



SIERRA LEONE'S REFUGEE ALL STARS

Radio Salone

April 24, 2012; Cumbancha

"Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars share experiences of violence, loss and the tedium of life in the camps. But when they make music together, something unexpected emerges: buoyant grooves and fierce optimism." – NPR

"...their music emanates a life-affirming positivity." – BBC

"...they still have something to teach the world." – Paste

The globally acclaimed **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars** return with their third studio album, **Radio Salone**, out April 24, 2012, on CD and limited-edition 2LP vinyl via Cumbancha. Produced by roots reggae, soul and Afrobeat guru Victor Axelrod, aka Ticklah, (Sharon Jones and The Dap-Kings, Amy Winehouse, Easy Star All Stars, Antibalas) and recorded in Brooklyn's Dunham Studios, **Radio Salone** marks the band's most musically sophisticated collection of songs to date. The album is the follow-up to the band's 2010 album **Rise & Shine**, which was the #1 album of the year on the World Music Charts Europe.

Out of dark times, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars have always made music rife with hopeful messages and joyful rhythms. **Radio Salone** is no different, but this time it feels like a milestone album for the group. When they stepped into the studio for the Radio Salone sessions, they began laying down tracks with a definitive vintage African vibe, connecting traditional West African sounds with roots reggae in ways that they had never before explored. Employing analog technology, the band used mid-70s era microphones and 16-track tapes. With the limited takes that tape imposes on the recording process, there was often just one chance to create perfection. But perfection to this band means embracing unplanned nuances, allowing the visceral qualities of music to shine, letting the process play out in real time. The mics don't shut off between the album's tracks – an invitation to the listener to join the band on their creative journey.

Having persevered through the horrors of the Sierra Leonean civil war, band leader Reuben Koroma and the group continue to musically evolve in exciting ways, well past their jam sessions in the Guinean refugee camps and the rawness of their first recordings in their native capital of Freetown. The songs are infused with intricate dub elements not found in their earlier material and interludes are featured as part of the album flow for the first time. From the hollow echoes of the congoma (also known as the marimba – a percussion instrument with wooden keys and resonators) in album opener "Chant It Down" to the bubbling rhythm of lead single "Mother In Law" to the irresistible hook of "Big Fat Dog," there are thrilling discoveries around every corner. While the band initially gained fame through the power of their story and message, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars have since become one of Africa's most active touring bands, and the years of experience are reflected in the virtuosity of their performance on **Radio Salone**.

The album title references "Salone" – meaning "Sierra Leone" in the native language of Krio – in which the band sings (along with five other languages) on the new album. The radio theme appears throughout the album artwork and reflects the impact that radio has long had on the band. In the pre-TV and Internet days, radio served as the musical connection to the rest of Africa and the world. Long before the war, members of the band were exposed to vintage reggae, Congolese soukous, American soul, and much more. During the war, radio served as an essential escape from the harsh reality of the refugee camps, bringing news and music.

2012 is the 10-year anniversary of the end of the Sierra Leone civil war that ravaged the nation and a look back brings a new appreciation for the story of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. After a compelling 2005 documentary about the band's post-war journey skyrocketed them to a global platform, their story and music was soon inspiring fans worldwide. Since then they have garnered praise from the likes of the New York Times, NPR, BBC, CNN, LA Times, PBS, Billboard and more. They appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, opened for Aerosmith, contributed to the Blood Diamond film soundtrack, and participated in the U2 tribute album In the Name of Love: Africa Celebrates U2. They have built a loyal fan base with extensive touring and festival performances both in the States and abroad, winning over audiences with their engaging and vibrant performances. The likes of Paul McCartney, Keith Richards, Joe Perry, Ice Cube and Angelina Jolie have sung their praises. From the ashes of war, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars have risen like a phoenix to become one of the most lauded African bands in the world.

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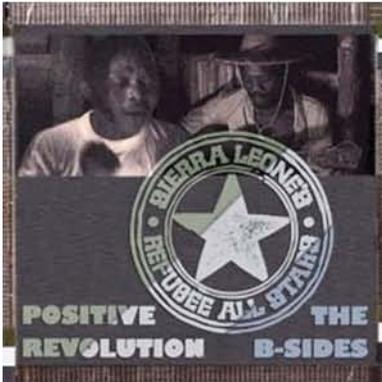
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"As harrowing as these personal tales may be, the music buoying them is uplifting. The cliché bears repeating: music heals and creates community."

