

MorningStar Cultural Arts Group (www.morningstararts.org) was proud to get the following concert write up the first go around, and have scheduled interviews for this year's entertainment as well.

Connect Savannah Recommends

Our suggestions for the week's most noteworthy shows

By Jim Reed
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Mamar Kassey

Back in September of last year, this internationally-known group of African pop stars were forced to cancel a scheduled appearance at this great midtown venue when they ran afoul of the Department of Homeland Security, and were denied the work visas needed to facilitate their goodwill tour of America.



As I noted at that time, in these days of heightened awareness (when most anything can easily be brought into the USA

in general – and Savannah in particular – through unchecked maritime shipping containers), one of the greatest threats to the safety of the average American must certainly be a lanky musician bearing an ethnic instrument and wearing traditional garb.

Well, cooler heads have prevailed and now local audiences will finally have a chance to see a group that has been turning heads and enthraling crowds the world over with their blend of timeless African rhythms and exhilarating, audience-participation dance routines.

Hailed by critics as “one of the most exciting roots pop outfits anywhere,” the band was formed by its two leaders, **Yacouba Moumouni** and **Abdoulaye Alhassane** in 1998, and almost immediately Mamar Kassey had electrified Niger’s (not to be confused with neighboring Nigeria’s) rather lackluster pop scene. They play a fusion of national ethnic music (concentrating on the styles of **Songhai**, **Fulani** and **Hausa**). However, what may be most interesting to audiences in our neck of the woods, is the noticeable influence of American black roots music.

The group deftly mixes native instruments such as the Fulani flute, desert fiddle and tabla-like drums with electric bass and guitar, which are played in a percussive “slap” style similar to that used in our own funk, soul and blues musics. At times, Cuban rhythms and New Orleans backbeats appear, but are placed directly alongside the drive and power of Niger’s traditional juju grooves, resulting in one of the most exciting new sub-genres to emerge from the African continent in the past decade. In fact, video footage shows people in their crowds shaking and shimmying, their arms outstretched, seemingly transported to another time and place – the group’s percussionists both mesmerizing the crowd and freeing them.

This show is free to all ages. Don’t miss this extremely rare opportunity to experience indigenous – yet progressive – music from this remote desert nation. *Thurs., 7 pm, The Jewish Education Alliance (5111 Abercorn St.).*