WOFA Brings Dancing, Rhythm to Campus

By Hanh Nguyen
Staff Writer

"Bum bum cac cac," the African rhythm with energetic colorful movements from the dancing group, WOFA!, brought a lively environment to EMU last Thursday.

WOFA! means "Let's go!" or "Come together, come along!" in the Soussou dialect. It is a group of 10 young, talented musicians and dancers from Soussou clan in Guinea. They describe themselves as "standing apart from other African performing arts groups by the linking without disruption, of past and present."

"WOFA! combines the traditional culture that is still very much alive on the Lower Coast with the contemporary characteristics of the present."

The performance included 11 different pieces combining music and dance, expressing the unique culture of Guinea: how Guineans observe and communicate with nature, with others, and how they live and celebrate.

Their movements mimicked the power of the drums, and showed their connection to nature. "They are so awesome. I want to learn how to dance like that," said junior student Mary Hope Brenneman at intermission.

The performers were dressed in their traditional costumes. The men wore bright yellow pants, feather hats, and no shirts. The women were in small elegant, bikini-like outfits.

WOFA!'s instruments are made with primary material but "rearranged in a more contemporary way." Two types of drums were used. One, called "kryin" was in the shape of a tree. The second, called "djembe," was carved from a solid block of wood and covered with goat skin. They also used a type of xylophone, and a tambourine-like "wassakhoumba."

According to an article named "WOFA! Guinea," the "wassakhoumba" is traditionally believed to have the power to "purify the area reached by its sound ... Uninitiated children and adolescents were forbidden to touch the sacred object. If they dare to, the discs would break! And if an uncircumcised child touched the Wassakhoumba, he would have to be circumcised without delay."

Excited to share their music and culture, WOFA! has been on tours in many countries all over the world: in Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia, and more than 80 communities in North America. They have performed in France's 200th Anniversary Bastille Day Celebration, at the MASA African Festival, and at many other popular events around the world. Aboubacar Fatouabou Camara, a member of WOFA!, said that the artists' successes were the result of years of practicing. Camara himself has danced since he was very little. He received the diploma of ojembe and dance from Guinea's former president Harmed Sekou Toure when he was eight years old.

The small EMU community was a change of setting for the group, which is accustomed to larger audiences. Camara said through an interpreter, "I don't care how many people showed up. The important thing was that we had a chance to share our music and culture. The audiences here are like the ones at home. They enjoyed the music. They clapped and gave us money. The audience's enjoyment and appreciation is what's important."