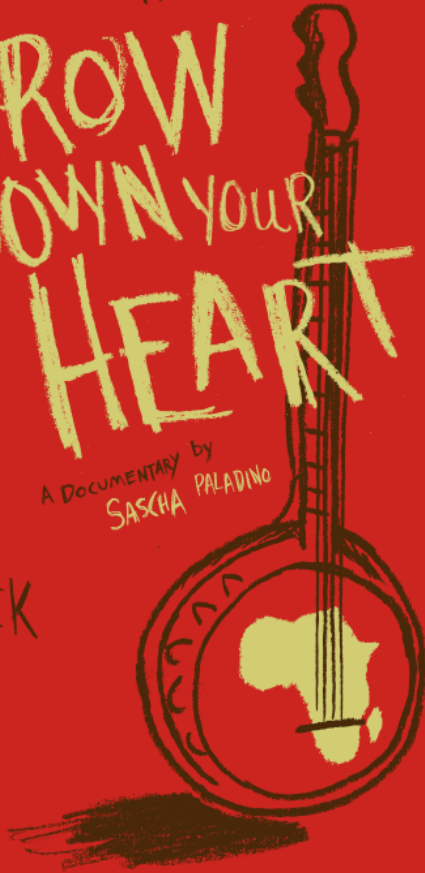




BÉLA FLECK
IN
THROW
DOWN YOUR
HEART

A DOCUMENTARY by
SASCHA PALADINO

BÉLA FLECK
BRINGS THE
BANJO BACK TO
AFRICA



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Throw Down Your Heart

Synopsis:

“Throw Down Your Heart” follows American banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck on his journey to Africa to explore the little known African roots of the banjo and record an album. Béla’s boundary-breaking musical adventure takes him to Uganda, Tanzania, The Gambia, and Mali, and provides a glimpse of the beauty and complexity of Africa.

“Throw Down Your Heart” presents a portrait of Africa that is very different from what is often seen in the media today. As Ugandan folk musician Haruna Walusimbi states in the film: “There is this negative thinking about Africa. There is nothing good in Africa. They are beggars, there is HIV/AIDS, they are at war all the time. But that is just a very small bit of what Africa is.” Béla’s trip provides a glimpse into the incredibly rich and diverse musical traditions of Africa.

At first glance, it might seem odd that the banjo is the catalyst for this journey. But in fact, the banjo is originally an African instrument. And Béla Fleck’s passion for the banjo runs deep. In his trailblazing 30-year career, Béla has brought the instrument into jazz, pop, classical, and world music settings, and won eight Grammys along the way (not to mention the 25 nominations, in more distinct categories than anyone else, ever).

Ever since he started playing music, Béla heard stories about where the banjo came from. To many, the banjo is seen as a uniquely American instrument – and even conjures images of white Southern stereotypes. But the banjo is actually a descendant of an African instrument. West Africans have long played an instrument that looks and sounds much like the banjo. When slave traders captured West Africans, many of the slaves brought that instrument, and the knowledge of how to make it, to the United States. On plantations in the American South, slaves were not allowed to play drums, but they were allowed to play the banjo. Soon, whites started copying it, and the banjo evolved into the instrument we know today – and became a part of American culture. Béla wanted to go to Africa to trace the roots of the banjo, the instrument that defines who he is.

But Béla’s journey was also motivated by a deep love of African music. Béla was inspired by music from all across the continent, and very often he could hear a place for his banjo. When Béla had a year off from his band, Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, he realized it was the perfect opportunity to follow his dream – travel to Africa to collaborate with African musicians.

“Throw Down Your Heart” tracks Béla’s tuneful collaborations with a wide variety of musicians – from local villagers who play a twelve-foot xylophone, to a family that makes and plays the akonting (thought by many to be the original banjo), to international superstars such as the Malian diva Oumou Sangare.

As Béla travels across Africa, Béla uses his banjo to transcend barriers of language and culture, finding common ground with musicians from very different backgrounds and creating some of the most meaningful music of his career.

Throw Down Your Heart

Credits:

Shot on location in Uganda, Tanzania, the Gambia, and Mali.

