



PRESS RELEASE ALI FARKA TOURE



'SAVANE' (WCD075) **RELEASED 17th JULY 2006**

"Absolutely perfect. It's an enriched musical statement. A truly great piece of work." *Ry Cooder*

"I know this is my best album ever. It has the most power and is the most different." *Ali Farka Touré*

World Circuit Records is proud to announce the release of 'Savane', the last solo album by the legendary Malian singer and guitarist Ali Farka Touré. Recorded in Bamako with his specially assembled down-home ngoni group, 'Savane' is Ali's testament, a powerful reaffirmation of his umbilical link to his Malian musical roots. Already acclaimed as his finest album, 'Savane' is both one of the most traditional and seemingly the most blues-drenched of Ali's recordings. The record occupied Ali right into his last weeks, and he finally declared himself satisfied with it shortly before his death in March this year.



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ALI FARKA TOURE
'SAVANE' (WCD075)

When the legendary Malian singer and guitarist Ali Farka Touré died earlier this year there was worldwide media coverage on a scale unprecedented for an African musician. Musicians paid tribute to a unique and towering talent, and memories flowed into web-sites from people who had met him on his travels and fallen under his charismatic spell.

In Mali, Ali was accorded a posthumous Commandeur de l'Ordre National du Mali (the country's highest honour) and a state funeral attended by all the country's senior politicians and major music stars as well as thousands of ordinary people. All this for a musician who considered himself first and foremost a farmer.

Now Ali is 'back' with an album that is already being hailed as his finest work. 'Savane' is Ali's testament, a powerful reaffirmation of his umbilical link to his Songhai and Fulani musical roots. Recorded over a two and a half year period, 'Savane' occupied Ali right into his last weeks, and he finally declared himself satisfied with the work shortly before his death.

During the course of his career, Ali 'retired' from performance several times, and despite endless requests he made only isolated concert appearances after the release of his last solo album 'Niafunke' in 1999. Weary of touring and the expectations of international audiences, this uncompromising man had decided to devote himself to the agricultural development of his home region on Mali's remote northern desert fringe. He wanted to play only when he felt he could do full justice to his music.

Yet over the last two years of his life, Ali began playing more frequently, both in his home area and in neighbouring Burkina Faso. On these travels he met singers and players of the ngoni (a traditional lute and probable precursor of the banjo) versed in some of the oldest traditions of Songhai and Fulani music. Ali, who began his musical career as a child, playing music at spirit ceremonies on the djerkel, a one-string ngoni – undergoing a painful spiritual initiation before progressing to the full ngoni and guitar – recognised this music as a heritage in need of preservation and wider exposure.

Inspired, Ali began work on his new album, enlisting top Bamako based ngoni players Bassekou Kouyate and Mama Sissoko, who alongside Dasy Saré, from northern Mali completed his unique down-home ngoni and guitar band. Ali even recorded demo tapes, something the singer, who prided himself on the spontaneity of his approach, had never done before.

Principle recording took place at Bamako's Studio Bogolan and at the Mandé Hotel – at the same sessions as 'In the Heart of the Moon', Ali's GRAMMY winning album of duets with Toumani Diabaté. Raucous harmonica from Little George Sueref was added, along with exquisite, vocal-toned tenor sax from former James Brown horn man Pee Wee Ellis. Ali enlisted the veteran Fanga on njarka single string violin alongside backing vocalists and percussionists from his native Niafunké. Completing the

percussion was Ali himself playing alongside Fain S. Dueñas from the Spanish group Radio Tarifa. Ali was in control throughout; uncompromising yet open to what his 'special team' had to contribute.

The result is 'Savane', a visionary statement of musical and cultural belief that is at once deeply traditional and the most blues drenched of his recordings.

Lyricaly, for the most part Ali adapts themes from traditional Sonrai and Peul repertoire. These include agriculture and cattle herding, praising heroes from the past and personal heroes from his childhood, legends from the spirit world and love songs. He also looks at Mali's success in the road to democracy and how the country can work together for a better future. Ali titled the album 'Savane' after his composition of the same name which tells the story of a man leaving his homeland in the African savanna for urban Europe. It talks of the erosion of the savanna grasslands to desert; the disconnection one feels when away from one's homeland; the strength needed to survive in foreign lands; the need for Africans to work for themselves and calls for the West to stop sending arms and to send agricultural equipment instead.

The arrangements, while traditionally based, break new ground in their permutations of guitar and traditional instruments. 'Ledi Coumbe' has the unearthly, invocatory feel of some ancient African proto-blues, while the njarka - the one-string fiddle - lends the kind of squawking rawness heard on Muddy Waters' early plantation recordings. 'Penda Yoro' has an almost Appalachian rhythmic bounce, with Ali and his team of ngoni pickers coming on like some backwoods country blues band. And if there's a Celtic vibe to 'Soya', there's a reggae lilt to 'Savane', with it's quasi-flamenco introduction and extraordinary note-bending solo from Bassekou Kouyate.

Ali never played a note without total commitment. For him, every performance had to say something. Yet there was a particular sense of conviction about his approach to 'Savane'. His voice is deeper and richer than of old, there's defiance there as well as a wealth of experience - the determination of a man intent on making his mark on the world and of sharing his beloved music with it.



'Savane' completes World Circuit's Hotel Mandé trilogy. 'In the Heart of the Moon' an album of duets by Ali and Toumani Diabaté was awarded a GRAMMY, and the second part of the trilogy was Toumani Diabaté's Symmetric Orchestra 'Boulevard de l'Indépendance'.