

Master stitches diverse sounds together

The Times Picayune

Thursday, April 30, 2009

By Molly Reid

Staff writer

Among the many musical masters living in New Orleans, Seguenon Kone stands apart.

Unlike the jazz, brass and blues greats who were raised in and fed off the city's rich cultural landscape, Kone, an Ivory Coast native, circled the globe several times before choosing New Orleans as his new home almost a year ago.

He is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, dancer and choreographer who was playing music and performing around the world with the National Ballet of the Ivory Coast when he was 14. He formed his own dance company when he was 21. Taught by his father at a young age, he is a master of the xylophone and djembe drums, has toured with Jimmy Buffett and contracted to work five shows a day at Walt Disney World.

The recent transplant will make his first two appearances at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival presented by Shell starting today, when his West African drum and dance company, Ivoire Spectacle, performs at the Congo Square stage. He'll also play Saturday in the Jazz Tent with a different group, Ensemble Fatien, which could have been formed only in New Orleans.

"The music's everywhere," Kone said, speaking softly in his halting English (French is his first language). "Every night, oh my God, it's crazy. I've never seen so much music like that in all the world. Not like New Orleans."

After visiting here several times for drum and dance workshops, Kone decided New Orleans was the place to pursue a long-held idea to create a new kind of ensemble, one that would combine old and new musical influences.

"All of our instruments, our singing . . . I wanted to pull them together," he said.