



Wednesday, March 20, 2002

## Internationally known African percussionist to play at OU

The **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** is presenting internationally known African percussionist Bernard Woma in concert for one night only Saturday, March 23, at 8 p.m. in Varner Recital Hall. Woma is the head xylophonist and master drummer of the Ghana National Theatre and is the founder of the award-winning Dagara Bewaa Culture Group.

He will perform music of the Dagara people of West Africa. Dagara music is some of the oldest xylophone music in the world, with complex rhythms that challenge the listener and the performer equally.

Woma is from the Gbanne Clan of the Dagara people. He was born in the village of Hiineteng, located in northwestern Ghana, near the border of Burkina Faso. His father noticed that, as a newborn, Woma's hands were clenched in fists as if he was clutching xylophone mallets. His father consulted with a village elder who informed him that his son's hands indicated he was destined to become a xylophone player.

Woma began playing the gyil when he was 2 years old. At age 5, Woma was introduced to Ziem Tibo, a xylophone maker and player who became his mentor and guide. Tibo taught Woma how to build and "purify" a new xylophone and he taught him the mysteries associated with the gyil.

Woma soon became known for his musical abilities and was asked to play at funerals and weddings throughout the Upper West Region of Ghana. Preoccupied with farm work and xylophone playing, Woma did not begin school until he was 10 years old. An older brother had to convince their father that Woma was very bright and should go to school. Reluctantly, his father agreed, provided that Woma would continue to work at the farm before and after school and his brothers would pay the uniform and school fees.

Woma quickly absorbed the school lessons and jumped several grades ahead. At the same time, he played the gyil at the local Catholic Church. There he began to set his own words to traditional melodies and compose his own music.

In 1982, when Woma had almost finished his schooling, he had no means to continue paying school fees and moved to the capital city of Accra to earn money. There, he found a job as a steward with a wealthy Ghanaian family. He worked seven days a week from 4 a.m. until midnight. Occasionally, he was given some free time on Sunday evenings. On these special nights, he would go to Mamobi, a section of Accra where many Dagara people live and gather. There, he played the gyil for traditional Dagara dancing and became well known in the community.

Tickets for Woma's performance are \$6 for students, \$10 for seniors and OU employees, and \$12 for the general public. Tickets can be reserved by calling the Varner Hall Box Office at (248) 370-3013, at all Ticketmaster outlets, on-line at the **Ticketmaster** Web site and at the door one hour before each performance.

### SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, March 20, 2002  
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, March 20, 2002  
Article Start Date: Monday, November 10, 2003