



CUMBANCHA PRESENTS:  
**SIERRA LEONE'S REFUGEE ALL STARS**  
**LIBATION**

"A fabulous, gifted band: down to earth, full of life and absolutely going in the right direction." - *Songlines (UK)*

Africa's most inspirational band celebrates ten years together with its finest album to date. *Libation's* "around-the-campfire" intimacy, honest soulfulness, and technical prowess reveal how far the group has come while remaining true to its roots. Produced by **Chris Velan** and mixed by **Iestyn Polson**, known for his work with **David Gray**, **Patti Smith**, and **David Bowie**, *Libation* embodies the contagious joy, optimism in the face of struggle and love for their fellow man that has earned the All Stars a devoted following across the globe.

**US & Canada Release Date:** March 18, 2014

**Europe & ROW Release Date:** April 21, 2014

After a 10-year adventure that has taken them from the squalor of refugee camps to the world's biggest stages, Africa's most inspirational band continues to ascend with what will surely be hailed as their best album yet. For these beautiful recordings, **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars** go full circle to the acoustic, "around the campfire" sound that appeared on their first album, much of which was recorded in the refugee camps during their years in exile from Sierra Leone. Back then, the group was in a very different frame of mind, had yet to tour the world, and were still raw in their sound. Over the years they have evolved to become one of Africa's most recognized bands with fans across the globe. *Libation's* acoustic intimacy, toe-tapping rhythms, catchy melodies, honest soulfulness, socially conscious lyrics and musical dexterity reveal how far the group has come while remaining true to its roots.

It's a family reunion as well, as they join forces again with **Chris Velan**, the producer of their debut album *Living Like a Refugee*. The new album, which will be released in the US and Canada on March 18, was recorded amidst the Green Mountains of Vermont and mixed in London by renowned British producer **Iestyn Polson**, known for his work with **David Gray**, **Patti Smith**, **David Bowie** and others.

The album takes its title, *Libation*, from the ritual pouring of a liquid that is common in African cultures. A libation is poured as an offering to a god or spirit, to honor the ancestors, and in memory of loved ones who have died. Often, when a libation is poured it is an invocation for sacred spirits to be present at a special event such as the welcoming of people into the community, for a wedding, birth or funeral or the coronation of a king or other ruler. After the tracking of the album was finished, for example, the members of the band celebrated the occasion by pouring a libation, both as a celebration and to remember the numerous beloved members of the band who have passed away over the last ten years and could not take part in the session. The title offers a celebration of ten years together, a chance to remember those who have joined the ancestors and hope for many years of success ahead.

As it happens, the state of Vermont has become something of a second home for Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. The film and debut album that introduced the All Stars to the world were the work of a trio of filmmakers and musicians who met while students at Middlebury College in Vermont: **Zach Niles**, **Banker White** and **Chris Velan**. Niles, a native of Woodstock, Vermont, served as the group's manager for many years and continues to be an essential part of the management team. The group's record label, **Cumbancha**, is based in the small town of Charlotte, Vermont. Over the years, Vermont has often served as a home base between tour dates, and the band has performed in the state more times than any other, sometimes a dozen or more shows over the course of a summer. So it was fitting for their latest album to be recorded amidst the rolling Green Mountains, whose summertime landscape reminds the band of the lush hills of their homeland.

The album's production began with a month long residency at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. For three weeks, the band and producer Chris Velan lived at a campus dorm. Daily rehearsal session took place at which the compositions and arrangements were refined. Members of the community often dropped by to help band members get to town to buy a phone card to call home or to cook them their beloved chicken and rice. After the rehearsals, recording began at **Lane Gibson Recording and Mastering**, the recording studio located at Cumbancha's headquarters in an 1800s-era farmhouse. In this picturesque and relaxed setting, Velan and the All Stars, working alongside engineer **Lane Gibson**, spent four weeks tracking the songs that would end up on the album. News quickly spread in the community that a world-famous band from Africa was recording nearby, and volunteers emerged to help with transportation, lodging, meals and musical instruments. The comfortable setting was a far cry from the conditions of their first album, which was literally recorded around a campfire in a refugee camp in Guinea and in a hot, ramshackle, studio in Freetown, where electric shocks and power outages were common.



