



Yacouba Sissoko

Master
Kora
Player

Yacouba Sissoko, is a Master kora player from the djely tradition. He has devoted his musical gift to expand the awareness of West African history and culture, spread the word of peace and empower his listeners to take charge and realize their imagined futures. His performances have a magical effect on audiences as he skillfully transforms traditional songs and stories that he learned from his forefathers into modern day messages of peace, love and harmony. His flexible virtuosity, which enables him to move seamlessly from one musical genre to another, has attracted the attention an eclectic mix of musicians who have sought him out as a collaborator.

He has performed toured and recorded with well-known African musicians, such as Sidiki Conde (Tokounou), Abdoulaye Diabate, Baaba Maal, and Kakande, and with many famous Western musicians, such as Harry Belafonte, Paul Simon, Leroy Jenkins and Leni Stern. Easily transitioning between jazz, pop, R&B, and classical music, Yacouba can be seen regularly with Regina Carter, Rachel Brown, Oran Etkin and Benyoro.

In addition to performing as a soloist and a guest kora artist, Yacouba leads his own band SIYA. The band adeptly harmonizes the ancient practice of musical story telling on the solo kora with the modern fuller harmonies of today's musical instrumentation. The fundamental principle of the band is to unite people and send a message to its listeners to return to the "source" of community and humanity; SIYA in Bambara means "Source". The sound of SIYA represents the breakthrough of the past few generations of Western African musicians who have opened up this musical experience to new audiences, incorporating additional instruments and spanning musical genres.

Throughout West African history, the kora was played as a solo instrument by djelys, or storytellers, whose roles in society were to perform exclusively for kings, nobility, and village chiefs. The songs sung by djelys were stories that had been passed down from generation to generation, and captured the oral history of the people and culture of West Africa describing social life, cultural identify and family backgrounds.

BACKGROUND

Yacouba Sissoko was born in Kita, Mali, to a well-known djely family. Djelys are the musical storytellers in West Africa, a position that is inherited through a family bloodline. For centuries they have been the keepers of the factual history and the fictional fables of past rulers, nobles, social groups and families. Highly respected within their communities, djelys are responsible for keeping stories of the past alive and applicable to contemporary audiences. The kora, a 21-stringed instrument, was the traditional instrument that djelys played as the accompaniment to their songs.

His mother and grandmother were both celebrated singers, and his grandfather was honored by the President of Mali with a trophy for mastery on the kora. At the age of 9, Yacouba started learning the kora and the oral traditions associated with it from his grandfather. By 15, he was touring the country sharing the stories that had been passed down through his family for centuries. When Yacouba moved to Bamako, Mali's capital, to attend the National Institute of the Arts, he caught the attention of the music world and began touring with noted artists and ensembles such as Ami Koita, Kandia Kouyate, the Alura Fulero Ensemble, and l'Ensemble Instrumental National du Mali, the orchestra that both his mother and grandmother had sung with. By the time he finished his studies, he was also touring with Yaye Kanoute, Hono Demba and Adja Soumano, all great musical names in Mali.

In 1993, Yacouba joined the Ensemble Koteba of Abidjan led by Souleymane Koli. Over the next several years Yacouba performed all over the world with the 45-piece band and made his first journey to the United States. It was this trip that inspired Yacouba to someday return to the United States to not only introduce and share the stories of his people but to broaden his repertoire by incorporating musical influences of other culture into his own unique style.

Yacouba did return to the United States and moved to New York City in 1998. Immediately he was in high demand as a soloist, guest artist and collaborator. He performed, toured and recorded with both well known African musicians, such as Sidiki Conde (Tokounou), Abdoulaye Diabate, Baaba Maal, and Kakande, and with new up and coming artists like Tapane Demba, Awa Sangho, and Sekou (Bambino) Diabate and Kerfala Kante. He was a founding member of Super Mande, Tamalalou and Fula Flute.

