

The Arthead Cultural Outreach



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Leif Totusek Interview

Staff of the The Arthead Cultural Outreach



by Staff of the **The Arthead Cultural Outreach**

on April 15

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Seattle claims Leif Totusek as his birth place, but that is the end of it because he is truly an international artist.

Q. Leif, what are you up to in 2024?

Right now I am recording my original songs with my band "[Freestyle Candela](#)" that I have been writing for years at my studio, [Candela Avenue Studios](#) and will be released for the public soon.



I am also performing with West African band, Boka Kouyate "[Deliyah Band](#)". Yes, sharing the stage with these grand musicians Boka Kouyate, Naby Camara and the band is a great pleasure.



I also perform with “[Sahara Sounds](#)”. Gnawa musicians Aziz Moro and Kalid Tazarni are a true treasure from Morocco and hit the North African vibe sweet with them too. It's like when I hit with my band back in London in the 1980's with “Orquesta Chakchouka” we played the Rai, Chaabi guitar vibe.

Also since my dear friend drummer Larry Vincent Jones passed away recently (we performed jazz for 30 years together) from my band [1-2-3](#). I have created 2 new jazz trios.

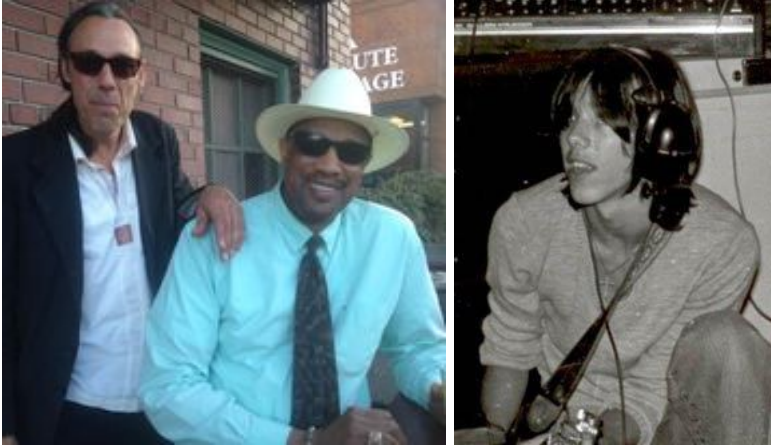


[Leif Totusek “Triunity”](#) that features grand jazz bassist Phil Sparks and Greg Cambell. Greg has studied a lot of traditional Ghana percussion and plays deep bebop so I hook up with his rhythm very well.



Also my new trio called “[Seatown Mardi Gras Band](#)” that has Phil Sparks on bass and New Orleans drummer Jamael Nance. We hit some funky tunes with this trio.

Also I'm still working with vocalist - artist - athlete [Sam Pierce](#) and our repertoire keeps growing . He's still cherpin' the sweet soulful songs.



Also been jamming with my sister from Zimbabwe [Ally Mtwalo](#) - such a [beautiful singer](#) ...

[Taxi Pata Pata :\)](#)

The image is a promotional poster for an event. The top half is a solid olive-green color with white text. It reads: "SAT NOV 12" (with "2022" in small text to the right), "TAMBA IWE", "Taste of Zimbabwe Thanksgiving", "Garfield Community Center", "2323 East Cherry Street Seattle, WA 98122", and "6 PM". Below the text, the names "Leif Totusek" and "Ally Mtwalo" are written in a white cursive font. The bottom half of the poster is a photograph of two performers. On the left, a man in a black jacket and dark pants is playing an electric guitar. On the right, two women are performing; one is wearing a red hat and a red and black patterned dress, and the other is wearing a light-colored top and blue jeans. The background of the photograph shows string lights and a microphone stand.

