

Arts, Etc.

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Celebrate the new year with Toubab Krewe

By Tiffany Narron
Staff Writer

An intense style of string picking deep rooted drum and bass make up the sound of Asheville's own Toubab Krewe, who will be bringing their rhythm back home for New Years along with the eclectic stylings of the local Snake Oil Medicine Show.

When asked to describe their sound and what style of music they fit into, the Krewe will answer that it is what it is.

"It is always wonderful to play music in our home town," said guitarist Drew Heller. "Nothing quite compares to the feeling of excitement, nervousness and joy of performing here."

Not all members of the quintet are from Asheville. The newest bass player, David Pranksy, hails from Vermont, while drummer Luke Quaranta is a New York native.

The other three members including Heller, drummer Teal Brown and electric guitarist Justin Perkins were born in the WNC mountains.

"We have been friends since elementary school," Heller said. "Justin and I have been playing music together regularly since the fourth grade. Toubab Krewe has been playing music together since 1998 but it was not until January, 2005 that we began performing in public."

The group's knowledge of African style music comes directly from Africa. Perkins began playing drums at an early age, taking influence from a variety of styles including jazz, rock, and afro-Cuban, according to publicist Jake Frankel.

At the age of 16, he was introduced to the eclectic style of West African music through local drum maker Gordon Ray.

In 2000 he joined the drum and dance ensemble "Common Ground" and in the summer of 2001 took his first trip to Africa with Heller, Brown and Quaranta. There, Ray studied the rhythm and dance of Guinea and the Ivory Coast and discovered the kora, a 21-string African harp.

"There is a constant evolution in process," Heller said. "Some of it feels conscious, much of it feels unconscious. What feels conscious is the occasional deconstruction of elements that have grown into the group's musical consciousness."

While in Africa, Perkins put down the drums and devoted himself to learning the sound of the kora, studying with musician Kelanton Sissoko. During that same trip, Perkins and Heller were introduced to lifelong musical mentor and friend Lamine Soumano.

"On April 20, our good friend and mentor Lamine Soumano was able to join us for a fun, festive



Toubab Krewe will play at the Orange Peel, Dec. 30 with Lee Boys and Dec. 31 with Snake Oil Medicine Show.

show at the Orange Peel," Heller said.

Soumano intricately instructed both Heller and Perkins on the eclectic mix of what makes Manding's music, according to the band. They have fused this sound into their own over the years, blending it with their personal styles and influences.

In 2004, the two traveled to Mali for four months, studying and practicing their newfound musical passions. During this trip, Heller studied the soku, Malian fiddle, with musical master Zoumana Tereta.

Drummer Teal Brown has a musical history much the same. His first encounter with drumming was in the second grade when he discovered the art of beat boxing, according to Frankel.

When he was a teenager he discovered his father's ashiko drum and created a lifelong passion.

While enrolled at Warren Wilson College, Brown and some friends took a trip to Guinea, where he learned and lived with master drummer Koungbawan Conde, according to Frankel. He graduated a few years later from UNC Asheville.

"We were a part of this music festival held in an extraordinary location, five hours north of Timbuktu, deep in the Sahara Desert," Heller said. "Having the opportunity to share the stage with so many of our heroes from West Africa was quite an experience. It was also the first time that we performed as Toubab Krewe in West Africa. Musically, it was raw and emotional."

The Krewe's bass player, David Pranksy taught himself the mandolin and began playing sold-out shows with the band Dispatch, according to Frankel. He released a solo album before hooking up with the Krewe in 2004 and picking up the bass.

Since the band's public debut in 2005, their unique African blend of floaty guitar riffs, kora, jimbale harmonies and deep rhythms have kept the crowds moving.

Just this year, the band toured from West Africa to New York City to New Orleans, according to Frankel.

"Almost like needing to trim some of the weeds, letting some light in for the flowers and helping you better see where you are placing your feet," Heller said.

"When you let your unconscious minds have equal stake in what is going on, it's often helpful to look at what has evolved and what has simply grown."

The band will perform on Dec. 30 and 31 at the Orange Peel. The second night will include the local act, Snake Oil Medicine Show.

Snake Oil has a musical styling all their own, blending feel good original Americana with a mix of jazz, swing, reggae and funk, according to fiddler player/vocalist Caroline Pond.

"We have shared festival time with Toubab Krewe and they are stellar musicians," Pond said. "I absolutely love their style and its great playing festivals because you get to hear bands that you normally don't get to hear."

Snake Oil's variously textured music fuses Appalachian bluegrass and old-time with early jazz styles, reggae and psychedelic funk. Their goal is to convey positive energy and ideals to their audiences through their encompassing mixture of music and art.

"I feel honored to have merry lil' pranksters at our shows," Pond said. "What a beautiful blessing that people still believe in us and

come to our shows. I love to share our gifts with the people. It's just a positive exchange of energy."

Having recorded six international releases, Snake Oil shares the stage with musicians such as Keller Williams, the Yonder Mountain String Band and Sound Tribe Sector Nine. They travel with an artist, Phil Cheney, who paints to the rhythms and grooves of the music on stage.

"The Snake Oil is like my church and then art is my religion," Cheney said. "When we would be apart for a while and then re-connect at a performance, it would all come rushing back to me, the reason for wanting to perform with this group. It's very powerful stuff. I feel like each musician's magic flies up in the air and then comes to me and I transfer that energy into the visual realm."

Toubab Krewe at the Orange Peel
Dec. 30; with Lee Boys; \$15
Dec. 31; with Snake Oil Medicine Show; \$20
\$30 for both nights

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Arts in Asheville

Ben Lee & Cary Brothers and Kate Voegele
Wednesday, 8 p.m.
The Orange Peel.
Tickets: \$14 (advance); \$16 (door)

Dinosaur Jr. and Awesome Color & Labiators
Friday, 9 p.m.
The Orange Peel
Tickets: \$22.50 (advance); \$25 (door)

Afromotive & Dubconscious
Saturday, 9 p.m.
The Orange Peel
Tickets: \$10 (advance); \$12 (door)



COURTESY OF NEW WEST RECORDS

The Avett Brothers and Langhorne Slim
Friday, Dec. 28, 9 p.m.
The Orange Peel
Tickets: \$20 (advance); \$25 (door)
Saturday, Dec. 29, 9 p.m.
Tickets: \$20 (advance); \$25 (door)

Found Magazine vs. PostSecret Tour
Friday, Nov. 30, 8 p.m.
The Grey Eagle
Tickets: \$10; \$7 student

Bob Schneider and AM
Sunday, Dec. 16
The Grey Eagle
Tickets: \$12 (advance); \$15 (door)

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