- **Stephen Holden, New York Times**



"What drew them together? You might say it was love for God, love for their country and, above all, love for music...The world should listen to Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars."

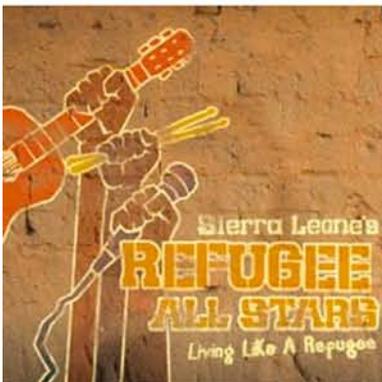
- **Terence Kenny, ABC News**

"Out of this horror, however, has come 'Living Like a Refugee,' an album that celebrates life, the human spirit, and the peace that Sierra Leone has found."

- **Sandy Bettison, The Times London**

"Based on the quality of their performance, the All Stars are well on their way to establishing an identity based as much on skill, imagination and charisma as on their undeniably touching story."

- **Don Heckman, Los Angeles Times**



Koroma and bandmates have "catapulted...onto the world stage and recruited a club of A-list fans and backers including Keith Richards, Sir Paul McCartney, Bob Geldof, Cameron Crowe, Aerosmith's Joe Perry and Ice Cube."

- **Andy Morgan, The Independent (UK)**

"The mind struggles to grasp the idea that tragedy and even horrific brutality can somehow give birth to life-affirming, uplifting music. But there is no better proof of that bitter-sweet truth than the joyful sounds of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars..."

- **Bernard Perusse, Montreal Gazette**



"Roots reggae rhythms blessed with finger-picked guitar is at the core: Fans of the early Wailers will be as beguiled as Afro-popsters. Underlying it all is a plea for peace from voices heartbreakingly familiar with the consequences of the alternative."

- **Nate Dow, Boston Herald**

"It's as easy to fall in love with these guys as it was with the 'Buena Vista Social Club.' "

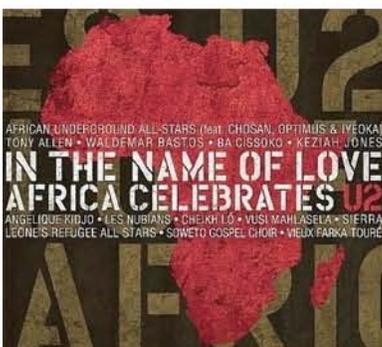
- **Vanessa Juarez Article, Newsweek**

"...judging from the dancing, whooping audience...the All Stars make a winning team."

- **Dallas Morning News**

Aerosmith's Joe Perry - "I was just so overwhelmed by the movie and the message of hope they're carrying," he continues. "The music is so buoyant and joyful."

- **Billboard Magazine, "Joe Perry Throws Support Behind Sierra Leone Refugees"**



"This year's Fuji Rock will take on the competition with a lineup of well over 150 artists that includes Franz Ferdinand, the Strokes, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Sonic Youth, the Raconteurs and even Madness... of which Hidaka says the Refugee All Stars of Sierra Leone will be one of the highlights."

- **Paul Jackson, Daily Yomiuri Tokyo (Story about Fuji Rock/Masa Hidaka)**

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SIERRA LEONE'S REFUGEE ALL STARS

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

A FILM BY ZACH NILES AND BANKER WHITE

FILMMAKERS NOTES

In early summer of 2002 a group of friends set out to make a documentary film about the role of music in refugee camps in West Africa. We didn't know what to expect, but after a chance meeting with The Refugee All Stars, it was immediately clear to us that their story needed be told. Forced from their homes in Sierra Leone by a brutal civil war (1991-2002), the band came together in a refugee camp to play music as a way to understand the tragedy they had suffered, the injustice they had witnessed and to give hope to their fellow refugees.

The title track on this album, "Living Like A Refugee" was recorded by the light of an oil lamp in Sembakounya Refugee Camp in Guinea, West Africa. Playing on impossibly worn instruments, the band sang and laughed into the night. Healing and being healed through their music.

A year later we traveled with The Refugee All Stars as they made their first trip back to Sierra Leone. They were reunited with their friends and pre-war band mates The Emperors Band. Together they entered Island Studio in the capital city of Freetown to record full band versions of the songs that they had been practicing throughout their years in exile.

