

Masks and Mask Culture

Mask dance tells story of Ivory Coast music and folklore

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by Kathryn Williams Craft

Vado Diomande requires 20 minutes of solitude to begin the ritual of transformation. He will don a sacred mask handed down through generations of his Mahouka family in Africa's Ivory Coast -- a mask so powerful no one else may touch it. Diomande feels the weight of his calling. Villagers back home are heavily invested in how he will perpetuate their culture in the United States. Diomande had to request their permission to take the mask from the country; no substitute exists.

As Diomande prepares, he is committed to the spiritual task ahead of him. For once he puts on the mask, he is no longer Vado Diomande (VAH-doe Dee-oh-MAHN-day), founder and artistic director of Kotchegna Dance Company.

He becomes *Gue Pelou* (Geh Peh-LOO), mediator between the land of the ancestors and the land of the living, a spirit that expresses itself through acrobatic feats performed on stilts.

When this mask appears in tribal life, it brings blessings and protection to important celebrations -- marriages, deaths, initiations, harvesting and sowing....

...Diomande pulls his performers from a pool of 20 dancer and musician members of the company. The male dancers are Africans, some of whom have also been entrusted with sacred masks...

...One of Kotchegna's full-evening pieces is a myth about the time when women were in charge of the mask, and the men became so upset that they challenged the women to a competition and won the mask back. There is no standard repertory; every program is decided upon close to the performance date.

Diomande became well-known in the Ivory Coast for his accomplishments as a stilt dancer as a result of the West African tradition of engaging in competitive dance. His reputation continues to grow through his performance and residency programs in the United States.



The Zaouly Mask"

(zah - wuhly)

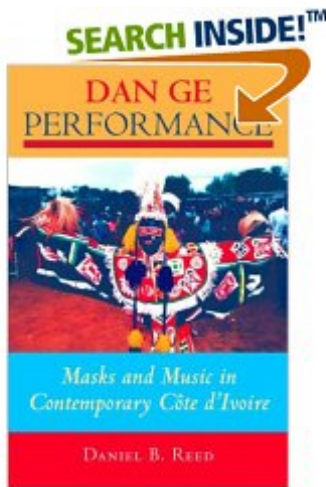
The Zaouly mask is a symbol of the Gouro culture from the Ivory Coast, West Africa.

The story tells us that Djela Lou Zaouly (jayla - lu - zah - wuhly) was a goddess for the Gouro people.

The Gouro word "Djela Lou Zaouly" stands for "The Lion's Daughter" -- Djela means lion; Lou means daughter.

The Zaouly dance is a seduction dance performed by a masked character whose finesse, elegance and grace contributes to the charm of this dance from the Gouro people.





**Dan Ge
Performance:
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Cote D'Ivoire
(African
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by Daniel B. Reed "On a hot dusty January day in the small city of Man, Nicole, Jacques, and I were looking for a place to live..." (more)

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Dr. Daniel Reed will present a lecture from 1:00-2:15pm on Saturday Aug. 26, 2006

"Ge Performance: Masks and Music among the Dan of Cote d'Ivoire"

Ge, formerly translated as "mask" or "masquerade," appears among the Dan people of Côte d'Ivoire as a dancing and musical embodiment of their social ideals and religious beliefs. In this lecture, Dr. Daniel Reed, who has conducted a year of fieldwork among the Dan, will explain the various meanings that *Ge* performance holds for contemporary Dan people. Using video and live musical examples, Reed will explain how *Ge* performance works in a spiritual and technical sense, with a special emphasis on the ways people use music in performing *Ge*.

Daniel B. Reed is Director of the Archives of Traditional Music and Assistant Professor of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is author of the book *Dan Ge Performance: Masks and Music in Contemporary Cote d'Ivoire* (Indiana University Press), which won the Amaury Talbot Prize for best book in African anthropology in 2003. Reed is also co-author (with Gloria Gibson) of the CD-ROM *Music and Culture in West Africa: The Straus Expedition* (Indiana University Press).