Yacouba was not limited to African music. He began to transcend musical boundaries and was soon playing with jazz, pop, R&B, and classical musicians. Since then, he has recorded and performed with a variety of artists including Harry Belafonte, Paul Simon, Leroy Jenkins and Leni Stern and has been asked to play anything from Indian ragas to Appalachian tunes. He has recorded tracks on over 15 CDs with artists ranging from the Gipsy Kings to Sidiki Conde, from Abdoulaye Diabate to Jamie Saft, and from Regina Carter to Rahim Alhaj. He was featured in a documentary filmed by the African Channel as part of their "Live from Red Kiva" broadcast and has been seen at music festivals across the country exposing new audiences to the sounds of the kora.

Rooted to give back to the community, Yacouba regularly performs for cultural programs and benefit concerts. He regularly performs for the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial, Educational and Cultural Center, partners with La Maison d'Art Gallery in Harlem to set up musical cultural exchanges and provides workshops and presentations to primary school and university students. Recognizing his educational contributions, in 2007 he was selected as a Teaching Artist by the Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall.

Yacouba continues to blend effortlessly with other musical styles, whether it is performing Indian ragas or Appalachian tunes. Yacouba can be seen regularly touring with Regina Carter, Rachel Brown, Jordana de Lovely, Oran Etkin, Kavita Shah, Leni Stern, Benyoro and his own band SIYA. His first CD, which features him as kora soloist and with SIYA, is due to be released in mid-2014.



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SIYA

SIYA represents a breakthrough of the past few generations of Western African musicians incorporating traditional and modern instruments and spanning musical genres.

World-renowned master kora player Yacouba Sissoko founded the band SIYA in 1999 in New York City. The band, which originally started as an informal trio, has matured into a quintet that adeptly harmonizes the ancient practice of musical story telling on the solo kora, originating in West Africa, with the modern fuller sounds of today's musical instrumentation. The musicians of SIYA, most of who come from Mali, perform on traditional instruments that capture the hauntingly beautiful sounds from West Africa.

Yacouba Sissoko leads the band playing the kora, a 21-string instrument, which is plucked like a harp. Throughout West African history, the kora was played as a solo instrument by djelys, or storytellers, whose roles in society were to perform for kings, nobility, and village chiefs. The songs sung by djelys were stories that had been passed down from generation to generation, and captured the oral history of the people and culture of West Africa describing social life, cultural identity and family backgrounds. Yacouba, who was born into a Djely griot family, formed SIYA to expand and share this tradition with those not traditionally exposed to these stories.

The other instruments of SIYA include the N'goni, a traditional guitar that was used by griots during the Manding Empire prior to the kora; the "talking drum", a small drum held on the shoulder of the player and hit with a curved stick or the hand to mimic phrases of the human voice, requiring great dexterity by the player; the Flén/Calebasse, or calabash, that is easily recognized by its deep resounding bass sound frequent to West African music; and an acoustic guitar and/or trumpet both of which adds the more modern approach.

SIYA in Bambara, one of the official languages of Mali, means "Source". The fundamental principle of the band is to unite people and send a message to its listeners to return to the "source" of community and humanity. Through its music, the band encourages the world to embrace love, peace, hospitality and education, and to help and forgive one another; each an important tenant to Malian living. It is highly spiritual music that inspires the listener to consider the future based on past learnings. The sound of SIYA represents the breakthrough of the past few generations of Western African musicians who have opened up this musical experience to new audiences, incorporating additional instruments and spanning musical genres from jazz, pop, R&B, classical.

SIYA currently performs regularly at large events, primarily participating in cultural exchange programs to expose others to the music and history from West Africa, specifically Mali. SIYA was selected to participate in the Carnegie Hall Education program in 2007, performed at the Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Conference sponsored by President Bush in Baltimore, and in 2008 was selected with other performers such as Tracey Chapman to play for the Robert Kennedy's Foundation.



