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West African Music, Dancing on Show at Bilingua

By Nosheen Shakil

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The group started playing West African music after seeing it on YouTube.

There aren't many chances to listen to West African music in Moscow, so grab the chance Wednesday as the oddly named group Sativa Lobster brings its love of that famous musical region to club Bilingua.

The group is made up mainly of Russians with a mania for the polyrhythmic drum beat of West African music that has had so much success in Europe and North America with stars such as the legendary djembe drummer Famoudou Konate.

"It was love at first sight," group member Alexander Afonin said in an e-mail interview. "We were always attracted by the sound of drums, and after we saw a video on YouTube about Guinean music, we also wanted to play such music. We bought the instruments and started immediately."

That was six years ago, and the group has grown since then, with two African musicians resident in Moscow joining.

Kalu Kouyate, a djembe drummer from Guinea, often plays with the group. Kouyate comes from a family of musicians and boasts that he is also a shaman who can heal using the sound of music.

“When we first met him, we took courses in djembe,” said Afonin, who plays traditional African instruments like the doundoun, a bass drum and its three different varieties. “He taught us different West African rhythms.”

Paul Yombuno, also from Guinea, sings and plays guitar.

Apart from music, the group organizes lessons in traditional African dancing taught by group member Tatyana Tichonova, who has studied in Guinea. They also often unite with a local theater group that performs traditional African fairy tales at concerts.

“In a couple of years our group will become popular thanks to our master classes in music and dance,” Afonin said.

Sativa Lobster performs Wednesday at 9 p.m. at Bilingua, 10 Krivokolenny Pereulok, Bldg. 5. Metro Kitai-Gorod. Tel. 623-9660.

African dance lessons take place at Dikaya Planeta, 7 Khokhlovsky Pereulok. Metro Kitai-Gorod. Tel. +7 (916) 315-5286, sativa-lobster.ru.

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