

Salif Keita

contemporary African Music

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Education and community outreach

Royal Opera House Muscat

Mali is located in the west of the African continent; it's the eighth-largest country in Africa, a landlocked country that has no contact with coastal waters, not much water basically except for Niger and Senegal rivers in the south. Mali is boarded by Algeria from the north, Niger from the east, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau to the south and by Mauritania from the west. Mali is a country that's mostly flat to rolling northern plains covered by sand; savanna in south, rugged hills in northeast. It has a population of approximately 14 Million of which 93% are Muslims, the rest are constitute of the Christianity and other faiths. The native language that spoken by Malians is Bambara which is also understood by neighboring countries, but French is the official language. There are over 13 national languages spoken in Mali but "*bambara*" is the original language and it's the most common widely spoken one.

As for arts and music in Mali, the Malian culture is born from a mosaic of ethnic tradition, a glorious and painful History. Mali has many handcraft traditions varies from weaving to batiks to sculptors, etc., counts an incredible number of artists, dancers, musician, writers and film directors. Art, particularly music is a major part of the everyday life of Malians and it is probably the most important form of art in Mali; it comes from an old tradition of storytellers called "Griots" who used to serve as historians, advisers and diplomats. A griot, is one or a group of musicians who have significant and prestigious roll in the country; a griot plays an instrument, sings and dances, a story teller who can recite poetry without making a mistake, a griot carries an old oral tradition of telling ancient stories of wisdom, spreads news and messages to the public from higher resources. Griots entertain kings and rich people regularly in their palaces by chanting mystical Sufi poems and other traditionally inherited rituals in special, national, religious and other various events. This life style of griots and the traditional music heritage influenced many African musicians and singers and shaped their early musical years, including Salif Keita, who is a direct descendent of Sundiata Keita, the Mandinka warrior king who founded the Malian empire in the 13th century. We will review a brief history on the music, the instruments and our featured guest artist "Salif Keita", who is regarded as one of most famous singer in Mali and Africa. Mr. Keita will have his debut performance tonight at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

Keita's music blends together the traditional griot music of his Malian childhood with other West African influences from Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Senegal along with influences from Cuba, Spain, and Portugal. Keita's sound also includes traditional African instruments, often synthesized and sampled, in addition to electric and acoustic guitars, saxophone, trumpet which are also used with other amplified electrical instruments like keyboards and synthesizers. The compositions included songs in an African tradition in a modern look and sound tend to the West by using Western instrumentations and Latin like rhythms like samba or rumba.

Malian music is diverse and has several different genres. It is in general an extension of the music of West Africa's in characteristics, feelings, rhythms and musical scales which are mostly based on few sequences of notes or on a pentatonic scale. Somewhat, similar to the scales that were used in ancient times by musicians of ancient Egypt, Greeks and countries in Asia and Africa which are still used in many parts of the African continent as well as in some Arab countries in North Africa like Morocco, especially in *Ginawa* (music which received its origins to Guinea) and *Shaibi* music performances.

There are various **musical instruments** used in Mali most important is the "**Kora**", the most widely used string instrument which has 21 strings attached to a round body made from gourd. The "**N'Goni**" or "**Xalam**" which resembles "**al Hajhu**" or "**Lutar**" in Moroccan music and among the Amazigh tribes of the Atlas Mountains; it's played like an Oud but plucked by nails; it's played as a solo instrument or as an accompaniment to singers during a performance. Another interesting and common instrument is the "**Balaphone**", belongs to the Xylophone and Marimba family which produce melodic and rhythmic sounds at the same time. The most interesting aspect of African music is the colorful **rhythms**; they are the real pulse of the African culture. Most African percussion instruments are made from certain kind of trees such as the "**Dojura**" brown color tree or "**Lankah**", the red color tree. Most popular drum is the "**Djembe**" looks similar to the Arabic "**Darabukkah**" but larger in size. Different percussion instruments are played together to produce a nice ornamented harmonic polyrhythms with layers of beautiful sounds similar to a human dialogue and conversation. In addition to djembe, the "**djundjun**" is widely used; it is made from a famous fruit of pumpkin (Gourd). Another important and famous percussion instrument is the "**Tama**" (This is also called the "Talking Drum"). The Tama is a flexible drum with loose strings connect 2 skins stretched at each end of a cylinder, a drummer squeezes it under his arm, and the tone goes up, when loosens it, you get the bass sound. The "master" speaks with the fast beats of a stick and accentuates with his other hand. The result is a drum that speaks a language. The "**Calabash**", which is a percussion instrument made of a large gourd cut in half, placed on the ground with the dome side up and struck by bare hands.

Dance is therefore an important part of the culture and has an important role in traditional ceremony; it is rich in traditional music in addition to modern music. Dance also plays a large role in Malian culture as dance parties are common events among friends, and traditional mask dances are performed at ceremonial events.

Mali today's music has evolved and Bamako became the heart of West African music. The city is now the home of internationally recognized artist as Toumani Diabate virtuoso of the kora, Ali Farka Toure (1939 – 2006) which reinvented traditional tunes with a bluesy flavor, Tinariwen mixing blues with Tuareg music, Amadou et Mariam and of course Salif Keita.

We hope you will enjoy tonight's performance of Salif Keita and the rest of the featured artists of the band.

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