

## BAKA BEYOND BIOGRAPHY

Musicians from 6 countries in the Celtic fringes of Europe and the West coast of Africa join together to play the most original live world fusion sound around. The spirit of the music lives in the rhythm. All Baka Beyond's rhythms are played by human beings not machines !



**History:** Baka Beyond were originally inspired by Martin Cradick & Su Hart's visits to the Baka Forest People in Cameroon. While there they played music with and recorded the Baka resulting in two albums, [Heart of the Forest](#) - field recordings of the traditional Baka music - & [Spirit of the Forest](#) [http://www.bakabeyond.net/images/martin\\_band.jpg](http://www.bakabeyond.net/images/martin_band.jpg) - a mix of music written with & inspired by the Baka. [Watch Martin playing with the Baka](#)



The album "Spirit of the Forest" helped define the term "world music" and pushed Baka Beyond into worldwide recognition. From these beginnings, recorded in a bedroom studio and based on live jams recorded while living with the Baka Pygmies in the rainforests of South-East Cameroon, Baka Beyond has evolved into a multicultural, dynamic live stage show. "It was the amazing bird-like singing or yelli that first attracted me," says Su Hart, Baka Beyond's lead singer. "The women get together before the dawn to sing, enchant the animals of the forest and ensure that the men's hunting will be successful. Song and dance are used by the Baka for healing, for rituals, for keeping the community together and also for pure fun! We try to do the same in Baka Beyond."



Although in the early days the live "Baka Beyond" was mainly British musicians reproducing the recordings on "Spirit of the Forest", over the years the band has grown to include members from Brittany, Cameroon, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Ghana as well as Britain. Each musician brings their influence and talent to the music to create a unique spectacle honouring a lesson learned from the Baka people, "everyone to be listened to".

The rhythms and melodies of the African players, every one an acknowledged virtuoso with a parallel career in their own right, meet with the Celtic traditions, ancient and modern, of the European musicians.

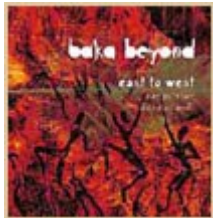


Over time the musicians have got to know each other and each others way of playing: Baka Beyond live or in the studio are a living lesson in communication, in passing the energy around. "It's great to play with so many talented musicians," says Seckou Keita, Senegalese kora maestro and percussion player for Baka Beyond. "We have worked very hard together and this really makes the music work on stage and in the studio." "The music of the Baka somehow touches the music of many different cultures," says Martin

Cradick, guitarist and founder member of Baka Beyond. "I've always looked for the similarities in music from different places and the fast, yet gentle syncopated rhythms of the Baka somehow provide the perfect glue to join together different musical elements from different roots." "It's amazing to see how connected we are," adds Seckou Keita. "We come from different cultures yet Baka rhythms such as Boulez Boulez are so similar to Senegalese rhythms."



Baka Beyond is one of the few groups who ensure that they put as much back into the culture that inspires their music as they take out. They created the charity "Global Music Exchange" to deal with royalties that were due to the Baka from the album "Spirit of the Forest" and its companion album "Heart of the Forest" and to bring these royalties back to the musicians' communities. This has led to an ongoing relationship with this Baka community involving many return trips in order to find out how best to use the funds. "We now feel very much part of the family," says Martin. "I have seen more people born and more people die in this small community than I have back in England! Since we keep coming back and they have seen material changes to their lives as a result of the money they have earned with their own music, a great sense of trust has built up, and they are very keen for us to spread their music and rhythms as far as possible."



It has been a busy time for Baka Beyond since the release of their last album, "East to West" in 2002. As well as major tours in Europe and USA there have been 4 return trips to Cameroon where a large timber-framed Music House has been built in the rainforest at the Baka's request. Martin has also used these journeys to experiment with different recording systems to capture some of the music that is always being played. "The original idea of 'Spirit of the Forest' was to recreate the mood of the music sessions that take place many afternoons and most evenings in the forest," says Martin. "However none of the recordings really touches the raw energy that is present in the forest where everyone, young and old, would be taking part. It just isn't possible in Britain to find the same atmosphere, especially in a studio. I've known for a long time that I would have to, one day, get a multi-track studio to the forest, and now the technology has caught up with the idea



"When I went on my own in November 2002 I took my laptop and a couple of decent microphones. This was the time that plans were being made for the construction of the Music House. The Baka, inspired by this idea, couldn't wait for our return the following spring for construction to start and so set to work to build a very large traditional-styled Baka house or 'mongolu' to play music in. This became my studio and it was great especially to record Loni singing 'yelli' as she was the 'mysterious Baka woman singing deep in the forest' who opens both 'Heart of the Forest' and 'Spirit of the Forest'." The building of the Music House has created a more

permanent base in the rainforest, which has opened up more possibilities for recording. Martin took a solar panel and battery in Jan 2004 and a multitrack system so that the Baka's music could be captured live. The track 'Kobo' on 'The Rhythm Tree' was the first song to be recorded in this way.



In February 2003 Denise Rowe, singer and dancer in the band, joined Martin and Su on their trip to help build the Music House in Cameroon. The Baka are renowned throughout Africa as masters of dance and Dee took this opportunity to develop her dancing skills with them. This is evident to all who have seen Baka Beyond since. "Dancing has always been my first love," says Denise, "but the energy and passion that the Baka put into their dance was just amazing! It was such a privilege to be there dancing to the Baka's music that most nights I would dance until almost dawn." In between Africa trips Baka Beyond were extensively touring and when not on the road were working in their studio in Bath. This has resulted in the new album 'Rhythm Tree' which has a mix of Baka music recorded in the rainforest, tracks that have become popular parts of the live show, and songs that have been written in the studio.



Martin says of the new album: "This is the culmination of over 10 years of work for me. It is where the music of the Baka and of Baka Beyond comes back together. I have always felt that there was a big difference between Baka Beyond as a live band and the Baka Beyond on the albums, which have always been quite studio based. We have had a stable line-up now for a long time and we are playing really well together as a band. Meanwhile the Baka musicians have been developing their songs using the guitars that we've taken to them, and on 'Rhythm Tree we have been able to bring all these elements together. The next stage will be to have 2 more new albums, one entirely the live band, and another the Baka performing the best of their many songs recorded in the forest and the Music house."



After all the work in putting together 'Rhythm Tree' Baka Beyond can't wait to get back on the road in the spring. "We have such a good time on stage," says Su, "that we all really miss when we're not gigging. The audience always leaves uplifted and their positive feedback always lifts us up." "We were bubbling!" says Ayodele Scott, Sierra Leonean percussionist, after a show. Baka Beyond have consolidated their live show into a tight spectacle of music, song and dance, overflowing with fun and exuberance. A feast for the eyes and heart as well as the ears and feet.