

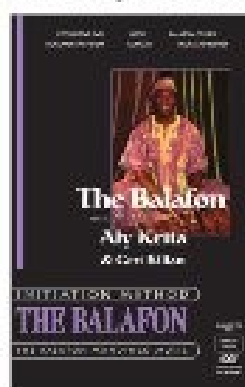
Aly Keita & Gert Kilian Initiation Method: The Balafon

IMProductions CV 0058

Mid Price (2 DVDs; 142 mins)



*All you need to know about
the African xylophone*



It's another double-DVD success for producer Philippe Nasse and his team, presenting an instrumental world music tradition with depth, respect and

wizardry. The *balafon* (a wooden African xylophone), in question is the pentatonic one – that's the scale produced by the black notes of the piano – derived from Mali, whose music is also present in Burkina Faso and Ghana. The heptatonic balafon (corresponding to the piano's white notes) hails from the same cultural stratum as the *kora* (harp-lute).

The whole production is very clever: it's everything you wanted to know about the balafon but were afraid to ask. Introduced by master player Aly Keita, there's an insightful documentary on the instrument, its place in society and the entire story of its construction. Then there's a well-filmed concert of his group Super Zamaza. The second DVD is a dream instruction video. And here is where the wizardry comes in. Every piece is broken down with a click-

track and count-in, and there are solo and duo versions to inspire you. The selection of material is perfectly pitched at the beginner, with just enough engaging variety for your first year, while experienced players can always copy the dazzling extended footage of the same pieces presented in the concert. Camera-wise you always see the player's eye view of the balafon – hands separately and together for a number of pieces. You can even loop sections and play along in duo with recordings of Aly himself.

There is also a 100-page booklet contextualising the tradition within a plethora of other African xylophone techniques and the mediator in this epic work, German percussionist Gert Kilian, perhaps could have acquired better translations and more accurate transcriptions. One of his pieces is included in the concert, and it's a bit too new age in comparison to the traditional pieces, but it is clear evidence that this music and instrument can and should be enjoyed by everyone. Everyone who is the least bit interested in this instrument should grab a copy: it will remain an essential and beautiful guide to this sector of African music for some time.

Barak Schmool ●