside drummers. Natives believed the caxixi to summon good enchanted spirits and to ward off evil ones.

THE KSINK KSINK (KESSING)



The djembe kessings or ksink ksink reproduces the leaves of the Baobab tree, which shake strongly.

The djembe kessing or ksink ksink (also called « sege-sege » or « sesse ») adds to the sound of the djembe drum by producing a metallic jangling when it is hit. Attached to the top edge of the instrument, it may also be struck directly by the player's thumbs. Its presence is felt more if the drummer plays while standing.

The NUT-SHELL HANDBELL



The nut instrument represents the Baobab tree.

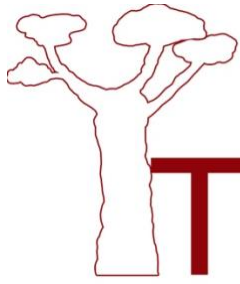
The nut instrument is made from dried nuts attached to a wooden bracelet with rope.

The NUT SHAKER



The nut shaker announces the drought and when the village well dries up.

The nut shaker is made from dried chestnuts attached to a wooden handle with string.



THE BAOBAB

Originally from the African continent, the baobab tree is also called the "tree of life" because its hollow trunk retains water. The baobab can live up to 2,000 years and reach a height of 25 meters! Its soft wood trunk can have a circumference of over 12 meters. The baobab appears to be planted "upside down" because its branches, by their arrangement, resemble roots. The baobab is also a generous provider of food and medicine for the population.

THE FRUIT'S PULP



The pulp of the baobab has six times more vitamin C than oranges, six times more potassium than bananas, six times more antioxidants than blueberries, twice as much calcium as milk, and even more magnesium than coconut water.

THE SEEDS



Baobab seeds can also be eaten raw or roasted and are used to thicken soups and add flavor. The oil extracted from the seeds can be stored for a long time and has applications in both cooking and cosmetics. It is also useful for treating toothaches and gum inflammation.

THE LEAVES



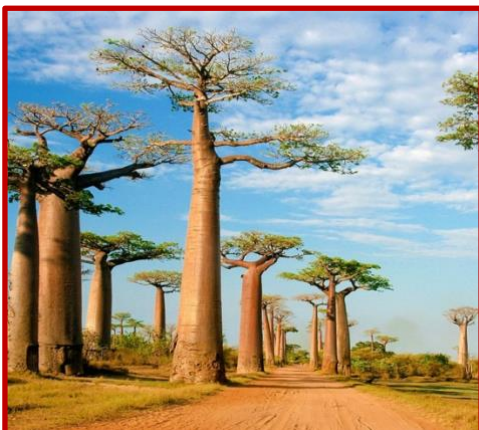
The young leaves of the baobab can be eaten as vegetables and are also used to make sauces.

THE BARK



The bark of the baobab is used as a remedy in decoctions. Since the inner part of the bark is very fibrous, baobab fiber can be extracted from it. The fibers are moistened to soften them and used for making ropes through braiding. These ropes are notably used for making musical instruments, baskets, nets, or fishing line.

TALES AND LEGENDS



Many legends circulate about the baobab in Africa: it is said to conceal treasures in the heart of its trunk, and it was supposedly planted upside down by God to punish it for its vanity.

But in the village, the baobab is above all the “tree of life”, a sacred tree under whose shade people gather to have conversations, to make important decisions and to tell stories.



ACTIVITIES

Calabash mosaic with cowries, coffee beans and lentils



Materials:

- Kraft paper or cardboard
- Pencil
- Glue
- Beans (various sizes and shapes), lentils, coffee beans

Draw a half-circle that covers almost the entire page. Apply a layer of glue to the circle. Arrange the seeds as you like. Let the glue dry.

Making a djembe with a tin can or plastic jar



Materials:

- Empty, well-washed tin or plastic pot (yoghurt pot, etc.)
- Elastic band
- White kraft paper or colorful pieces of fabric
- Glue
- Scissors
- Brushes
- Paint

Cut out the top and bottom of the can. Apply a layer of glue all around the can and glue pieces of paper or fabric to it. Cover the whole can. Measure the diameter of the lid to be covered and cut out a sheet of kraft paper in the shape of

a circle with the diameter increased by 10 cm. Stretch the kraft paper over the container. Fold over the edges of the circle and secure in place of the lid with a rubber band. Leave the glue to dry. Paint the paper as you like!

For chopsticks, all you need is a wooden stick, cotton, plastic and a rubber band. Place a cotton ball at the end of the wooden chopstick, surrounded by a plastic ring held in place by a rubber band.

Making a percussion instrument with a small plastic bottle



Materials:

- Bottle of 500ml or less and cap, well washed
- Multicolored beans

Fill a quarter of the bottle with the beans and close the cap.
Decorate with markers, paper and paint!

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