

## Tendé from Niger

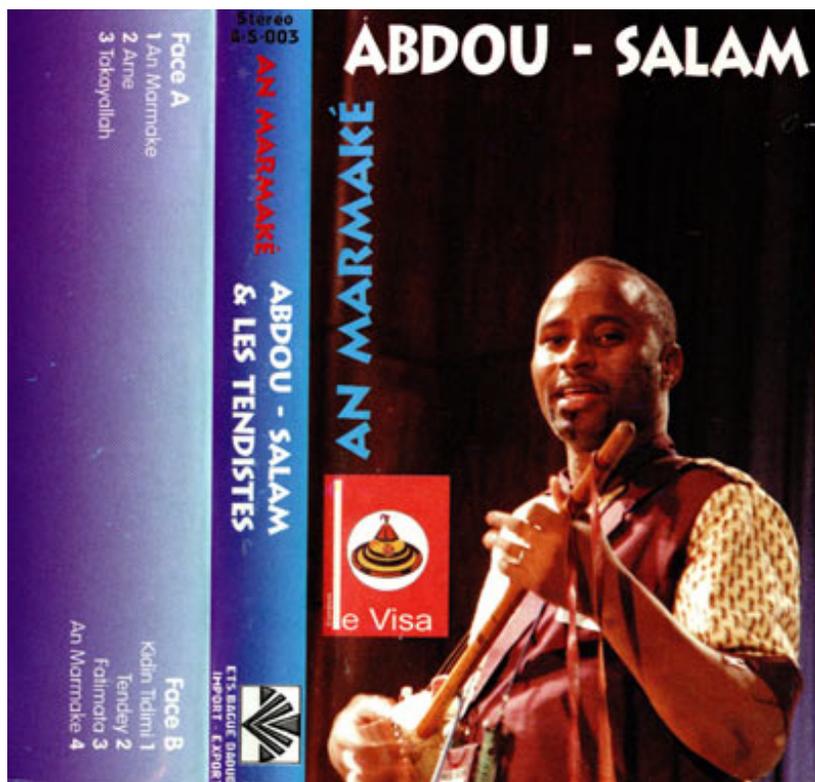
Posted At : January 28, 2008 11:40 PM | Posted By : Matthew LaVoie

Related Categories: Niger

One of the great pleasures of working at the Voice of America is the letters, pictures and cassettes that our listeners send us from throughout Africa (in the future I'll devote a post to some of the home-recordings we have received). Last week I saw this beautiful snapshot of a listener from northern Niger on a colleague's desk: on the backside he wrote "I've got two radios in case one break's down."



My first thought was, "I wonder what kind of music he listens to on his two radios?" This train of thought led to me to rummage through a box of cassettes from Niger and pull out a few of my favorites to share with you.



Abdou Salam is one of Niger's best-selling artists: he is also popular in Northern Nigeria. He was born on June 6, 1976 in Tahoua (which is 300 miles northeast of the capital, Niamey). He grew up next to a military camp and his earliest musical memories are of listening to the camp's guards sing and play music during their idle hours. Day after day he would return and listen, spellbound.

Abdou started his first group in 1991, when he was still a student at the University of Niamey. Determined to

become a professional musician, he traveled to Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire, where he studied music at the Ecole Nationale Supérieur, Arts et Lettres. In the mid-1990s he returned to Niamey and started his group Les Tendistes, who take their name from the Tuareg drum and rhythm of the same name, the Tendé. Abdou and his Tendistes have released six cassettes and are getting ready to put out their seventh. Abdou composes all the group's songs, and also plays the guitar, bass, Tendé, and the Gouroumi (a four-string Hausa lute). He sings in Hausa, Beri-Beri, Peulh, Tamachek, Toubou (his native language), and French.