Featuring

Béla Fleck, Haruna Walusimbi, Anania Ngoliga, The Jatta Family, Oumou Sangare, Djelimady Tounkara, Bassekou Kouyate, and many others.

Director

Sascha Paladino

Producers

Béla Fleck & Sascha Paladino

Director of Photography

Kirsten Johnson

Production Sound Mixers

Wellington Bowler & Dave Sinko

Edited by

Scott A. Burgess, Béla Fleck & Sascha Paladino

Music Editor

Béla Fleck

Supervising Editor

Joe Bini

Languages

English, Lusogan, Swahili, Jola, Bambarra, French, with subtitles.

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Director's Statement:

“Throw Down Your Heart” grew out of Béla Fleck’s passion for the banjo, but it turned into something more. As we traveled through Africa, we encountered such wonderful people who opened up to us through their music. It quickly became clear that the heart of the film was not only in Béla’s journey, but also in the many stories of what it means to be a musician, an artist, today in Africa. I hope that the intertwining threads of these stories and Béla’s cultural exchange shed light on the beautiful corners of the world that we were lucky enough to experience, and that the film puts the audience right in the middle of our musical adventure.

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Biographies:

Sascha Paladino, Director/Producer

Sascha Paladino is a filmmaker and writer. “Throw Down Your Heart” is his first feature. Sascha’s documentary short, “Obstinato: Making Music for Two” (2004), about the musicians Béla Fleck and Edgar Meyer, premiered at the Film Society of Lincoln Center, won the Best Documentary Short Award at the Woodstock Film Festival, the Audience Award at the Newport Film Festival, played at the Full Frame Film Festival and Nashville Film Festival, and was released on DVD by Sony Classical.

Sascha’s other documentary shorts include “Party For the People” (2005), about a communist rockabilly band in Northern Italy, (Woodstock Film Festival, Newport Film Festival), and “The Subway Line” (2002), about a guerilla subway artist in New York City (Mill Valley Film Festival, Florida Film Festival).

Sascha is also an Emmy-nominated writer and producer for children’s television. He is head writer and producer of “Ni Hao, Kai-lan” on Nick Jr, and has written and head written for programs including “Wonder Pets,” “Blue’s Clues,” “ToddWorld,” and many others. He has worked for companies including Nickelodeon, The Discovery Channel, Disney, Noggin, the BBC, and Granada UK. Sascha is also involved in many facets of arts education, and has taught and developed workshops for arts organizations, public schools and prisons.

Sascha is one of seven international filmmakers invited to participate in the American Film Institute’s Project 20/20, a program designed to promote cultural exchange, understanding and collaboration through film, funded by the NEA, the NEH, and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. Through Project 20/20, “Throw Down Your Heart” will screen internationally throughout 2009.

Béla Fleck, Artist/Producer

Béla Fleck is a powerfully creative force in bluegrass, jazz, pop, rock, classical and world music. The pioneering banjo virtuoso and bandleader is best known at the helm of the groundbreaking group Béla Fleck & the Flecktones.

Often considered the premiere banjo player in the world, Béla has virtually reinvented the image and the sound of the banjo in a remarkable performing and recording career that has taken him all over the musical map, both with the Flecktones and on a range of solo projects and collaborations.

A New York City native, Béla picked up the banjo at age 15 after being awed by the bluegrass playing of Flatt & Scruggs. He began experimenting with playing bebop on the banjo in high school. In 1982, he joined the progressive bluegrass band New Grass Revival, where he made a name for himself in the country-bluegrass world, at the same time beginning a series of solo albums.

Bela has won 10 Grammys, and been nominated 25 times. He holds the distinction of being nominated in more different categories than any other musician in Grammy history.

Béla made the connection to classical music with “Perpetual Motion,” his critically acclaimed 2001 recording that went on to win a pair of Grammys, including Best Classical Crossover Album.

Bela’s most recent recordings are “The Enchantment,” a collaboration with the pianist Chick Corea, and “The Sparrow Quartet.” The Flecktones’ first Holiday record, “Jingle All the Way,” was released in December 2008.