

**Elemental Spirits, Dream Readers, Sorcerers, Tuaregs and Geopolitics Fuel Leni Stern's Global Sound, as she Roams from South India to Africa on Striking New EP**

**Songs in Tamil, Wolof, Bambara, Uruba (and English,) All Recorded on Analog Tape, Create a Haunting Dreamscape, as Stern Evokes Peter Gabriel on 'Spirit in the Water'**

Singer/guitarist **Leni Stern** wraps her arms around a global sound on her striking new EP, **'Sprit In the Water'**. Fueled by recent journeys to India, Mali, Madagascar and elsewhere, Stern has delivered an intense collection of songs that combine South Indian Ragas (sung in the local dialect of Tamil) with haunting tales of African sorcerers, sung in Wolof, the language of Senegal, and more. Recording on analog tape, Stern creates a warm, soulful sound for the EP, recalling jazz and rock albums of the 1960's...She comments:

*"I needed to record "the old way" again. Without fixes and overdubs and slick little automated moves, just play the song and mix it by hand on a nice old board with some blue greyish compressors with no names on them from old movie soundtracks, ancient tube mikes, a big old room, loads of room mikes, an engineer that knows and loves the sound the way I do."*

The EP is now available for download via Stern's website, on disk at concerts, and via iTunes, CDBaby and other web outlets. It precedes a new, full-length Leni Stern album to be released in 2010. Until then, Stern plans a series of international performances, on tour with the legendary Salif Keita.

Each of the six songs on 'Sprit In the Water' weaves a distinct and visceral tale, and Stern's evolution as a storyteller reaches its peak on the centerpiece title track, in which she creates a dream state in an offering to Yemaja, the revered and feared African



spirit of the water. Featuring vocals sung in Uruba (and a talking drum performance) by Nigeria's Kofo 'The Wonderman', this rich song is recalled by Stern:

*"Yemaja is the mother of all spirits. She protects her children, especially in matters of love. She is believed to have miraculous powers. She is sweet and loving and very, very beautiful. Like the water, her element, she moves quickly and softly. She is everywhere and in everything. She doesn't like to see her children in pain. It is said that she takes them home when she sees them suffer, and she punishes whoever has hurt them. All over Africa and the islands of the Caribbean, people pray to her and make offerings. The Tacamba, a rhythm from the north of Mali, mysteriously fits into Kofo's Nigerian rhythms on this track. This song is my offering to Yemaja."*

In the mournful 'Sera', Stern's up-close, delicate vocals make the listener feel as if the singer is whispering in their ear. Sera means 'sister' in Bambara, the language of Mali. Stern's refrain "kanakassi sera" means "don't cry, my sister". She recalls the sad story behind this track:

*"I remember last winter. I was having dinner with a Tuareg friend of mine in Bamako, when Andara Kouyate called me, saying that his brother had been in a bad motorcycle accident. We found out later that night that his brother, Saro, didn't survive his injuries. Saro was Bassekou Kouyate's little brother, and he played the kora. While working on my first cd in Mali, 'Alu Maye', Bassekou would always send Saro to pick me up for rehearsals. As we drove, Saro would teach me Bambara. We would laugh so much, because apparently my pronunciation was very funny. I couldn't get mad at Saro, despite his relentless teasing. He was just such a sweet and charming man. He also accompanied my friend Ami Sacko, Bassekou's wife and my favorite African singer, to concerts, TV shows, the hairdresser, anywhere we went. Ami took the news of his death very, very hard. She cried and cried for days. She refused to eat and just sat under her veil, silently crying to herself. I took care of the children, trying my best to explain what had happened. They all kept asking, 'why is Ami crying so much?' I said she was sad, because Saro was gone. When they asked me where he went, I said, to paradise, hoping they'd know what that meant, even if I didn't. I felt so helpless. When I lost Michael Brecker and Don Alias while I was in Mali, Ami always told me that I should accept death because we all come and we all go. Andara's wife Mah Bara Soumano sings with me on this track. She says in Bambara what I say in English: "Kanakassi sera – don't cry, my sister...""*



Leni Stern's wicked electric guitar solos are a highlight of the propulsive 'In My Dream', a winning track about African sorcerers and dream interpreters. Stern sings in Wolof, the language of Senegal. She recalls:

*"When I record in Africa in Salif Keita's studio, I work with Abou Cisse. He is the youngest son in a family of sorcerers from Abigan, Ivory Coast (and he is my favorite African recording engineer). His father can give advice and tell the future by interpreting dreams -- This is the tradition of the Cisse family. The father taught all his sons, but he gave 'the book of dreams' only to Abou. I have spent many evenings with Abou at the studio, talking about dreams and their meaning. Once, I was troubled by a recurring dream, in which I was in a fire. Abou asked me if there was smoke in my dream. There wasn't. He got all happy and said that was excellent news, because fire by itself is a symbol of success. I didn't really*

*wanna know what smoke was a symbol of! Sometimes I would get all spooked during our late night talks. I sing in Wolof here, the language of Senegal. Like in most of my African songs I repeat in English whatever I sing in the African language."*