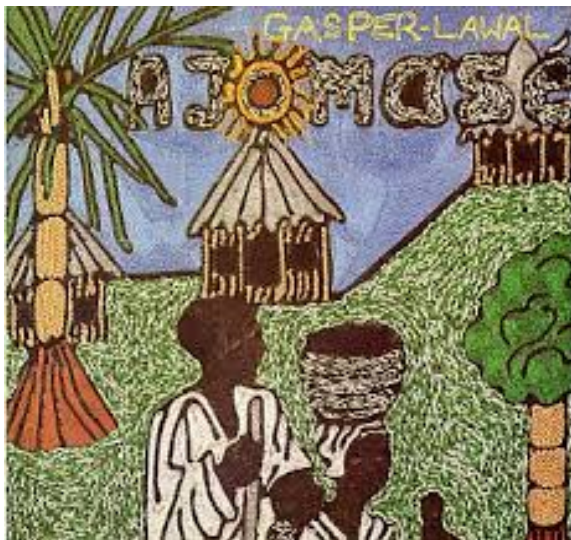
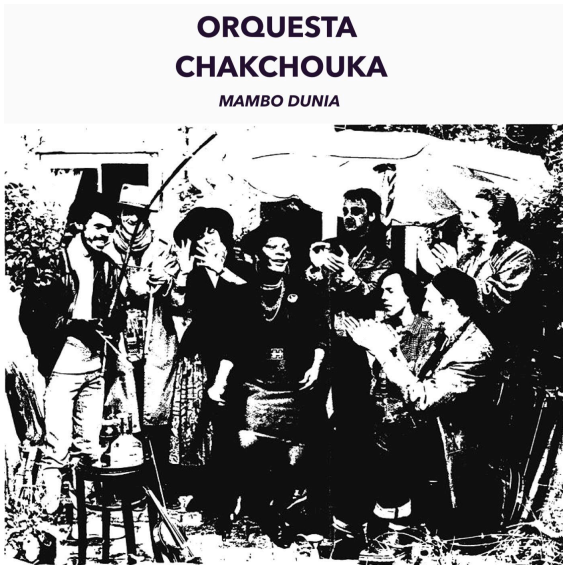
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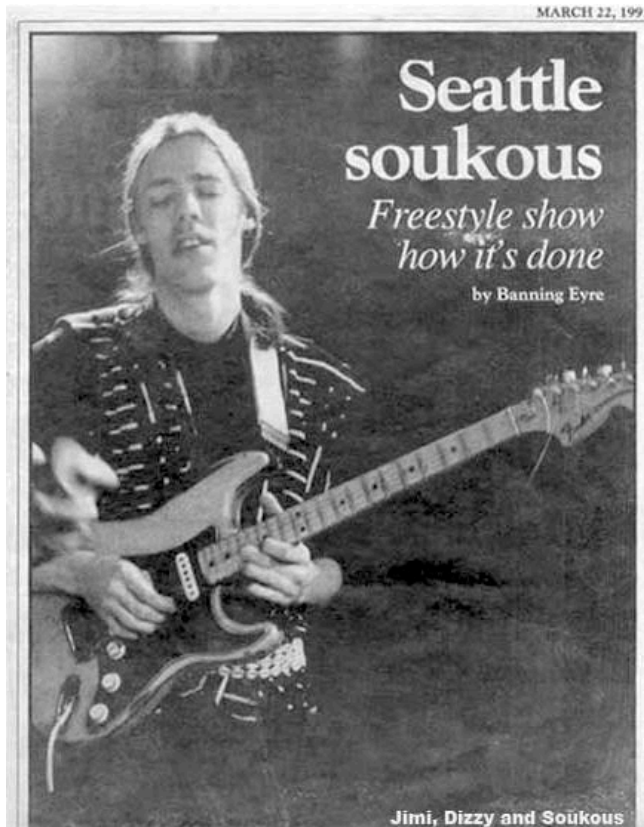
[Archives: Press Release "Seattle Jazz" 1980's](#)

Q, Tell me about your band Leif Totusek "Freestyle Candela"

Oh yeah, I created "[Freestyle Candela](#)" in which I compose the bass , the guitars, the vocals , the lyrics, the melodies, the hi-hat, the bass drum, the snare, the horn lines and the conga rhythms. And way back in 1982 when I was performing in Seattle with FAME Gospel Choir and bassist Brian Mills "Warlock". I started the band with "Warlock" with a focus on African style guitar and a jazz mix. Then later, I hired bassist Arne Livingston as I was in Seattle waiting for my musician visa from London to go back to London and play more guitar for [Mose se "Fan Fan"](#) in a Zairian band called "Somo Somo". "Fan Fan" was the greatest bandleader I ever worked for in my life. His precision as bandleader resulted in a tight band, a 5 star combo. I was also playing for an African Band, based in Seattle called "[L'Orchestra Afrisound](#)." In London I called "Freestyle Candela" "Seattle Jazz" a mix of African guitar and jazz music. I hired one of London's best percussionists from Sierra Leone, [Mamadi Kamara](#). We hit The Jazz Cafe, Watermans Art Center, Riverside studios and other places as "Seattle Jazz Trio". Mamadi was also a great chef. He would cook the okra soup for the local African restaurant every Sunday and Arne and I would gladly eat with him and enjoy the fufu. I would jam at his house with Gambian musician [Sona Jobarteh](#) and her brother. I was also hitting in London with this great band called "[Orquesta Chakchouka](#)", a mix of Jazz, Algerian, South African, Afro-funk music. We played Glasgow - Edinburgh Scotland Jazz Festivals, the amazing Dingwalls club, Bass Clef and a few pubs. One of the pubs in Glasgow was called "The Scottish Hall of Musicians", where I played a 6 string banjo for my group. I also was hitting with [Eddie Edem "Highlife International"](#) every Friday night at The Tabernacle in Powis Sq opening for numerous African bands like Dudu Pukwana , Somo Somo, Orchestra Jazira ... and many others. That's where I met "Fan Fan" , I joined his band and toured all over England and Scotland for many years in the 1980's. Also in London I worked with Nigerian musician [Gasper Lawal](#) and "The Oro Band". Then after 8 years in London I moved to Boston, MA



