

## Culture

# Danmaraya and innovative Hausa music



The author (left) with Danmaraya Jos at the British Council in Kano in 2003

By Abdalla Uba Adamu

When I was writing my undergraduate dissertation in ABU Zaria in 1979, I noticed that many of my colleagues and previous dissertations dedicated their works to either parents or grandparents. At that time I was full of admiration for the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. I therefore domesticated my Kantian affinity and dedicated my thesis to Danmaraya Jos, the poet musician. I did so simply because I was not aware of any Hausa poet musician whose corpus reached the hard core of philosophical idealism like the works of Danmaraya Jos. Musicians of the era were fundamentally praise singers – singing the praises of one patron or another; a style that fundamentally characterised traditional Hausa popular music. Danmaraya was refreshing in

the sense of devoting his poetic lines to the human condition – truly a philosopher poet. Seeking international comparisons, I would say Danmaraya Jos echoes the poetic ideals of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen – both folk guitarists that straddle the chasm between poetic excellence and brilliant guitar playing.

My idealism of Danmaraya's work remained with me for the rest of my life. In 2003, Gillian Belben, the then newly appointed Director of the British Council, was being driven from Kano to Abuja in the official BC vehicle. A tape was playing in the car. It was Danmaraya. Gillian was literally blown away by the sheer beauty of the music and lyrical harmony – even though she could not speak Hausa. When she asked about the musician, she was told he was Danmaraya. On return to Kano she contacted me – we had a series of collaborative projects

together – about the possibility of inviting Danmaraya to Kano for a concert. I then suggested we should pair him with a folk musician, preferably from northern England. She accepted the idea and asked me to come up with the name for the project. I called it 'North Meets North'. This was a homage to 'East Meets West' musical collaboration between the great British violinist, Sir Yehudi Menuhin, and the great Indian sitar player, Ravi Shankar. Gillian eventually identified and invited a Scottish musician, Rod Paterson who agreed to come to Nigeria for collaboration with northern musicians. We eventually called the project "North Meets North: Experiments and Innovations in Hausa and Celtic Music." I traveled to Jos in April 2003 and met Danmaraya to brief him about the project. He accepted with great enthusiasm. I also gave him a CD of his songs which I converted from the tapes. He was

fascinated by how technology had moved.

We eventually held our music workshop and two concerts (one in Kano and the other in Abuja) with young musicians from the north, one of whom was, significantly, called Danmarayan Zamfara, but really called Babangida Kakadawa who plays in the same poetic style as Danmaraya. The latter was extremely happy with him and considered him the heir he never would have.

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