



## News & Events

University News & Information

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California

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# Baobab Brings Unique Afro-Cuban Music Blend to PAC April 29

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Orchestra Baobab, the groove-music 12-member Afro-Cuban ensemble who dominated the music of Senegal in the 1970s, will perform on Thursday, April 29, 2004, at 8 p.m. in the Christopher Cohan Center.

Billboard Magazine called "one of the great bands in the history of West African music...The revitalized Orchestra Baobab sounds fabulous. Their Afro-Cuban sound is a thing of beauty... its return couldn't be more timely."

In an evening of Latin rhythms and African melodies, Cal Poly Arts presents the group as part of Cal Poly Arts' innovative Director's Choice series, which highlights emerging artists in featured performances.

Senegal is a country with a rich musical heritage and one of the most vibrant pop music scenes on the African continent. In the 1970s, the style that filled Senegal's airwaves was a fusion of Afro-Cuban elements with various local sounds drawn from Senegal's diverse cultural traditions. The undisputed masters of this fusion were the legendary Orchestra Baobab.

Baobab -- named for the baobab tree, one of the most emblematic and majestic trees of the African Savannah -- exploded onto the Dakar scene in 1970. They immediately became the top local band, famous for their sublime and sophisticated arrangements, lyrical vocals and dazzling guitar solos.

For a decade, Baobab reigned supreme, recruiting some of the finest musicians from around the country, making them one of Senegal's most cosmopolitan and versatile bands.

Their approach to the Cuban sound went beyond imitation: they created their own mellow, unique Cuban-style rhythms. Orchestra Baobab featured

rolling harmonies and intensely melodic drumming traditions, which was to become Baobab's trademark.

Their hauntingly beautiful ballads and their rocking songs became all-time hits in West Africa. They founded the Baobab Club and recorded more than 20 albums between 1970 and 1985, including the acclaimed "Pirate's Choice," which was released internationally. Among connoisseurs of West African music, Orchestra Baobab achieved almost cult status.

But by the early 80s, times were changing in Senegal. There was a new sound in the nightclubs and Cuban rhythms were exchanged for adaptations of the Sabar street dances.

The Baobab Club closed in 1979 and the band had moved on to new locations. There was a new political movement and there was intense guerrilla warfare in the region. One by one, members of the band left, and by 1987 the band had completely broken up.

In 2001, Nick Gold, director of World Circuit, decided to reissue "Pirate's Choice", this time with some previously unreleased material from the same 1982 sessions. It was Baobab's mellow arrangements of Cuba's dance rhythms that had first inspired Gold to research Cuban music, leading eventually to the most successful ever world music album, "The Buena Vista Social Club."

Gold was already collaborating with premiere Afro vocalist Youssou N'Dour on several other Senegalese projects and Gold enlisted N'Dour's support for an Orchestra Baobab reunion concert.

Said N'Dour: "(Baobab) had such a clean sound and they were Pan-African. We're ready for this to come back. We've put up barriers in our music and we have to bring the barriers down. All the young kids, they understand now just how important those years, the 70s, were for their music, so they're ready to listen."

The core members of Baobab got together for a reunion concert at London's Barbican Centre in May, 2001. And though Baobab hadn't played together for almost 20 years, they proved that they were still one of the great live bands of West Africa.

Critics and audiences agreed that their music sounded as powerful as ever, a refreshing take on Senegal's cultural diversity, driven by the mesmerizing guitar solos and haunting vocals.

In November, 2001, Baobab recorded "Specialist in All Styles," with their signature Afro-Cuban blend and a totally "live" feel. The release includes stunning new material, as well as some old favorites.

"Specialist in All Styles' reunites many of the key members from

Baobab's golden era and affirms their timeless power. This is groove music at once relaxed and unyielding, insistent enough for the dance floor, trance-y enough to lull an infant." (Rolling Stone)

"There is no way you won't fall instantly in love with the Orchestra's exquisite ripple of guitars...gorgeous." (The Independent on Sunday)

Tickets for the performance range from \$22 to \$34, with student discounts available, and may be purchased at the Performing Arts Ticket Office, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. To order by phone, call 805/756-2787; to order by fax: 805/756-6088. Order on-line at [www.pacslo.org](http://www.pacslo.org).

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