This album is the realization of a seemingly impossible dream and a musical document of the band's incredible journey. From "Living Like a Refugee," to international acclaim they have become an inspiration for refugees and musicians around the world. We feel blessed to have them as friends and are honored to be a part of their story.

-Zach Niles, Banker White & Chris Velan

- WINNER**
GRAND JURY AWARD
BEST DOCUMENTARY
AFI FEST
2005
- WINNER**
FILMMAKER AWARD
FULL FRAME FILM FESTIVAL
CENTER FOR DOCUMENTARY
STUDIES
2006
- WINNER**
BEST OF THE FEST
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
FILM FESTIVAL
2005
- WINNER**
AUDIENCE AWARD
SXSW FILM FESTIVAL
24B PS runner up
2006
- OFFICIAL SELECTION**
IDFA
AMSTERDAM
2006
- OFFICIAL SELECTION**
KIRLOVY VARY
FILM FESTIVAL
2006
- OFFICIAL SELECTION**
SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
2006

- WINNER**
AUDIENCE AWARD
MIAMI INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
2006
- WINNER**
IMPACT OF MUSIC AWARD
NASHVILLE
FILM FESTIVAL
2006
- WINNER**
ISSUES OF JUSTICE
AND HUMAN RIGHTS
VERMONT INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
2006
- WINNER**
AUDIENCE AWARD
EMERGING PICTURES
FULLFRAME FILM FESTIVAL
2006
- OFFICIAL SELECTION**
HOTDOG FILM FESTIVAL
TORONTO
2006
- OFFICIAL SELECTION**
EDINBURGH
FILM FESTIVAL
2006

SIERRA LEONE'S REFUGEE ALL STARS

BIOGRAPHY



Sitting in a dusty refugee camp in Guinea in 2004, Reuben M. Koroma, the founder of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, could not have imagined what the near future would hold for him and the members of his band. In just six whirlwind years, the group has gone from being unknown musicians languishing in various refugee camps to being the subject of an acclaimed documentary film, touring the world to support a critically revered album, appearing on the Oprah Winfrey Show, and sharing the stage and studio with Aerosmith and other international stars. Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars have risen like a phoenix out of the ashes of war and enflamed the passions of fans across the globe with their uplifting songs of hope, faith and joy. The band is a potent example of the redeeming power of music and the ability of the human spirit to persevere through unimaginable hardship and emerge with optimism intact.

Throughout the 1990s, the West African country of Sierra Leone was wracked with a bloody, horrifying war that forced millions to flee their homes. The musicians that

would eventually form Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars are all originally from Freetown, and they were forced to leave the capital city at various times after violent rebel attacks. One particularly odious event took place on January 6, 1999, when rebels attacked the city as part of an unthinkable evil campaign they called "Operation Kill Every Living Thing." This attack on Freetown caused a panicked mass exodus with thousands of civilians fleeing the region. Most of those that left the country made their way into neighboring Guinea, some ending up in refugee camps and others struggling to fend for themselves in the capital city of Conakry.

Koroma and his wife Grace had left Sierra Leone in 1997 and found themselves in the Kalia refugee camp near the border with Sierra Leone. When it became clear they would not be heading back to their homeland anytime soon, they joined up with guitarist Francis John Langba (aka Franco), and bassist Idrissa Bangura (aka Mallam), and other musicians in the camp whom they had known before the war, to entertain their fellow refugees. Even the refugee camps were not safe havens, however, as they were attacked by the Guinean military and civilian militias who believed the camps were being used as staging ground for cross border attacks by the Sierra Leonean rebels. Eventually, Reuben, Grace and Franco ended up in the more stable Sembakounya Refugee Camp near the remote town of Dabola, and there they put the call out for musicians to audition to form a band. After a Canadian relief agency donated two beat up electric guitars, a single microphone and a meager sound system, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars were born.

American filmmakers Zach Niles and Banker White encountered the band in the Sembakounya Camp, and were so inspired by their story they ended up following them for three years as they moved from camp to camp, bringing much needed joy to fellow refugees with their heartfelt performances. Eventually, the war in Sierra Leone came to an end, and over time the All Stars returned to Freetown, where they met other returning musicians who joined the band's rotating membership. It was there in the tin-roofed shacks of Freetown's ghettos that Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars recorded the tracks that ended up, along with unplugged recordings made in the refugee camps, being the basis for their debut album, *Living Like a Refugee*, which was released on the label Anti in 2006.

