

Music and Dance

The Sierra Leone Civil War began in 1991; it was initiated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) under the command of Foday Sankoh. Tens of thousands died and more than 2 million were displaced due to the 11-year conflict. The causes originated in 1985 when a military leader was installed as president of Sierra Leone in a one-party election. Many opposed, primarily a group of students, including Foday Sankoh were expelled from the country. Many started to attend Moammar Qaddafi's secret service training facility, the al-Mathabh al-Thauriya al-Alamiya World Revolutionary Headquarters. The group recruited unemployed young men and students, some associated with the Pan African Union of Sierra Leone (PANAFU), as the group grew, internal conflicts arose, and many left the group, some students to universities in Ghana, others back to Sierra Leone. Others were still more interested in a revolution and went to Kano state and toured the diamond industry and talked with workers about their situation and started to spread a revolutionary ideology.

Control of Sierra Leone's diamond industry was a primary cause of the war. Although equipped with abundant natural resources, Sierra Leone was ranked as the poorest country in the world in 1998. When all the state structures began to break down, broad corridors of Sierra Leonean society were opened up to the trafficking of arms and ammunition. Drugs also wore away national and regional security as well as facilitated crime within the country, precipitating illegal trade with both Liberia and Guinea. The RUF's teamed up with Charles Taylor, now a former President of Liberia; he was a leader of Liberia civil war and wanted to destabilize Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone then was a rear base for the West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG, which was preventing

Taylor from seizing the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Taylor reportedly helped set up a deal with the government in Burkina Faso on behalf of the RUF for the supply of Burkinabe mercenaries, with payment to be made in Sierra Leone diamonds.

When the fighting started the RUF's were quick to demonstrate their brutality. They would decapitate community leaders and put their heads on stakes. The RUF used terror tactics such as mass rape, torture and mutilation of civilians, abduction of children to become child soldiers or sex slaves and massive intimidation. The forced recruitment of child soldiers was an idea that came about at the beginning of the war and many people were against the idea. Sankoh had many of these people killed, after that, rebels and other RUF followers implemented the plan. The children abducted ranged from ages 8-16 usually.

Music and dance forms of the country have primarily been related to tribal religious ceremonies but more recently music and dance has been used to promote peace. Today as Sierra Leone prepares for presidential and parliamentary elections on 11 August, the second since it emerged in 2002 from the brutal civil war conflict that saw thousands killed and many others with their limbs cut off in a terror-campaign of mutilation, more than a dozen well-known area musicians are touring the Sierra Leone countryside in a series of peace-promoting concerts. "Music is one of the most important resources of Sierra Leone," UN Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative Victor Angelo says. "These young people represent what is best about the country, and the UN is proud to support them so that their message of peace reaches all the citizens of their country."

Mapsoftheworld.com describes the music of Sierra Leone as a rich mix of the native traditions with French traits thrown for good measure. One of the renowned musical genres originating in Sierra Leone is called the "Palm Wine". The genre gets its name from a drink by the same name, which were served at places that played this type of music. You can hear versions of it all along the west coast of Africa. The Palm Wine is performed to the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar and drum. The formal name for the genre is "Maringa".

The most outstanding feature of the country's cultural life is its dancing. The Sierra Leone Dance Troupe is internationally known. A wide range of agility, gracefulness, and rhythm is displayed; in addition, there are elements of symbolism in most of the dances. Drums, wooden xylophones called balaphones, and various stringed instruments provide the musical background. Dancing plays a large part in all religious ceremonies and other ceremonies such as weddings, celebrations, holidays, etc.

Music and dance is and always has been a significant part of easing pain for this culture. Many people affected by the civil war turned to music and dance to lift their spirits. Many sounds and bands emerged from camps, hiding spots and rehabilitation centers during the civil war of the 1990's; most famous the Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. The creators of the band mates were living in Freetown during the attack near the turn of the century that forced a panicked mass of people to neighboring countries. They relocated to France where they began making music for their fellow refugees, providing a welcome distraction to life in the camps. Their efforts, however, were short lived. Safety in the Kalia camp disintegrated when it came under attack from the Guinean army and citizenry who believed the camps were being used as staging grounds for rebel attacks

against Guinea. With refugee camps now war zones, the initial band members were evacuated from the area and moved to Sembakounya Refugee Camp. While settled deep in the Guinean countryside the developing band was able to acquire the rusted-out sound system and beat up electric guitars that helped officially launch the group. Now the band tours the world while spreading their message of peace and love in a show that fans from all musical genres enjoy.

Music and dance is deep in the hearts of all native people of South Africa. It has made a powerful impression on many people and will forever be a part of the culture and everyday lives of the people.