



## LIONEL LOUEKE BIOGRAPHY

Lionel (pronounced lee oh nell) was born in Benin, West Africa, which is between Togo and Nigeria. He speaks and sings in the languages Fon (from Benin) and Mina (from Togo). Though he is typically addressed as Gilles (with the French pronunciation "zheels") by everyone in his homeland, outside of Africa, he is known by his traditional first name, Lionel (thanks to the particulars of European and American legal "channels").

Lionel was first drawn to percussion as a child but soon found himself under the spell of his older brother Alesis' guitar playing. "I loved music," he says, "and would have played anything that was available to me. Guitar happened to be the first instrument I could get my hands on." Alesis taught his brother all he could from ages 17-20. Then Lionel began classical guitar studies at the **National Institute of Arts** in Ivory Coast. At 23, he migrated to Paris' **American School of More than Music** whose faculty consists primarily of Berklee graduates. A dynamic student and musician, Lionel aced a scholarship to Boston's **Berklee College of Music** in January 1999.

Beyond his trio, Gilfema, with **Massimo Biolcati** and **Ferenc Nemeth**, Lionel was a participant on **Charlie Haden's** Grammy-winning **Verve Records** album, **Land of the Sun** (2004). He has worked with trumpeter **Terence Blanchard** for the past three years, touring, recording and contributing compositions for his **Blue Note Records** albums **Bounce** (2003) and **Flow** (2005). Lionel has also worked extensively with **Herbie Hancock**, recording and arranging "Sister Moon", for the keyboard giant's, **Possibilities** (2005) with Rock royalty **Sting**. In April 2006, Lionel did a 2-week European acoustic quartet tour with Hancock, who also invited Lionel to sit in with him, **Wayne Shorter**, **Dave Holland** and **Brian Blade** at last year's **Tokyo Jazz Festival** - a "highlight" of his career thus far.

Much like his Gilfema composition "Tinmin" preaches, Lionel is most impressed with Hancock's and Blanchard's lack of ego when it comes to making music. He takes proud note of the way Blanchard showcases the writing and playing of the musicians in his band. "Terence taught me, 'You hire a musician because you like them. Why hire them and ask them to play different?'" And while working on those vocal arrangements for Hancock, he remembers one quietly profound moment. "I will never forget how he put himself 'down' to serve the music," Lionel shares. "I was blown away when he asked me if I thought some chords he was playing were right in one particular section. I looked at him and said, 'Man, you're the master! I just did the arrangement.' That is the quality of a great musician - no ego."

Following the release of his highly-acclaimed album, **Gilfema** (OS 504) in 2005, Lionel Loueke has successfully released his debut solo album **Virgin Forest** (OS 104) on ObliqSound.