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## **WOMAD 2004 GRAND ORCHESTRE TAARAB DE ZANZIBAR (TANZANIA)**

Taarab means many things to many people, but on the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar it boils down to the breeziest big band dance music you've ever heard. It's essentially an 'island' sound, with historical roots in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, to which Zanzibar has been umbilically tied by trade winds and Muslim sultanates for centuries, and the black African culture of mainland East Africa. Banks of swelling violins, a delicately tinkling qanun or Arabic zither, a plucking 'ud or lute, gently lilting bongo and dumbak drums, rousing vocals and wheezing accordions all conspire to carry you away on a hot and tropical nor'easterly to a land in which the air is scented with spices, the earth is greener than emerald and the sea is deep, blue and all-encompassing.

Once Zanzibar was peppered with musical clubs and their taarab orchestras, but now only a few survive. Pre-eminent amongst them is Culture Musical Club, who first started in 1958 as the 'Shime Social Movement', a significant force in the island's struggle for independence from Great Britain. After the revolution in 1964, the orchestra became affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and changed its name to Culture Musical Club. Of all Zanzibar's musical clubs, Culture is the most active and the most prolific and in recent years they have released a string of acclaimed CDs including their most recent 'Waridi'.

Every few years the orchestra emerge from their clubhouse in the Vuga district of Stone Town, the main burg on Zanzibar, to infuse festivals and concert halls with a powerful if distant aroma of their island home. This time they are accompanied by 93 year old Bi Kidude Baraka, a legend in her own lifetime, who's lifespan stretches back to an era when the Sultan and his British protectors worked hand in hand to rule the island and slavery was a recent and still potent memory.

Courtesy of Andy Morgan, July 2004

### **Some audience comments:**

*Culture Club gave a stunning performance and I haven't stopped playing their CD since. And what those ladies did with their bottoms was something else!*

*Claire Johnson, Cambridge*

*Utterly amazing. From starting off restrained the group worked up to climax with the best and most fun display of bottom wriggling ever! Bi just stood up and let rip - and what a sound from anyone never mind at 93!*

*Mike Grenville, Forest Row, UK*

*These guys blew me away with their infectious rhythms and dancing..amazing.*  
*William*