



Ali Farka Touré & Toumani Diabaté

'In the Heart of the Moon' (WCD072)

SLEEVE NOTES

"A Very Important Meeting In the Realm At the Heart Of the Moon" Ali Farka Touré

Toumani is a child who was born in my hands. I knew Toumani as a child and I also worked a lot with his father, Sidiki Diabaté, who has contributed a lot to sharing traditional culture between Guinea and Mali. I know Toumani as an artist today, and he is someone I admire and whom I will keep on admiring. I know that Toumani has faith, he holds the key to Malian music and ten million Malian artists live in his shadow.

I am Arma and Toumani is a Griot. I am from the Songrai/Peul culture in the north and he is a Mandé from the south. It's rare that musicians meet like this from different traditions. But there is something that unites us and it is art and culture, which have no borders. We both work towards the same goal, for the same things, therefore colour is not an issue, and musical differences are not an issue. This did not start yesterday. Whether you are Tamaschek, Peul, Hassania, Songhaï or Sonrai, you are Malian. Wherever you make your bed, you are still Malian.

I don't need to rehearse with Toumani. I never rehearse when it comes to music, because the inspiration will come to me at the right moment; I know what I am doing, I know what I want. Music is part of the fabric of my body and makes my spirit grow. Sincerely, music quenches the thirst in my heart. It is my gift, my gift of knowledge.

It is the same for Toumani: he is a phenomenon of African culture. The kora is born with Toumani. There is no competition between us, no hate, no jealousy. You cannot be jealous of God and of what He gives. And with his instrument, Toumani is able to do whatever he wants. We never talked about the repertoire. We don't need to plan ahead. We didn't improvise. It's perfectly normal that I know this material. First it was his father who told me about it. I know Toumani understands. For me, this African culture is part of the fabric of my life, of my inspiration and intelligence. This recording is a natural wish we all share.

These are songs which belong to a repertoire that goes back to a very artistically fertile period, the 50s & 60s, a time between the end of colonisation and the birth of the independence, a very important period. And I am very proud of it. This album was made in order to share our knowledge with the new generation, to bring this period back to life and show the significance of this time and the opportunities we had.

If you know something and don't want to share it, then you are selfish. You came after someone, and someone else will come after you. You can't learn the entire sea by heart.

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No. This is why God created waves in the river and in the sea. Some leave, and some come. I met Keita Fodiba in 1956 when he was playing this music and he was my inspiration to pick up the guitar. Everyone needs to participate in making sure our culture is healthy, in helping preserve our heritage. And today in Mali, in Bamako, we are working so very hard to fight against the way the Third World is being plundered. And I hope that we will succeed.

ALI FARKA TOURE

The first time I heard about Ali Farka Touré was when I heard his music on Radio Mali when I was a child. It was really strange music for me, but very good. He's one of the great, great, great musicians. Nobody does what Ali does. He is one of a kind; he is the lion of the desert, the lion of Niafunké in the North. And I am very happy to have met him and proud to have been able to play with him and mix both our types of music. People will be very surprised when they hear Ali play Manding music, which is the music of the Griot people, on his guitar, because Ali is very famous for playing the blues. He is a prophet of the blues. All of us were so surprised to see Ali have a connection with this kind of music. He flicked one of his lion's claws that no one knew about and produced these ancient pieces.

Everything happened at the studio that we built at the Hotel Mandé in a room overlooking the Niger river. Ali arrived at speed in his Mercedes, parked, entered the hotel and took up his guitar. I said to Ali "We ought to rehearse". He said " No Toumani, we'll try to work together in a natural way. There won't be any problem". He took up his guitar, I had my kora. Jerry had set up all the microphones ready to go. We played a few notes, chose a key and off we went...voilà. We did that for a couple of minutes and then said "o.k. Jerry, rolling." And it was done. In the blink of an eye it was finished. There was never any complication in what we did. We had already reflected on ourselves. There was a way of thinking within us that was strong. I know what I need to do for Ali and Ali knows what he needs to do for me. That's what's amazing. It will stay with me forever. That was the essence of this music - this complementary nature.

This is a record of music that did not exist before. The music in Mali can't be compared to any other type of music. Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world financially but in cultural terms it rates amongst the first. Through all the centuries we have managed to maintain our message and our culture and to transmit it from generation to generation. You know there are a lot of mixtures of types of music everywhere today. The Africans are mixing their music with the Europeans, the Americans, the Asians, but often it's important to go back to your roots to discover things that are more interesting, more concrete, and clean and simple, which represent truth. It proves the artistic talent of Ali Farka Touré who carried the record technically speaking and musically speaking. He provided the backing and stayed with it. He said "Musically, Toumani, you go where you want when you want and come back when you want to come back. I'll stay fixed. I won't go anywhere". And he supported me and he continued to support me morally, physically and musically. It was also a revelation for me to play Ali's music which is typical of the North. It requires harmonies on the kora that I'd never done before. So I learnt musically and continue to learn from him. I really can't repay him, except by asking God to give him a long and happy life, and I thank him for all he's done for me.

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I am happy that on the eve of this recording, Ali was made mayor of Niafunké. As a Griot, I say we should pay tribute to him. It shows once again his patriotism. I want to dedicate the piece "Monsieur le Maire de Niafunké" to him. That's the best gift I can give him.