Doreen Webster
vocalist Somo Somo
&
Orquesta Chakchouka



[Boston Phoenix Article by Banning Eyre](#)

[Boston, MA](#)

Q. What were you doing in Boston, MA?

In 1990, I set up camp in Boston and changed my band name to “Freestyle”. One of my first gigs I played was at The Middle East Cafe. I hired Jessica Lurie, Arne Livingston still focusing on African jazz guitar mix.



After that gig a gentleman introduced himself to me. He said he was [Mark Sandman](#). He said he was very impressed with my band. I would record my guitar at his studio in Cambridge for him. We always hung out talking about music and ideas. He was always working on something new.

“Freestyle” performed at a lot of University’s, Adam House at Harvard University, RISD, Williams College, Zoots in Portland Maine, and many other clubs and festivals on The East Coast. At The Tam O’shanter, I hired some great saxes to hit with Freestyle, [Joshua Redman](#) and [Mark Turner](#).

Also I joined [Ibrahima Camara](#) “World Beat Band” and toured the east coast with him and his band for many years at The Channel, Cumberland Maine Festival, Orpheum Theater and a lot of places. Ibrahima moved to Seattle in 2003 to join “Freestyle Candela” and begin his new Senegales band called “Safal” which I played my [mbalax](#) guitar for.



LEIF TOTUSEK’S CANDELA BLUES

Seattle-based, world-renowned composer/guitarist Leif Totusek, known for his stunning mastery of wide-ranging world-music genres—particularly Pan-African (Congo/Haiti/Cuba/Mali/NewOrleans) styles with his group, Freestyle Candela—explores with his ensemble, “Candela Blues,” the African roots of blues guitar. He will be accompanied by Jay Collins (from The Gregg Allman Band), Ibrahima Camara on percussion (Stevie Wonder group, National Ballet of Senegal), Phil Sparks on upright bass, Yvey Valcin vocals (Haiti), and Ricardo Guity on percussion (from Garifuna region of Honduras).

Those of you who missed Totusek’s workshop on the FedEx Crossroads stage last year on Sensational Sunday—a sublime workshop/demonstration/journey most of those in attendance declared one of the hidden highlights of last year’s festival – get another chance. Following their main stage appearance Saturday, Totusek and percussionist Camara take the Crossroads stage on another Pan-African blues voyage.