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DISCOGRAPHY

Yacouba Sissoko has recorded with a variety of artists including Paul Simon, Baaba Maal, Ami Koita, Regina Carter, Leni Stern, and Abdoulaye Diabate.

Yacouba's flexible virtuosity spans diverse musical genres. For over a decade, prominent artists have sought him out for his musical contribution. His enchanting sound is prominently featured on tracks found on the following recordings:

Janjon (Mali)

Various – Badenya: Manden
Jaliya in New York City
Smithsonian Folkways
2002

Fula Flute

Fula Flute
Blue Monster
2002

Mali Lolo: Stars of Mali

Ali Farka Touré, Ali Farka
Touré, Ousmane Kouyate,
Ousmane Kouyate, Ousmane
Kouyate
Smithsonian Folkways
2003

Roots

Gipsy Kings
Nonesuch
2004

Assiya

Ido Ziv
Cd Baby
2005

Haran

Pharaoh's Daughter
Oyhoo
2007

Sidiki

Sidiki Conde
Innova Records
2008

Connections

Tom Rossi
Gaiam/Living Arts
2008

Sara

Abdoulaye Diabate
Completely Nuts
2009

Mansa America

Fula Flute
Completely Nuts
2009

Reverse Thread

Regina Carter
E1 Entertainment
2010

A Bag of Shells

Jamie Saft
Tzadik
2010

Little Earth

Rahim Alhaj
Ur Music
2010

Sa Belle Belle Ba

Leni Stern
Leni Stern
2010

So Beautiful Or So What

Paul Simon
Hear Music
2011

Disney Jazz, Vol. 1: Everybody

Wants To Be a Cat
Walt Disney Records
2011

Visions

Kavita Shah
2014

Yacouba is currently working on a new CD “SIYA” featuring him on solo kora and the band SIYA to be released in 2014.



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APPEARANCES

Yacouba has performed with world renowned singers, musicians and bands sharing the magical sounds of the kora with audiences across the world and has appeared at numerous festivals and premier venues.

Tours

Baaba Maal	Les Go de Koteba
Awa Sangho	Rachel Brown
Ami Koita	Regina Carter
Fantani Toure	Souleymane Koli
Kavita Shah	Fula Flute
Roberto Fonseca	Abdoulaye Diabate
Leni Stern	
Ensemble Koteba	

Guest Artist and Collaborations

Benyoro	Leroy Jenkins
Kakande	Oran Etkin
Kandia Kouyate	Jayme Stone

Festivals

Yacouba is a regular performer at Music Festivals across the country bringing the sounds of the kora to thousands of festival goers. Selected Music Festivals in which he has participated include: the *Smithsonian Folklife Festival* in Washington DC (2001), *Sounds of the City* at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (2005), the *67th National Folk Festival* in Richmond Virginia (2005), the *Playboy Jazz Festival* in Los Angeles (2006), the *New York Family Arts Festival* in New York City (2008), the *Grant Park Music Festival* in Millennium Park at the Pritzker Pavilion in Chicago, IL (2011), the *Portland Jazz Festival* (2011), the Detroit Jazz Festival (2011) and the *Monterey Jazz Festival* (2013).

The sonorous melodic tones of Yacouba's kora has resounded in premier venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Pritzker Pavillion in Chicago, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, the United Nations Headquarters and in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center.



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CRITICAL PRAISE

Yacouba has generated significant praise as a soloist, a guest artist and with SIYA.

"Kora virtuoso Yacouba Sissoko was brought on board to help recreate the spirit of passing stories from generation to generation. The result – unlike anything previously heard – is a haunting and beautiful compliment to Regina's sumptuously seductive violin." Lakeshore Music, Lakeshore Jazz Series

"The interaction of the two flutes with the balafon and the kora has a hypnotic, enchanting effect, carrying the listener into another dimension." Howland Chamber Music Circle, Inc.