TOUMANI DIABATE

Early in 2003 we were recording with Ali at Bogolan studios in Bamako. He'd wanted to record the Mandé standard 'Kaira' for some time, but could never get it down to his satisfaction. So I suggested contacting Toumani Diabaté. Toumani arrived the following afternoon and was thrilled to learn of the choice of song which was very dear to him, due to its association with his father. Ali played two intros while they were warming up. Toumani chose the second. As the last note of 'Kaira' died, Ali started another and within ten minutes we had two songs recorded – with no rehearsal. We didn't have time to do any more recording on that trip, but it was clear there was something special going on and that it couldn't stop there.

It was the beginning of the rainy season in July 2004. Engineer Jerry Boys and I had brought a mobile recording studio out to Bamako, and we'd set up in the beautiful "Toit de Bamako" conference room on the top floor of the Hotel Mandé – looking out over the breadth of the River Niger. Fishermen in their pirogues moved slowly back and forth over the water. Then the pirogues would disappear, the sky would darken and with a great thunderclap, the recording console, the lights and everything else would go out.

We were there to record three albums – one with Toumani Diabaté's extraordinary Symmetric Orchestra, one with Ali's downhome N'goni band and, if all went well, the duet album with Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabaté. We spent the first week recording the thunderous Symmetric Orchestra while Ali was in the north being inaugurated as Mayor of Niafunké. He arrived in Bamako towards the end of our trip and at two o'clock the next day Ali and Toumani were sitting opposite each other, close together. Instruments were tuned, microphones were placed, sound levels were set and off they went.

Each of them would suggest or remind the other of a song by playing the first few notes of the melody and that was basically it. Beyond the basic song structures, it was completely improvised. If one of them wanted to take a solo, he'd nod to the other. At times it seemed like they were just sitting on a groove (albeit a wonderful groove), then one of them would start damping a string, the other would follow suit, and you had this very detailed interaction that I didn't fully appreciate until we got to the mixing stage. Every single note that both of them played was absolutely meant. For three days every afternoon they played for an hour or two. These sessions were very relaxed, but the concentration between the two of them was intense. The order that appears on the record is exactly the order they played it – except 'Kaira', which is from their very first session. There were no second takes. Nothing was edited. The only comparable experience I've had was the first Rubén González album, where every note played is what the record is. They hardly spoke during the sessions. They didn't need to. Sometimes I had the thrilling sense of eavesdropping on a moment of very special and intimate communication. Listening to this record, you'd think they'd played together all their lives. Yet they'd played for a total of three hours before this – spread over fifteen years.

I'd be so completely absorbed by the music. We needed absolute quiet in the room while they were recording since the kora is such a very quiet instrument. A song would end and you'd realise you'd been holding your breath, hypnotised. It was terrible when those

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sessions ended. I wish I could have afternoons like that every day of my life, with the most sublime music just going on – forever.

NICK GOLD as told to Mark Hudson

In the years leading up to Mali's independence in 1960, part of the struggle against colonial rule was the search for a modern - and indigenous - identity. Music played a crucial role in this.

Many musicians, especially Mandé griots living on either side of the Mali-Guinea border, became involved in an informal cultural movement in which the guitar was the preferred instrument: it could emulate the sounds and styles of local instruments, but was not tied to any one ethnicity or ritual. They developed an acoustic finger-picking guitar style, drawing on the interlocking techniques of *balafon* and the delicate ornaments of the *ngoni*. They composed new songs that had a lighter more popular feel than the old Mandé griot classics, with rolling harmonies and laid-back rhythms. The lyrics were philosophical and often talked about the importance of passionate love, in defiance of arranged marriage, which even today in many parts of Mali remains the norm. Some local writers, such as the novelist Massa Makan Diabaté, began referring to it as "jamana kura" - meaning "new age/era". It was as much about the feeling and free approach to playing as it was about the songs themselves. It lasted from the 50s right through until the late 60s when the music of dance orchestras and Apollo bands began to take over.

This album takes us back to the spirit of *jamana kura*: many of the pieces are rescued from Ali and Toumani's memories and tinged with nostalgia for a bygone era of half a century ago. Many of them are now almost forgotten, certainly rarely played. Some of the pieces here are from the classic, centuries old griot repertoire but played in the 1950s way: *Debe*, in which Ali praises Toumani as the rightful heir to the Mandé tradition, is an old version of the well known *Tutu Jara* (sometimes called *Bajuru*) dating back to the 17th century Bamana kingdom in central Mali; *Kaira* (meaning "peace") was popularised by Toumani's kora-playing father Sidiki Diabate in the 1940s and 50s, as part of the movement for independence; and *Mamadou Boutiquier* ("Mamadou the shop-owner") was originally in praise of Mandé traders who helped to spread Mandé language and Islam in West Africa. Other songs are taken from the repertoire of love songs and other songs for the youth created in the 1950s, such as *Kala*, *Simbo*, and *Soumbou Ya Ya*. *Ai Ga Bani* ("I love you") sung by Ali in Sonrai is imbued with the Cuban guajira feel that was popular at the time. Even *Monsieur le Maire de Niafunké* composed by Toumani on the spot to congratulate Ali for having been elected mayor of his home town, is written in the spirit of Mali's *jamana kura*, - one of the main roots of contemporary Malian music. The final three pieces are all new interpretations from Ali's repertoire. *Kadi Kadi* is a Mandé love song. *Gomni* is a Sonrai piece about working for the community and *Hawa Dolo* tells a Dogon story about fidelity and trust.

LUCY DURAN