

## African Global Roots recognizes Joe Shalita

Written by IBé Kaba

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Long before Somali became synonymous with African, African music in Minnesota had one name: Shalita.

It was Loketo, Kanda Bongo Man, Prince Nico meet Kassav in Jamaica.

It was African music with no continental borders.

It would be years before I realized Shalita was not only the name of that band I first heard at the Blue Nile Restaurant and Lounge many years back, but actually the name of one man in particular: Joe Shalita, lead vocal and guitar.

Joe Shalita's history in the Twin Cities shares some of the same chapters with the history of African music in the Twin Cities. After the University of Wisconsin at Platteville and working in Dubuque Iowa, Joe Shalita moved to Minneapolis in 1979. While looking for a job, he took the lead guitar position with the then only Afro (reggae, soca, and African vibes) band in the Twin Cities area, Sweet Taste of Africa.

But Joe Shalita started long before that, an ocean away. "I started performing music at a very early stage," he says, "in my village where I was born in southern Tanzania, near the Mozambique Malawi Border. I had the privilege of being a student of Tanzania's most famous percussionist and cultural icon, the late Mzee Morris Nyakyusa & his 10 Drums." But it was not until young Joe Shalita moved to Uganda to live with his mother and step father that cement settled in his musical foundation. In Uganda he learned to play the guitar by ear, listening and watching local musicians.

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In Kenya, listening to the music coming out of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Joe Shalita's musical sensibility started to take shape. He moved to America with the help of a "high school exchange scholarship in 1972 and wound up in Wisconsin in a small town called Darlington," where he was introduced to the Blues, Funk and other American musical forms. A star was born!

When Sweet Taste of Africa disbanded in 1982, Joe Shalita relied on his diverse musical background to play with many different types of bands in the Twin Cities including Ipso Facto, Caribas and Shangoya.

Joe Shalita eventually got together with friends to form the band that bore his name. Though it has seen many members come and go, the inaugural band had Joe Shalita as lead vocal and guitar, Brain Boma on bass, Paul McGee on drums, and Peter Tiedman on keyboards.

Shalita would be the face of African music in the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota for some 15 years before disbanding in 1999.

In 2000, Joe Shalita managed Kanda Bongo Man's North America tour. After that he joined Marimba Africa, an offshoot of the Mila Band, which is itself an offshoot of Shalita. At the same time, he continues to perform solo gigs as Shalita, and he is working on his next solo album due next year on MR Records. Like many artists in the business for the love of music, he still maintains his day job working of the State of Minnesota where he's been employed for the last 20 years.

Shalita was honored by the community on December 26, 2008 at 1st Cup Cofé, in South Minneapolis. For more information, please visit African Global Roots' website at [www.AGRMN.com](http://www.AGRMN.com)