"I was transported to a sacred land in which I sang and danced. His heart warming messages about life was true to life itself as it is. The energy was cozy and warm in which all was perfect! I am truly grateful for such gift!" Facebook Post

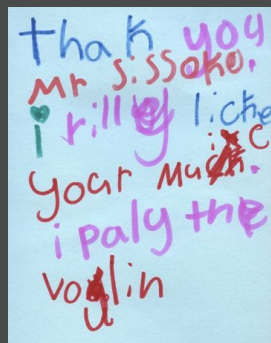
"Working with Yacouba allows me to learn to let the simple beauty shine." Regina Carter

"With traditional African songs, Yacouba's soundscape will hypnotize those who are within his audible radius using remarkable ancient tones." Hoboken Public Library

"The best kora improvising that I have ever experienced." Monterey Jazz Festival

". . . beautifully textured solos from Malian kora master Yacouba Sissoko." Chicago Tribune

"Guest artist Yacouba Sissoko performed dazzlingly on the kora." Orange County Register



Weschester Primary School, NY



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SERVICES

Solo Artist

Yacouba's calling in life is to live up to his family heritage and convey and preserve the stories taught to him and told by past generations. The ensuing music is peaceful, magical and creates a communal space for spiritual experiences. In addition to performing solo concerts, Yacouba's performances have served as background music to various social events. Listeners will be transported to a soulful place giving them piece of mind and time to meditate and reflect.

Guest Artist/Collaborations

Yacouba's flexible artistry is in high demand as a valuable guest artist and collaborator. The distinctive sound of the kora, and Yacouba's delightful interpretations, blend effortlessly across musical genres ranging from R&B, jazz and blues, to pop, reggae and classical, creating new listening experiences. Yacouba is interested in exploring and contributing to new and exciting collaborative opportunities and is available as a guest artist for recordings, performances and tours.

W/SIYA

The musicians of SIYA perform on African traditional and Western instruments, which when combined capture the hauntingly beautiful sounds of West Africa with a more modern approach. The fundamental principle of the band is to unite people and send a message to its listeners to return to the "source" of community and humanity. SIYA is available for social events, educational, cultural and conference programs, as well as festivals, clubs and other musical performance venues, and for touring opportunities.

Workshops

Provides workshops and presentations about the kora, its role in preserving history, and the stories of Western Africa that have been passed down for generations. He also uses the kora not only as a musical instrument, but also as an instrument to demonstrate the importance of education, personal behavior and responsibility, and courage. Audiences have included educational institutions, from primary to university students, art galleries, cultural and community centers and other entities.

Cultural Exchanges

Both Yacouba and SIYA are keenly interested in sharing the history, music, culture, belief systems and traditions of their homes and educating others about the traditional instruments that they play and the stories that they tell. In return, they hope to learn similarly from others. Interactions are designed to be collaborative and broaden the horizons of participants.



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SPECS & CONTACT INFORMATION

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Home base

New York City, NY

Services

Solo Artist, Guest Artist/Collaborations, SIYA, Workshops, Cultural Exchanges

Instrumentation

Kora solo, or with the following optional instruments - N'goni (traditional guitar), "Talking drum", Flén/Calebasse (calabash), Acoustic guitar and/or Trumpet

Backline

Solo Kora: DI Box, Boom with Vocal Microphone, Monitor
Additional Instruments: Vocal Microphones, Monitors, Bass Amp, Table

Transportation and Lodging Requirements

Determined by size of group

Photos

Available by request at contact@yacousiskora.com

Links

<http://www.yacousiskora.com>

<http://myspace.com/sissokoyacouba>

<https://www.facebook.com/sissokoyacouba>

<http://sagharboronline.com/sagharborexpress/arts/yacouba-sissoko-the-story-of-kora-player-26074>

<http://www.abqjournal.com/363847/entertainment/albuquerque-santa-fe-west-african-music.html>

Touring and Booking Contact

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