

ZAP MAMA

Profile

Marie Daulne, the founder and fronting member of Zap Mama since the early 1990s, has lived a life that rivals Homer's *Odyssey*. Filled with peril and triumph, globe-spanning quests, and a series of personal achievements that seem almost heroic in scope, her story is one of epic proportions in the annals of world music. She stands with one foot firmly planted in tradition and the other in the progressive sounds and sensibilities of a new century, and she consistently merges the two with an effortless grace that never fails to mesmerize.

Born in the Congo, but raised in Belgium, Marie spends her life crossing continents and winning the hearts of thousands of fans, while introducing her musical heritage to the world and uniting musical cultures through the wonders of voice, music and dynamic performance.

"My early childhood was filled with the music of my mother, the music of the Congo," Daulne recalls. "We had the radio when I was growing up in Belgium, so we heard a lot of French music. And of course, American music was also very popular all over Europe. Since our mother did not want us to watch TV in our home, we entertained ourselves by creating our own music. We were very musical."

After studying painting and art history in high school and college, Daulne made a pilgrimage in her late teens back to the land of her birth. In doing so, she reconnected with the pygmy culture, and discovered that the African music of her early childhood was still very much alive within her.

The resulting experience, she recalls, was nothing short of an epiphany – one that changed the course of her life. "That was when I became a musician," she said. "When I went to the Congo, I hadn't thought of being a musician. Not at all. But I was there, and I was standing in the middle of the forest, hearing the music that had been a part of my earliest memories, and it was like an illumination, like a light."

In 1990, Daulne assembled four other vocalists and created the first incarnation of Zap Mama, an all-female a cappella quintet, or as *The New York Times* called it, "a utopian multicultural dream." *Adventures in Afropea I*, the group's 1993 debut recording on David Byrne's label, Luaka Bop, wove together music from Zaire, Tanzania, Syria, France and Spain. *Afropea* became the biggest selling non-compilation album in the history of the Luaka Bop label and reached #1 on the *Billboard* World Music Charts.

The followup album, *Sabsylma*, came a year later and earned Zap Mama a Grammy nomination in the Best World Music Album category. Another critical and commercial success, this mix of a cappella performances and exotic rhythms further cemented the group's reputation as one of the most innovative stylistically diverse acts on the contemporary vocal scene.

In 1997, the group signed to Virgin Records and released their third album, *7*, a recording aimed at a more mainstream audience by incorporating elements of R&B and pop, and a cover of Phoebe Snow's "Poetry Man." Guest appearances by hip-hopper Michael Franti and Jamaican-born DJ U-Roy added to the album's overall sense of eclecticism.

The exploration continued with the release of *A Ma Zone*, a 1999 release on Narada that included breakbeats, jazz lines on upright bass, turntable manipulation, and collaborations with Black Thought (of The Roots) and Speech from Arrested Development, spawning the

popular Zap songs, “Rafiki” and “W’happy Mama.”

After a four-year hiatus, Daulne returned to Luaka Bop for the 2004 release of *Ancestry in Progress*. With a co-production credit going to The Roots’ Richard Nichols and guest appearances by Erykah Badu, Questlove and Talib Kweli, *Ancestry* upped the ante with layers of funk and soul atop the already well-established African, Afro-Cuban, R&B and jazz grooves. This album also earned Daulne another #1 spot on the *Billboard* World Music charts.

Over the years, Zap Mama has morphed from an a cappella quintet into the creative vision of one woman surrounded by talent from nearly every corner of the musical landscape. In the process, Daulne has toured the globe in support of her music, with legendary performances at the Montreux and New Orleans Jazz Festivals, the UK’s Glastonbury Festival, the WOMAD festivals in Adelaide and Singapore, Coachella Festival, Austin City Limits, Roskilde, and the Blue Note Festival in Tokyo.

Daulne’s music has also been featured in numerous films and television shows, including *Mission: Impossible II* and most recently in an episode of the popular series, *So You Think you Can Dance?* She was also the subject of a BBC documentary.

Daulne opened a new chapter of this continuously unfolding story with the 2007 release of *Supermoon*, Zap Mama’s debut recording on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group. An engaging blend of world, jazz, pop, funk, reggae and soul, the album included guest appearances by stellar figures from around the globe: drummer Tony Allen; bassist Meshell Ndegeocello and Will Lee; guitarists David Gilmore and Michael Franti; pianists Leon Pendarvis and Robbie Kondor, percussionist Bashiri Johnson and many more.

ReCreation, Zap Mama’s latest disc on Heads Up, is set for worldwide release on May 26, 2009. In addition to a rhythm section rooted in a rich Brazilian vibe, **ReCreation** also boasts a guest list of high-profile vocalists including Bilal, G. Love, actor Vincent Cassel and several others.

In addition to her role as an artist and performer, Daulne continues to devote much of her time and energy in working to protect human rights and fight global poverty with organizations such as Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), CARE and the United Nations.

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