

*Circle of Drums* is an ancestral transmission, a spiritual communication from three great drum artists, Babatunde Olatunji, Muruga Booker, and Sikiru Adepaju, who transcend their backgrounds to deliver a message of unity. Their drumming styles combine with vocal chants, ancient stringed instruments and synth drones to create a trance-like soundscape that brings to mind the experimental rock of the 1960's when eastern philosophies and cultures were informing western popular music.

Originally recorded in 1993, but never commercially released, *Circle of Drums* is a lost treasure - rediscovered and remastered by Chesky Records using special surround sound processing in keeping with their commitment to high resolution audio. Its release is a homage to the group's elder statesman, Babatunde Olatunji, who passed away on April 6, 2003.

Babatunde Olatunji – the name means “father returns, wealth is awoken” - was born in 1927, in the Nigerian village of Ajido in the outskirts of Lagos and grew up in the nearby town of Olowo Gbowo. After being awarded a Rotary International Foundation Scholarship to study in the United States, Baba enrolled in the prestigious Moorehouse College in Atlanta in 1950 and began informal drum, dance and storytelling sessions for his peers. By the time he moved to New York City in the mid 50's, his artistic reputation grew and caught the attention of Columbia Records who released *Drums of Passion*. Recorded in 1959, *Drums Of Passion* catapulted Olatunji onto the world music scene and introduced African drumming to the western mass audience, selling millions of copies. Baba Olatunji and his transcendent drumming had reached the world stage and everyone who he came into contact with would be forever changed.

As Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart put it, “Baba was original, totally unique and glorious in his being. He lit the world with his groove and presence. He believed in the power of the drum dream to change consciousness and to raise personal and group power.”

For Serbian drum artist Muruga Booker who was raised on Middle Eastern music and grew up playing jazz and blues, Baba's music came as a life-changing message in 1966. “When I first heard *Drums of Passion* I stayed in my mother's living room for two weeks listening to that record,” Muruga remembers. “I realized that this drumming was just as sacred as the orthodox singing I was raised on in church,” he explains, “and that if the drummer was spiritual, the drumming likewise would be spiritual.” Before long, Muruga traded his suit for a yoga robe - and covered his shiny Pearl drums with burlap. Muruga credits his experience and new path in African rhythms with helping him land later gigs with Weather Report and Paul Winter. When later introduced to Olatunji by a friend, Muruga approached him about his idea for this project, *Circle of Drums*. “I was already into Shamanic and trance drumming so I asked Baba to make a drumming album,” Muruga Booker explains. “Babatunde said yes - on the condition that ‘we must be equals and I want my friend Sikiru to play on the album.’ Baba showed us that you can have many religions, but love is the rhythm and meaning of life.”

Nigerian drum master Sikiru Adepaju was born in Eruwa, Western Nigeria, into a traditional Yoruba drumming family. Sikiru's expertise with the talking drum (the instrument reproduces the tonal Yoruba language) led him to tour with world famous artist Chief Ebenezer Obey, before moving to San Francisco in 1985. Within two months of his arrival, Sikiru went to see Baba Olatunji perform. After the concert he was invited to Fantasy studios to record along with Carlos Santana, Airto, and Mickey Hart in what was later released as Olatunji's *Dance To The Beat Of My Drum*. This was the beginning of a 17-year musical relationship between Adepaju and Baba Olatunji. “Baba was a father to me and encouraged me to work with many people,” Adepaju recalls. “He had a gift for teaching people how to drum and really knew how to break it down.”

In traditional Yoruba society, community, prayer, ritual and drumming form the fabric of daily life. On the evening of this recording, the drummers used prayer, candles and an altar with incense to set the mood and cleanse the space. Muruga enlisted the help of his wife, Shakti (vocals), along with friends Harry Ely (hammered dulcimer) and James Gurley (ektar – a one-stringed guitar of east Indian origin) to round out the group and provide a bit of melody.

From the heart comes a rhythm beyond styles, a pulsing of people's struggles, their aspirations and history. The drum carries its message of unity, as healer and guide, directed by its messengers. It speaks of characters and character. This is the message of the cosmic rhythm vibrations. Enter the Circle of Drums.

– Chris “Fatoye” Theberge



Executive Producers: **David Chesky** and **Norman Chesky**  
Surround Mix, Editing, and Mastering Engineer: **Nicholas Prout**

Recorded at **The Music Annex**, Menlo Park, CA  
Recording Engineer: **Robert Iratibatre**  
Recording Production Managers: **Michael Makowsky**, **Bill Leikam**  
Drum Tech: **Aaron Vittala Bookvich**

Project Director: **Lisa Marks**  
Production Assistants: **Sven Philipp**, **Lisa Hershfield**, **Matt Epstein**, **Rick Eckerle**  
Art Direction: **Aldo Sampieri**  
Photography: **Janette Beckman**