On *Libation*, the band took a more acoustic approach than on their last two albums, experimenting with a variety of vintage guitars and hand percussion to create unexpected sonic qualities. The unplugged style is a return in a way to the days in the refugee camps when the band had to make do with whatever instruments they could round up or make by hand, and do without amplification and electronics. On their last two albums, the All Stars had taken a different approach, working with some of the top musicians from New Orleans and famed producer **Steve Berlin** on their 2010 release *Rise & Shine*, or taking advantage of the retro dub effects brought by producer **Victor "Ticklah" Axelrod** on 2012's *Radio Salone*.

The band also made a concerted effort to mine the riches of Sierra Leonean folklore, basing their songs on the *highlife*, *maringa* and *palm wine* styles that the band members listened to in their youth but are not heard as often today, as well as *baskeda* and *gumbe*, the Sierra Leonean relatives of reggae and soukous respectively.

The themes of the songs address subjects that have long been central to the band's worldview. "Rich But Poor", a catchy reggae anthem with banjo riffs, addresses the contradiction of a country filled with natural resources and entrepreneurial people yet saddled with poverty and debt. Singer and bandleader **Reuben Koroma** calls for unity, singing, "So let us get together, work together / Don't let them fool you with them dirty politics / Say no to tribalism, apartism, regionalism will only tear us apart."

On "Manjalagi" a scorching track buoyed by hip-shaking Afro-Latin grooves and a shredding electric guitar solo, **Ashade Pearce** calls on his country's government and people to show sympathy and support for the poorest members of society. "They say love your neighbor as you love your self / Love for one, let it be love for all."

Many who have seen the documentary film *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars* will be happy to know that then teenage **Black Nature**, whose terrible experiences during the war are soothed by his dreams of being a rap star, has grown up to become a well-adjusted (and well-built) man who never fails to excite the crowds with his acrobatic dance moves during the band's live performances. Nature, who now lives in San Francisco, wrote and sings on the lover's rock reggae track "Treat You Right", a plea for forgiveness from a lover that will surely enhance his heartthrob status.

The All Stars also have some fun with some endearing slice-of-life songs about misbehaving love interests. On "Can't Make Me Lonely", Karoma laments his lady's lack of interest in intimacy: "Many many times, darling / You've been keeping me waiting / Many many times, woman / You've been disappointing me / Another time you hungry / Another time you go to a meeting / Another time you busy / Another time you grumpy." A jilted lover is the protagonist of "Ghana Baby" and "Maria," catchy songs that will have you dancing so much you might not even notice they are tales of romantic woe.

"Its So Sorry" calls for personal responsibility; "Money No Do" points out that money won't fill every need; "Gbaenyama" encourages young people to embrace a spiritual life; "Min Do Sin Tay" is a foot-tapping treatise on equality and African unity; closing track "No Feel Bad-O" tells people not to let jealousy get in the way of appreciating your blessings in life. While every song on *Libation* is supported by upbeat rhythms and sing-along melodies, the lyrics offer advice, guidance, humor and words of wisdom that give them the depth and resonance of the classics they will surely become. Asked what the overall message of *Libation* is, guitarist and keyboard player Jahson Gbassay Bull states, "The message is music can heal the trauma of man. Music can control the stress in man. If you lose hope, music can cure it." Words well spoken from someone who should know.

This momentous recording celebrates, embodies and radiates the joy, passion for music and love for their fellow man that have made Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars a living testament to the resilience of the human spirit and an inspiration to hundreds of thousands of people across the globe over these past ten years.

In the album's liner notes, the members of the All Stars make the following statement: "This album celebrates the 10th Anniversary of the making of our first album *Living Like a Refugee*. Since that first album we've lived a life that once seemed unimaginable; we have toured the world, released more albums, and shared our music with thousands upon thousands of friends and fans. But while we keep rolling we never forget our roots. So this is our musical libation - an offering - to celebrate the blessings that our music has brought to us, to pay respect to the spirits of the musical brothers we have lost along the way, and to pay tribute to Mama Salone - the country who's culture, traditions, and rhythms infuse our music and fill our souls with pride."

The release of *Libation* will be followed by a worldwide tour beginning on April 3<sup>rd</sup> in Minneapolis, followed by a performance at the Amnesty International Human Rights Conference in Chicago, a concert at the iconic Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York and a special private appearance at the United Nations. Additional tour dates confirmed in Montreal, Boston, Washington DC, Los Angeles, San Francisco and more. For a full list of confirmed dates, visit [www.cumbancha.com/slrastour](http://www.cumbancha.com/slrastour).

**For more information, review copies, song lyrics & descriptions, photographs, tour dates and other support materials, etc. please contact:**

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