Stern's doubled vocals on 'Show Me Your Face' convey the song's theme of hiding one's true identity behind a literal and figurative veil. The topic was inspired by the Tuaregs seen during Stern's visits to The Festival in the Desert, in the north of Mali:

*"Ever since I first performed at The Festival in the Desert, I have been fascinated by the desert tribes, the Tuaregs. They cover their faces with colorful wraps to protect themselves from the desert sun and from the wind that blows across the sand with nothing to stop it, no trees, no bushes. I've come to like hiding behind a veil, to appreciate the privacy it gives, the protection from everyone's eyes."*

Stern expands her musical horizon to embrace the South Indian classical Raga on 'Tell Me', as she questions trust and faith:

*"This song is based on a Raga, Charukeshi. I love the mood of this scale, it's right in the middle, between sadness and joy. I have spent many years studying Indian Ragas and their wonderful elements of improvisation. In Indian classical music, everything apart from a small theme, is improvised (and has been for the last 4000 years.) Improvisation is my favorite thing in music, and there is always so much more to learn along the way. I sing this track in Tamil, the language of South India – "sole, sole une nam balama: tell me, tell me can I put my faith in you."*

Stern makes an oblique political statement on 'House of Thieves', which was among the first tracks written for the new EP:

*"The idea for this song came to me while waiting in an endless line at immigration in England. There were people from all over the world around me, all patiently waiting. I could see the rainy pale grey sky through a window on the other side, and I couldn't help but wonder what I had, what everybody had come here for. I was coming from Africa and had just seen, first hand, the mess the European colonial regimes left there. I was on my way home to America, the most powerful nation on earth today. Bush and Cheney were still running the show. Thieves, all of them."*

Leni Stern's additional comments about the 'Spirit in the Water' EP:

*"House of Thieves' and 'Tell Me' were recorded in the spring of '09 -- they were the first recordings at Bedford Studio. We recorded on tape with all analog processing, like the old jazz and rock records from the 1960s. I always felt nostalgic for the sound of my guitar on tape. My first record, 'Clairvoyant,' with Paul Motian and Bill Frisell, was recorded this way, and Hiram Bullock was the producer. I know that the warm sound of that record was due to many factors, the great band and the producer most of all, but there was a piece of the puzzle that couldn't be explained this way. And I'd always felt that I needed to record "the old way" again. Without fixes and overdubs and slick little automated moves, just play the song and mix it by hand on a nice old board with some blue greyish compressors with no names on them from old movie soundtracks, ancient tube mikes, a big old room, loads of room mikes, an engineer that knows and loves the sound the way I do. Andy Tomassi specializes in live jazz and rock recordings. He was the perfect choice. His collection of microphones, outboard gear, vintage guitars and amplifiers is the best in New York. There is an old organ, a Leslie cabinet that I used for my guitar, old Fender basses, Ampeg bass amps, a Ludwig drum set...the list is endless. I met Andy*

*at The Festival in the Desert in Essakane, Mali when I performed there with Bassekou Kouyate for the first time. Ever since that day we had planned to work together."*

'Spirit In the Water':

leni stern: guitars, voice, n'goni

mamadou ba: bass

will lee: bass

harvey wirt: drumset

tim keiper: drumset, shakers

brahim fribgane: oud

makan kouyate: kalabash

yacouba sissoko: kora

kofo: talking drum, voice

bassekou kouyate: jelly n'goni

ami sacco: vocals

mabarra soumanou: vocals

awa sango: vocals

haruna samake: camala n'goni

prince: calabash, tama

solo doumbia: percussion

andara kouyate: jelly n'goni, n'goni bas

produced by andy tommasi and leni stern

engineered by andy tommasi, kona, and abou cisse

mixed by andy tommasi at bedford studio

Leni Stern is a Global Music artist and electric guitarist whose acclaimed 2007 CD '**Africa**' was described by **ALLMUSIC** as "**one of the finest CDs of the past year, in any genre.**" With a vocal style that has been compared to Rickie Lee Jones, Stern has wowed critics with her embrace of the many musical traditions the world has to offer – in fact, Stern was recently invited to perform at the **United Nations**.

Stern's live shows deliver an African/Global musical experience to an American audience. **Jazziz Magazine** profiled Stern, and noted: *"Though not an African native, the blonde, German-born, Berklee-trained jazz guitarist Leni Stern has become a windswept desert wanderer in heart and spirit. While recording her latest album, Africa (Leni Stern Recordings), she immersed herself in West African culture, living there for the better part of two years. From that rich experience, she created a collection of songs that are an aural history of her music lessons, and that were further drawn from passionate fireside debates and observations about a vast region of the world that is both elementally sacred and relentlessly plagued by political unrest."*

Stern's stature as a Global Music artist has grown in the wake of 'Africa', and her live performances have reflected the dynamic shift, both in terms of instrumentation and personnel. Critics embraced 'Africa' as "**a significant new chapter in a career marked by bold changes.**" With 'Spirit In the Water', Leni Stern's world has expanded to include South India, as her sound continues to evolve. More details about her full CD for 2010 will be announced soon.