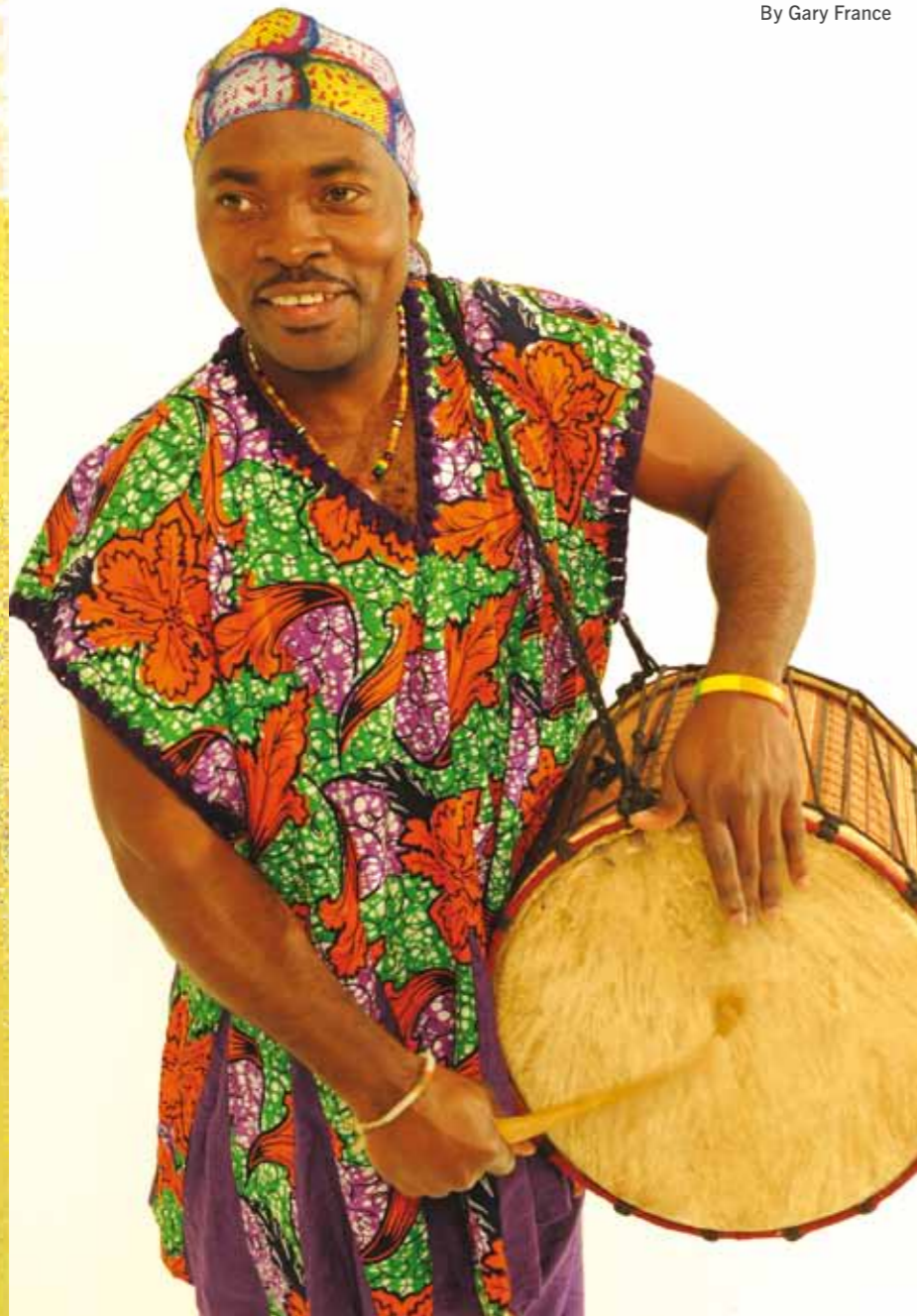


# TUZA AFUTU

## Master Drummer Extraordinaire

By Gary France



In 1999 I had the privilege of travelling to Ghana, West Africa to study West African Drumming Dance and Chant as part of the Kusun Intensive African Drumming program in Ghana. Kusun cultural programs are the brainchild of master musicians Nii Tettey Tetteh and Ray Pereira. This program provided a fantastic opportunity for me to immerse myself in the culture while being able to dictate my pace of learning. A surprise educational opportunity was the many Master Drummers and Dancers that were employed as teachers and mentors in this program. A highlight for me was to study with Tuza Afutu, a true Master Drummer with extensive knowledge of Ga-Adangbe, Ewe and Ashanti drumming, dance, and chant. I recently caught up for a conversation with Tuza, now living in Australia.

