



PRESS RELEASE

Razia Asks "What Now?"

Akory, the new album from Madagascar's Razia Said, explores the environmental and political challenges facing her native land.

The album features guest appearances by some of Madagascar's top musicians and will be released by Cumbancha in Europe in the fall of 2014 and in North America in early 2015.

After years of living abroad, **Razia Said** returned to Madagascar in 2007 to discover her country's landscape ravaged by illegal logging, slash-and-burn agriculture and the impact of climate change. That trip inspired the production of her first album, the critically-acclaimed **Zebu Nation**, which was released by Cumbancha Discovery in 2010. The songs on her new album, **Akory**, address Razia's life experiences as well as Madagascar's struggles to cope with an ever-deteriorating political situation, the destruction of the country's bio-diverse forests and the daily challenges faced by its inhabitants.

Akory, which means "What Now?" in the Malagasy language, was produced on four continents over the last four years and sees Razia diving even more deeply into her Malagasy roots. Featuring a more stripped-down approach than her debut album, *Akory* is full of upbeat songs with vibrant melodies and soulful collaborations with a number of Madagascar's top musicians. Cumbancha will release *Akory* in Europe in November 2014 and in the United States in early 2015.

Singer, songwriter and environmental activist Razia Said spent her childhood in the vanilla-growing region of the east coast, surrounded by the infectious rhythms of local *salegy* music. Her life journey has taken her from Madagascar to Gabon, France, Indonesia and her current base of New York City, but Madagascar has always been her spiritual home and main source of inspiration.

"Malagasy music is very rich," says Razia. "Everywhere in Madagascar you can hear guitar, accordion and local instruments played in the smallest villages." Razia describes her band's sound as very endemic to Madagascar drawing on the country's intricate and unique rhythms that inspire awe and fascination worldwide. As one of the few crossover musicians from Madagascar, Razia takes it upon herself to spread messages of environmentalism and social action by blending her country's traditional music with a contemporary Western twist. Keeping her focus on the connection between the environmental destruction and political dismay in the country she calls home, Razia delivers an album full of soul, energy, and urgency that reaches into her most private thoughts and emotions.

Razia grew up listening to her uncle play guitar in her hometown of Antalaha. When she turned 11, she moved to Gabon, West Africa and later to France where she graduated from school with a PhD. After several years of working in a different field, Razia returned to the stage. Finally finding a home in New York, Razia attended Guitar classes at the New School University and began writing and recording her original songs.

Since the release of *Zebu Nation*, Razia has toured worldwide, spreading messages of environmentalism and social action in her native language, Malagasy. In 2011, Razia returned to the rainforest where she spent her youth and created a festival named "Mifohaza Masoala - Wake Up Masoala." Concerts were performed in and around the threatened Masoala rainforest, gathering more than 20,000 people and mobilizing the entire environmental community of the region. Pulling off such an event in Razia's hometown, where most people made a living from illegally harvested rosewood, was a risky business. But a connection was forged with the villagers living on the edge of the Masoala. People came from the most remote part of the forest, some walking for days to attend the event. 20,000 new trees were planted as the villages and the people of Razia's hometown Antalaha joined the protest.

Razia immediately set about organizing an international extension to her festival. She changed the name to "Wake Up Madagascar" and raised funds to create a tour across the USA and Canada in the summers of 2012 and 2014. The same musicians that performed alongside her in the Masoala were now bringing their music and message to North America. The show, which featured Razia alongside **Jaobjoby**, **Charles Kely** and **Saramba** was ecstatically received. Its mission was to raise awareness for her devastated country and introduce the



largest assortment of Malagasy music ever seen in North America. Wake up Madagascar appeared at major venues such as Joe's Pub in New York City, Nuits d'Afrique in Montreal, Levitt Pavilion in Los Angeles and many other venues.

It was during this busy time on the road that Razia started putting together the elements she needed to craft her second album. The songs on *Akory* are performed in Malagasy, French and English. Razia has been joined by some of the leading names of Malagasy music, including guitar virtuoso **D'Gary**, legendary accordionist **Regis Gizavo**, *valiha* phenom **Rajery**, and nimble-fingered guitarist **Teta**. Razia presents rhythms from the four corners of Madagascar, including showcase performances on traditional instruments such as *marovany* (a wooden box zither), *valiha* (a zither made of a bamboo tube and plucked metal strings) and *lukanga* (a three stringed fiddle). Guitar lines ripple through the album and the powerful harmonies chant out an irresistible call to action. Whether it's to dance or protest, laugh or despair, Razia takes us on another unforgettable journey across a paradise in danger of being lost forever.

Recording for *Akory* started in May 2011 in the renowned Studio Mars in Antananarivo with ace Malagasy engineer and producer Bivy. Razia arrived from New York with twelve new songs and began working with her friend and internationally acclaimed *valiha* master Rajery to adapt them into Malagasy musical forms. Razia was keen to work with as many Malagasy legends as she could on this album. The super group she put together made up of Bivy (guitar), Do (drums), Johnny (bass), Daniel (marovany), Teta (guitar), and Petit (percussion) worked solidly for days, rehearsing intensively in the studio. The magic soon came together as the intricate 6/8 rhythms took shape and transformed the original songs into an urgent, passionate wave of sound. Razia was then joined in the studio by her regular guitar player Charles Kely, drummer Jimmy, Rajery himself on *valiha*, Surgi on *lukanga*, and the guitarist D'Gary who co-wrote the song "Gny Lalagna (The Way)" with Razia.

Razia took the tracks to Paris where the stellar accordionist Regis Gizavo and violinist Francois Michaud added further layers. Engineer Nir Graff, producer Jamie Ambler and Malagasy bass player, singer and vocal coach David Rajaonary supervised further recordings in New York, including 4 tracks with drummer Harvey Wirht, bassist Michael Olatuja and percussionist Samuel Torres. Godfrey Diamond mixed the album in Brooklyn and the album was mastered by the famous Leon Zervos at Studios 301 in Australia. With work on the album having taken place in Madagascar, Paris, New York and Australia, *Akory* is a truly international effort.

On the album's opening track, "Taranaka Afara (Our Future)," Razia sings succinctly, "a tree is a living thing, born to protect and nourish every being. Let's hold its real value high and respect nature instead of destroying it for gain." On "Zanako (My Child)", Razia calls for the nation to cherish its children. "Madagascar has forgotten its children. They are the path to our hearts and the guides to our future; we would all be lost without them." Razia is not afraid to challenge her country's inept political leaders, and on the rousing "Baraingo (Chasing Our Tails), she asserts "Our leaders seem lost and out of touch. They cannot choose which direction to go. One day left the next day it's right. Where are they leading us?"

The songs also address more personal stories, such as memories of her late stepfather's fascination with butterflies, which she fondly recalls collecting with him in the forests of Gabon in the song "Papillon (Butterfly)." Razia remembers her childhood fear when hiding under her grandmother's iron bed during a powerful cyclone in "Akory Tsikaby (How Will We Survive), which also serves as a potent metaphor for the dire situation in Madagascar today. On *Akory's* closing track, Razia ends with a bang on the upbeat "Nifankahita (It Was Meant To Be)", singing "There is magic in a true love story. Things happen because it was written in the stars long ago. The beauty of destiny as we stumble into love."

While Razia confronts some difficult topics on *Akory*, the closing track offers a positive message of hope that love will save the day in the end. While the album does not pretend to answer the question raised by its title, it argues that we can change our current path and work together towards a more positive future.

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