Leif Totusek - guitar/vocals



Yvey Valcin - vocals



Jay Collins - sax



Ibrahima Camara - percussion



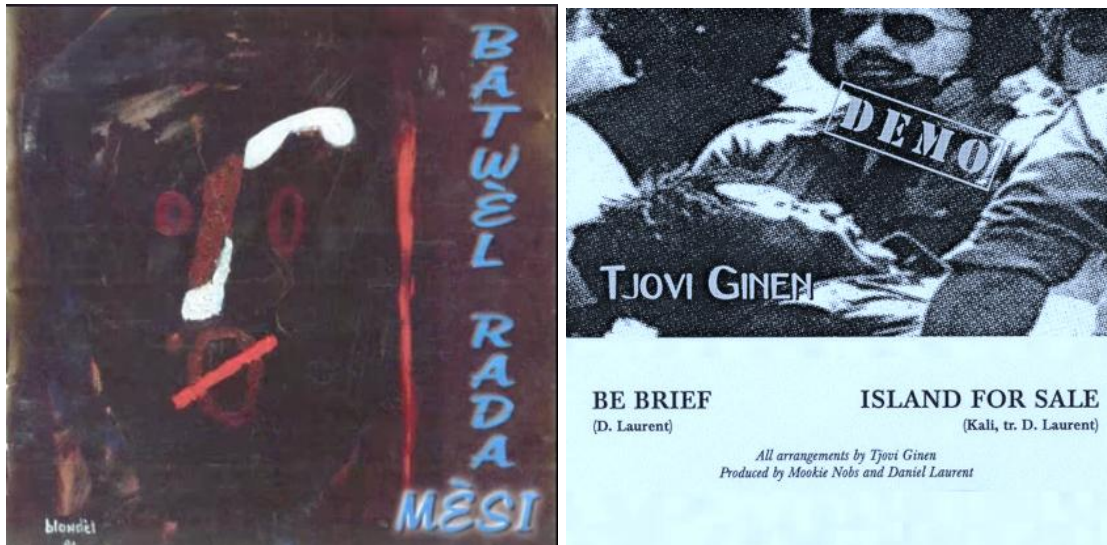
Phil Sparks - bass



Ricardo Guity - percussion



I also recorded and joined a Haitian [rasin](#) band called “[Batwel Rada](#)” we played at Cornell University, MIT, Harvard University, Ryles, Middle East Cafe, Strand Theater in Dorchester and numerous places. I really loved to play my guitar with this special band.



Later I would record (the original guitarist) for another Haitian Band called “[Tjovi Ginen](#)” and performed at Boston’s House of Blues and in NYC at The Lions Den and on the Cape for many years.

[Returned to Seattle](#)



[Seattle Stranger Article by Danny Housman](#)

[Archives: Press Release “Freestyle Candela”](#)

Q When did you move back to Seattle?

Yes. I move back to Seattle in 1996 and started calling my band “Freestyle Candela”

We hit Bumbershoot, The Art Bar, Ok Hotel, Weathered Wall and many festivals and clubs in the NW and still going forward today. One day I was reading the newspaper to see who was hitting in Seattle and I saw that [Tabu Ley Rochereau](#) "Afrisa International" was playing at the Kilimanjaro Club in Pioneer sq. I didn't believe it. So I went to that club that night and there they were. One of Zaire's greatest bands performing Soukous in Seattle. On their break I came up to them and started speaking to them in Lingala. I said "Sango nini, Ngai Leifo, Ngai musician avek groupe "Somo Somo avek London." They put me on stage that night to jam with them. The next time they came back they were performing at Jazz Alley in Seattle. They invited me to come sit in and play with them again. They were based in LA at this time. I had my "Freestyle Candela " CD release party at the Art Bar and I flew up Tabu Ley vocalist [Wawali Bonane](#) to sing Lingala with my band. We also played together that week at The OK Hotel, Folklife, and The Show Box opening for the new front bar. Later Wawali moved his whole band called "Yoka Nzenze" to Seattle and I would play Soukous guitar for them at the Firehouse and other clubs. I am a freelance guitarist. I play for a lot of bands. [Edward Souarez "Atlantic Melody"](#) "[Unko Funki](#)" "[Arturo Rodriguez "Rhythm Ambassadors"](#)" [Thione Diop](#) and many more. Yet Freestyle Candela is my heart and soul and my work for many many years.



In 1999 WOMAD Seattle called me to perform with Uganda musician [Geoffrey Oryema](#). I did that and then traveled to tour with his band in France, based in Paris. I came back to Seattle after that,



and Folklife asked me to perform with Ethiopian singer [Ali Birra](#). We played at The Seattle Opera House and some other stages at Seattle's Folklife. I also toured with blues guitarist [Alice Stuart](#) for years in the early 2000's. In 2008, I performed "Freestyle Candela" in NYC at The Shrine and at The Lyons Den. Recently I opened up with "Freestyle Candela" for [Salif keita](#) at

Kings Hall. I also have been performing “Freestyle Candela” at Seattle’s World Rhythm Festival, Benaroya Hall, Portland Waterfront Blues Festival, University of Washington, Masquers Theater in Soap lake, WA, Museum of History & Industry, Sirens in Port Townsend, WA, Conway Muse Conway, WA, The Triple Door, Seattle, WA, Connecticut Yankee SF, CA . I am excited to perform this year and bring my band Leif Totusek “Freestyle Candela” to Harlem, NYC to hit The Shrine World Music Venue once again on Friday May 24, 2024.

by Staff of the **The Arthead Cultural Outreach**

Thank you Mr Totusek for sharing your time and explaining your long career.

ACO **The Arthead Cultural Outreach**

[William Wikstrom](#): KRAB FM DJ 1974 1977.. Public Access Producer from 1996 -2005,

Owner: Arthead Gallery