**I know you as an 'African Master Drummer'. What does the title "Master Drummer" mean, and what kind of training does one undergo to receive this title?**

A Master Drummer is recognised by his peers to have a deep knowledge of traditional music from various ethnic groups of his country, and excels at performing, soloing, directing, arranging and teaching. Every African drumming ensemble has a Master Drummer who tells the ensemble when to play and when to stop, he signals other players to change the tempo or the drum rhythm. The Master Drummer plays the lead drum, and acts like a conductor – simultaneously playing along and leading the music as well. The Master Drummer also understands the relationship between the drumming and the dancers, and the meaning of the dance steps.

The training involved begins at an early age and takes many years to complete (up to 20 years). It involves lengthy and daily drumming practice with older generations of Master Drummers and a bigger ensemble. It also means learning hundreds of different rhythms, and being able to play a variety of



percussion instruments as well as singing. Being a Master Drummer also carries with it a responsibility to pass on these rhythms to the younger generations, training new apprentices. The Master Drummer can play any part of the rhythm, and knows the songs and dances that accompany that rhythm.

**In the workshops that you present I note that when you teach an authentic "Rhythm" you also teach the accompanying chant, and dance. Is there a relationship between West African drumming and dance?**

African drumming and dancing have a close relationship – really in Africa they go hand in hand. There is usually no drumming without dancing and vice versa. The drum rhythms have specific dances that accompany them, and the dancer changes his or her moves according to the drum pattern being played. So the dancer needs very good listening skills to hear the drumming rhythm change, and know at that moment the drummer has signalled them to change to the next movement in the piece. It is an intricate art form where the Master drummer controls the dancer.

**Are there rhythms and drums that are the speciality of the Ga People? Is all African drumming the same or are there different rhythms and styles native to each country?**

All African drumming is definitely not the same. There is a huge difference in the type of drums

from different countries and even different tribes within the same country. So the Ga people use the kpanlogo (twreshi) drum, obonu drum (huge large drums as tall as a man, played with sticks), krokoto drum, kroboge drum, gome drum etc. In terms of the rhythms the Ga tribe is known for the kpanlogo rhythm (an urban dance from the 1960's), obonu hiiamli rhythm played on the chief palace

**How did you come to live in Australia?**

I toured widely in Australia many times performing in schools around the country, before marrying an Australian woman and settling in Sydney.

**Can you please tell me about your organisation 'African Beat'?**

I am the Director of African Beat which is a drumming company offering corporate team building



drums, mla rhythm (a voodoo court rhythm), oge rhythm which comes from the slaves, kple rhythm played at festivals in my village of Nungua, gome rhythm (which remembers the slave trade).

**While I was in Ghana as a student I noticed you teaching a wonderful ensemble of young people. Do you have a special approach or philosophy when teaching? Do you use written music? How do people learn?**

We don't actually use written music. Our drumming is an oral tradition learned from repetition and practice, and feeling the rhythms. You need to have a good memory and play often to learn African drumming. We also have a drum language, which we use for teaching. We speak or sing the very rhythm to be played, as a method of making it easier to remember and play – "singing the sound".

**As a Master Drummer do you also know how to repair drums?**

Not all Master Drummer know this skill, but I do and I believe all of us should. However there are drum makers who have specialised in this task and we prefer to buy our drums from them to support their trade.

events, school performances, drumming parties and African entertainment. We only use African performers and have the very best musicians on board. Our feedback is out of this world! Please visit [www.africanbeat.com.au](http://www.africanbeat.com.au)

**Do you lead cultural educational tours in Africa?**

Every January my friend and business partner Simon Fraser and I take visitors to Ghana to learn drumming and dancing as part of "Ekome Tours". It is a total immersion into the music and culture of Ghana, a life-changing experience. Many of our tour participants have visited 2-3 times. For more info visit [www.ekometours.com.au](http://www.ekometours.com.au)

**Can you please tell me about your fabulous ensemble 'Salaka'?**

Salaka is the name of my youth ensemble based in Ghana. This is the way in which I have passed on my musical heritage to the next generation. They are wonderful musicians and performers, having travelled from Ghana to Australia 5 times and are widely recognised within Ghana. They are also the teachers for Ekome Tours. They are earning their living through music as well as [www.salakaensemble.com.au](http://www.salakaensemble.com.au)