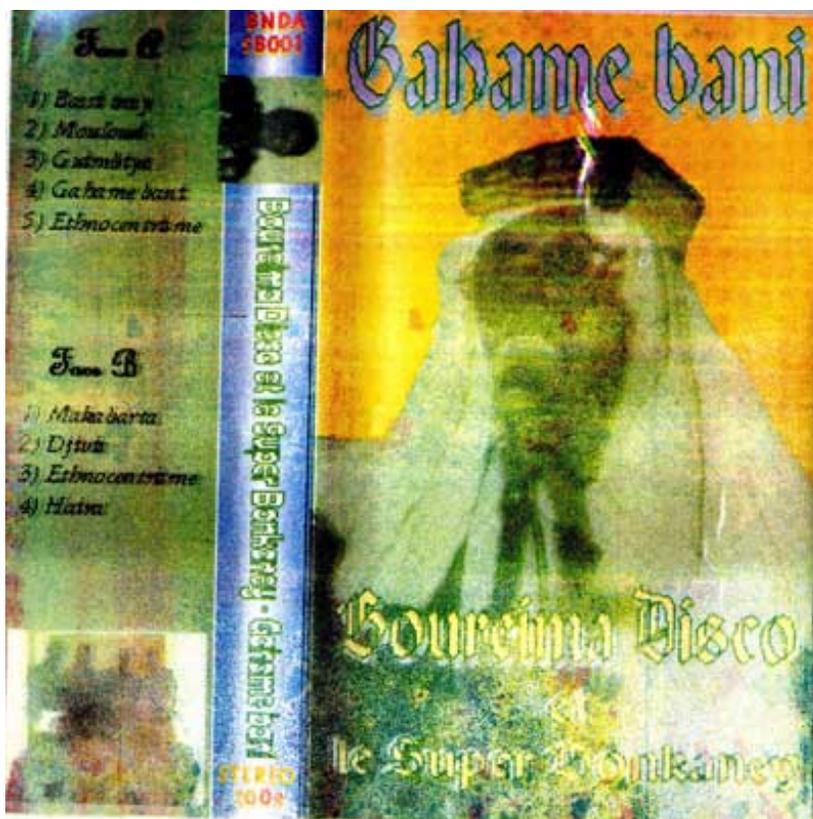
In 'Takayallah', which is a great example of Abdou's Tendé rhythm, he sings of the impatience of children in his village, who beg their parents to let them dance to the Tendé beat in the village square with their elders.

↳ [Abdou Salam "Takayallah"](#)

This next track is a response to one of his earlier hits. In 'An Marmaké' he sings of all the ways in which women must serve men: the earlier hit described the ways in which men served women. It all evens out in the end; men and women depend on each other.

↳ [Abdou Salam "An Marmaké"](#)

One of my favorite groups from Niger is Boureima Disco and his Super Bonkaney. The bandleader, singer, and primary composer, Boureima, was also born in Tahoua, on July 9, 1967. He made his musical début when he was still a schoolboy, beating traditional rhythms on empty cans to get his classmates to dance. His first musical passion, however, was Hindi film music. He would sing his favorite theme songs over and over again. He started singing professionally in the late 1990s, when he joined Eric Pancho's group, a popular singer at the time. Boureima started the Super Bonkaney at the beginning of this decade.



The group has released two cassettes and is very active on Niger's wedding scene. In 2004 Boureima took the Super Bonkaney on their first international tour, performing throughout Ghana and the Cote D'Ivoire. Asked how he got the 'Disco' suffix attached to his name, Boureima explained, that before he started singing, he was known throughout Niger for his dancing skills. Whenever he would walk into a party the crowd would call out 'Boureima Disco!'

