



The central voice of Afrissippi is Guelé Kumba, a griot of the Fulani people from the West African country of Senegal. Griots are part itinerant musician and oral historian, and in 2002 Kumba traveled to Mississippi, to participate in a jam session at R.L. Burnside's Marshall County home. That journey led to the Afrissippi project, a collaboration between Kumba, Burnside apprentice Eric Deaton, Junior Kimbrough's son Kinney, and Garry and Cedric of the Burnside clan. Their stunning 2006 debut *Fulani Journey* arrived to critical acclaim, and several of the personnel from that record return on Kumba's follow-up album *Alliance*.

Recorded live on a single day in late 2007 at Jimbo Mathus' Como, Mississippi, studio and funded in part by a grant from the Flora Hewlett Fund for Folk Culture, *Alliance* bears the unmistakable sound of the-hill country. The mid-tempo *Singha* opens with a guitar riff that recalls the elder Burnside's work, pierced with the soaring moan of Kumba singing in his native tongue. The tempo hastens to a brisk trot mid-song, but never deviates from the haunting one-chord groove often identified with hill country blues. *Debbo Ndoogu* follows a similar pattern, but with a darker, more menacing tenor, *Sonna* captures Kumba's rich vocal work over Deaton's trance-inducing electric guitar leads, and the bright *Leeliyo Leele* stands out for its complex layers of percussion and call-response vocal harmonizing. Deaton weaves guitar solos through the cheerful and funky *Ngoope Kam* and *Maasino Tooro*, and *Raas* brings Kumba's African roots to the forefront with a lightning-fast display of percussion. The album closes with the a cappella *Gede Nooro*, and while listeners not fluent in Kumba's native tongue will be baffled by the lyrics, they may recognize a connection between his oral nar-

ative and the intimate story-telling of other blues artists.

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