The resulting film that documented this moving saga, *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars*, was a critical success, and introduced the world to the personalities and dramatic stories behind the band, not to mention their instantly appealing music. "As harrowing as these personal tales may be," wrote *The New York Times*, "the music buoying them is uplifting." *Newsweek* raved, "It's as easy to fall in love with these guys as it was with the Buena Vista Social Club."

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The movie, album and eventual U.S. tours helped expand their following, and soon the band found itself playing in front of enraptured audiences of tens of thousands at New York's Central Park SummerStage, Japan's Fuji Rock Festival and the revered Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival. They appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show, contributed a song to the Blood Diamond film soundtrack, participated in the U2 tribute album *In the Name of Love: Africa Celebrates U2*, and earned praise and backing from Sir Paul McCartney, Keith Richards, Ice Cube, Angelina Jolie and others inspired by their life-affirming story and captivating music. In one of the most surreal moments of their climb to fame, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars opened for Aerosmith at the 12,000 capacity Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Connecticut.

Despite their success, back home in Sierra Leone it was becoming clear that even though the war was over, there were still difficult challenges to overcome in the world's third poorest country. Now living back in Freetown, the band was able to afford luxuries such as cement walls and refrigerators, but they were still faced with the daily struggles shared by most of their countrymen.

In the past year alone, there have been four deaths in the extended band family, including the sudden passing of their bass player Mallam. A beloved original member of the band, Mallam had written the first bass lines to their hit songs "Soda Soap" and "Weapon Conflict" in the refugee camp with Koroma. Always cheery and smiling, Mallam was known as the honorary "mayor" of the Magazine Wharf slum where he made a living selling rice whisky and palm wine. While his death at 49 may seem premature to people in the west, in Sierra Leone it is actually the average life expectancy, an unforgiving side effect of poverty, war and disease.

The senseless deaths and illnesses of friends and family, and the slimming hope for great change in their country as a result of peace, has only strengthened the resolve of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars to do what they can to turn their country around. Their weapon in this struggle is music, and their message, while offering critique and condemnation of wrongdoing, remains positive and hopeful. Optimism in the face of obstacles, and the eternal hope for a better future motivates their lives and music.

"It's been a long struggle out of the war, out of miserable conditions," notes Koroma, "So now we are trying to develop ourselves as a band and be based in our country. We are really moving towards finding ways of elevating ourselves somehow. But we do not just think about ourselves alone, we try to bring out sensitive issues that are affecting the world. It is all of our responsibility that the masses are suffering. We bring our positive messages into the world so we can expect a positive change in the world. And, most importantly, bring about peace."

For their second album, the members of the All Stars knew that they needed to prove to the world that they had the talent to produce an album that would rise above their unique story and stand on its own musical merits. After years of touring and performing together the band was overflowing with material, both old and new. While they were now in a position to record with better facilities and with top quality producers, the band was determined to maintain the intimate spirit and raw soul of *Living Like A Refugee*.

After recording some songs and demos in Sierra Leone, the group went to New Orleans, Louisiana to work on the album with veteran producer Steve Berlin, a member of Los Lobos who has produced for Angélique Kidjo, Michelle Shocked, Jackie Greene, Alex Ounsworth, Ozomatli, Rickie Lee Jones and many others. With music coursing through it's streets, the Big Easy's laid back vibe, spicy food and enthusiastic hospitality reminded the All Stars

of being home in Freetown. The residents of New Orleans in turn could relate both to the All Stars experience of being displaced from their homes and to the important role music plays in healing spiritual and emotional wounds and bringing communities together. New Orleans ended up being an inspired choice for the recording and musicians such as Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, Washboard Chaz and Bonerama lent their talents to a number of tracks, giving a unique flavor to the album.

The result was *Rise & Shine*, a masterful collection of songs that reflects how much Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars have grown since their early days jamming around campfires in isolated refugee camps. The title of the album reflects the band's desire to remain positive in the face of struggle, always greeting a new day with a spirit of excitement over what the future holds. Given how far they've come in just a few short years, they have reason to be optimistic. If they could not have imagined five years ago where they would be today, there's no telling where they will be five years down the road.



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