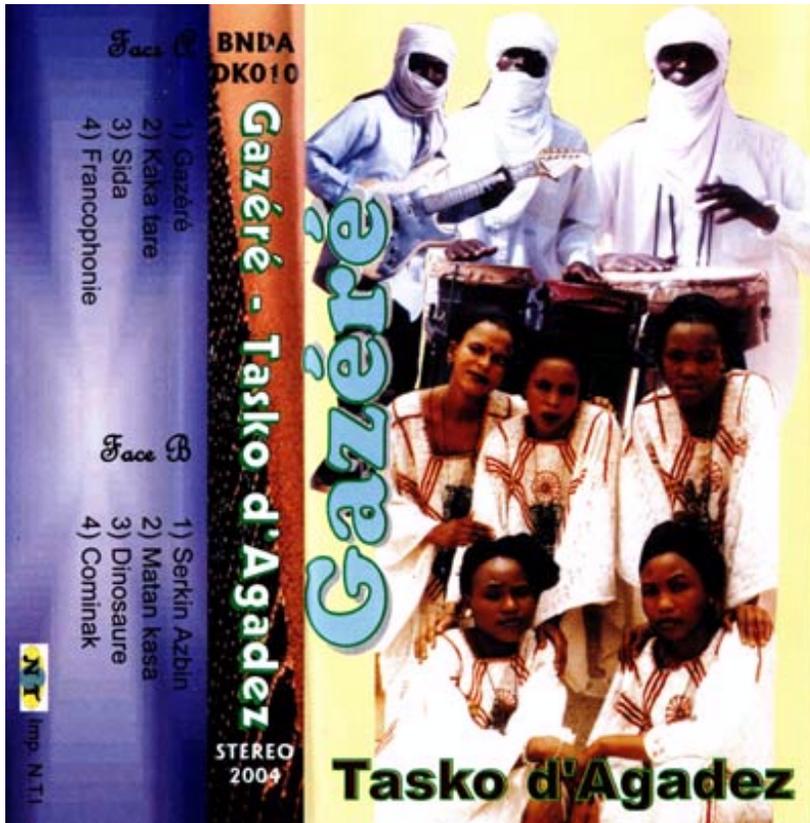
These two tracks are off 'Gaham Bani', the Super Bonkaney's first cassette. The first cut on the cassette is 'Bassitray', in which Boureima praises, in the Zarma language, the solidarity that exists between ethnic groups in Niger. He sings about the ties between the Kanori and the Fulani, the Songhai and the Zarma, the Yoruba and the Gobi-rawa. Enjoy the funky drum machine and wicked guitar playing of Mamoudou Seyni!!

↳ [Boureima Disco et le Super Bonkaney "Bassitray"](#)

In 'Guimbiya', Boureima sings, again in the Zarma language, of women who have the courage of warriors. Make sure you listen until the end, the band kick into a wonderful double-time groove to ride out the song!!! A tough rhythm!!

↳ [Boureima Disco et le Super Bonkaney "Guimbiya"](#)

I've saved the best for last. As their name indicates, the 'Tasko d'Agadez' is from the town of Agadez in northern Niger. They have released two cassettes, and recorded 96 songs that are in the ORTN (Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision du Niger) archives. They are frequently invited to play at weddings, baptisms throughout Niger, and especially by age-grade associations (called 'Fada'). All of the songs are composed by Sani Mani aka 'Anto', who was born in the town of Maradi, in 1960. He writes the songs and then works out the arrangements with the rest of the group.



The song 'Kaka Tare', sung in Hausa, praises the affectionate relationships that exist between grandparents and grandchildren in Niger.

↳ [Tasko d'Agadez "Kaka Tare"](#)

The next track 'Matan Kasa' is more politically engaged. The 'Tasko d'Agadez' call on the women of Niger to become more politically involved. They sing; 'during electoral campaigns all the candidates fight for our votes. Women of Niger, have you noticed? Once they are elected, these politicians do not appoint women to serve in their governments. We are tired, we have to organize to make sure we are not taken for granted.'

↳ [Tasko d'Agadez "Matan Kasa"](#)

This final track is an untitled guitar romp hidden at the end of the A-side of the cassette. The group's Tendé beat whips the guitarist Ahamed Maman into shape. This song is a tribute to Ibrahim Oumarou, the sultan of Agadez.

↳ [Tasko d'Agadez "Untitled"](#)

All of the above artists are on the traditional end of the Nigerien musical spectrum. The country has also got a vibrant hip-hop scene. If you enjoyed these tracks, stay tuned for a future post featuring my favorite roots hip-hop from Niger.