

## Leon Mobley

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Leon Mobley's natural talent and infectious smile has taken him a long way. From child actor on PBS Television show Zoom (1971-1973) to touring the globe as drummer / percussionist with Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals (1993-present), Leon's sheer exuberance and joie de vivre is ever present.

Leon began playing African drums in 1967, studying for 10 years under the tutelage of seminal Nigerian master drummer Babatunde Olatunji at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1977 Leon studied under the directorship of Senegalese master drummer Ibrahim Camara (former drummer for the National Ballet of Senegal) while a member of the Bokan-Deye Dance Company. Leon was building a name for himself as a drummer and became a much sought after player in the world of African music. A testament to his new found status as a major player on the African music scene was when he was invited to South Africa in 1991 to perform with returning exiles Letta Mbulu, Caiphus Semenya, and Hugh Masekela, artists known worldwide as some of Africa's greatest musicians. One of the highlights of Leon's career was meeting and playing for Nelson Mandela when he was released from prison after 27 years as a political prisoner.

Leon studied and performed from 1979 to 1981 in Surinam, South America, Trinidad - Tobago and throughout the West Indies. He continued his studies during 1982 in Senegal and Gambia. In 1987 and 1992 he traveled to Japan, where he taught and performed West African Drumming and Dancing. While in Japan he visited Sado Island, home of Kodo, the internationally acclaimed percussion group, in a cultural exchange program. He has also performed and lectured throughout the US as well as toured Germany, Italy and Israel producing, recording, conducting clinics and performing with his group Da Lion.

Like his mentor Olatunji, (who played for many years with Santana and other popular artists of the day), Leon has succeeded in bringing African drumming into contemporary mainstream music and has performed and recorded with many major artists in all genres. Among the many artists Leon has worked with are: The Dave Matthews Band, Jack Johnson, Peter Wolf, Mick Jagger, Quincy Jones, Santana, Michael Jackson, Macy Gray, Trevor Hall, Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Blind Boys of Alabama, Damian Marley, Jason Mraz, Madonna, The Fugees, Stevie Wonder, Gov't Mule, Michael Franti & Spearhead, Tom Morelo of Rage Against the Machine, Pierce Fucinni, Airto and Flora Purim, and more. Most recently, Leon performed for a Gucci sponsored event at the United Nations which raised 5.5 million dollars for UNICEF and Madonna's charity Raising Malawi. In addition to opening the event with a rousing drum performance, Leon & Da Lion also accompanied the world acclaimed African Children's Choir.

With the knowledge Leon garnered from studying with some of the greatest drummers in the world Leon is now regarded as a master drummer in his own right. Leon has been a signature series artist with Remo who has manufactured and marketed the Leon Mobley custom designed African drums since 1983. As an ever seeking student of African drumming and culture for over 30 years Leon has become a nationally and internationally sought teacher of West African Drumming and Culture. While in Boston he taught at community centers, conducted school tours with the Art of Black Dance and Music, and conducted workshops at Berklee College of Music. He also served as musical director at Paige Academy, a private school in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Leon continued teaching after moving to Los Angeles in 1986, conducting weekly classes at UCLA, Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Theater, Parks and Recreation, and the Los Angeles High School for the Arts on the campus of Cal State (Los Angeles). Leon also contracted with the Music Center on Tour Program and presented African drumming and dance to thousands of students throughout Southern California.

Mobley is the founder and artistic and musical director of Da Lion and Djimbe West African Drummers and Dancers. He founded these two groups in order to help preserve African cultures, and present authentic traditional West African-American dance and music to North American audiences. Through these groups, Leon continues his mission of educating others about the West African people, their customs, history, and cultural arts as well as the influence of Traditional African drumming and music on African American art and culture. Connecting the dots between African and African American music Leon has developed a fresh new approach to drumming which he calls Traditional African American Music. This traditional approach to new music enables Leon to illuminate and bring to the forefront the traditional African drum rhythms from which many Jazz, Funk, R&B and Hip Hop rhythms are derived.

Leon is a renaissance musician. One, who respects the musical traditions of the past, addresses the music of the present and seeks the songs of the future-----all with that infectious smile, sheer exuberance and joie de vivre-- which has taken him so far.