



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Mali Lolo!
Stars of Mali

Mali Lolo! Stars of Mali

Mali Lolo! showcases preeminent musicians on the forefront of Mali's modern musical renaissance. It features the Super Rail Band—Mali's headliner group for 30 years—Grammy winner Ali Farka Toure, kora masters Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko, Wassoulou diva Oumou Sangare, guitarist and singer Habib Koite with his Bamada group, and more of Mali's best talent. This collection exemplifies each artist's exploration of the rich ground between revered musical traditions and the innovations of modern Mali that draw upon a myriad of Western influences. Modern Mali, a powerhouse of African musical tradition, reverberates far beyond its geographic boundaries, harnessing its rich culture and history to create unique contemporary sounds. Extensive Notes, 16 Tracks, 73 Minutes

1. Kasse Mady Diabate

Eh Ya Ye (4:20)

2. Kandia Kouyate

San Barana (6:18)

3. Habib Koite and Bamada

Nimato (4:04)

4. Ko Kan Ko Sata Dombia

Ko Kan Ko Sata Dombia On River (1:02)

5. Yoro Sidibe

Noumou Koulouba (5:55)

6. Oumou Sangare

Ya La (4:07)

7. Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko

Cheikhna Demba (4:25)

8. Abdoulaye Diabate and Super Manden

Fakoli (6:03)

9. Tinariwen

Tessalit (3:55)

10. Tartit

Iya Heniya (3:34)

11. Lobi Traore

Duga (5:23)

12. Ali Farka Toure with Afel Bocoum

Hilly Yoro (3:35)

13. Neba Solo

Vaccination (3:17)

14. Rokia Traore

Yere Uolo (4:12)

15. Les Escrocs

Pirates (4:49)

16. Super Rail Band

Mansa (6:31)



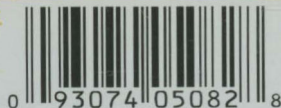
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

LC 9628

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1. Kasse Mady Diabate "Eh Ya Ye" 4:20

(Kasse Mady Diabate/Discos Corason, SA)

2. Kandia Kouyate "San Barana" 6:18

(Kandia Kouyate/Stern's Music)

3. Habib Koite and Bamada "Nimato" 4:04

(Habib Koite/Contre-Jour)

4. Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia "Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia On River" 1:02

(Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia/EMI Music Publishing Ltd.)

5. Yoro Sidibe "Noumou Koulouba" 5:55

6. Oumou Sangare "Ya La" 4:07

(Oumou Sangare/Rykomusic, Inc. – World Circuit Music)

7. Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko "Cheikhna Demba" 4:25

8. Abdoulaye Diabate and Super Manden "Fakoli" 6:03

9. Tinariwen "Tessalit" 3:55

(Tinariwen/Emma Productions)

10. Tartit "Iya Heniya" 3:34

(Fadimata W. Mohamedun — arr. Tartit)

11. Lobi Traore "Duga" 5:23

(Lobi Traore)

12. Ali Farka Toure with Afel Bocoum "Hilly Yoro" 3:35

(Ali Farka Toure/World Circuit Music)

13. Neba Solo "Vaccination" 3:17

(Souleymane Traore)

14. Rokia Traore "Yere Uolo" 4:12

(Rokia Traore/Label Bleu)

15. Les Escrocs "Pirates" 4:49

(Salim Diallo-Mamadou Tounkara)

16. Super Rail Band "Mansa" 6:31

(Djelimady Tounkara)

The Music of Mali Today

Banning Eyre

A survey of contemporary African musicians signed to record labels in the United States today reveals a surprising fact: the largest contingent by far comes from a single country—Mali, a vast, dry, landlocked, culturally diverse nation in the interior of West Africa. Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, yet none of its African counterparts can rival the international success its musicians have achieved in recent decades. There is no simple explanation for this. Some observers point to the facts that Mali has known interethnic harmony going back as far as the rise of the Manding Empire in the 13th century, and that insulated by its neighbors from the sea, it has tended to look inward, developing and valuing its traditions, rather than neglecting them in favor of foreign cultures. The tradition of *griots*—musicians and orators who recount history and lineages—has no doubt reinforced these trends, keeping Malians mindful of the region's indigenous peoples and how each has contributed to its history. The result is a powerful incubator of cultural expression, quite different from the divided and culturally traumatized environments that exist in much of postcolonial Africa.

Another line of reasoning argues that some of the music widely listened to today—especially American folk, blues, jazz, and rock—have roots in Mali going back to the days when slaves captured in the West African interior were transported to coastal ports, sold to Europeans, and taken to the Americas. When we hear the bellowing vocals of a *griot* like Kasse Mady Diabate, or the loping rhythms and bluesy inflections of Bambara and Wassoulou artists like Lobi Traore and Oumou Sangare, or the free-flowing string interplay in Manding court music performed by Kandia Kouyate and her group, we sense a familiarity that transcends the foreignness of language and instrumentation. It is as if we are hearing the modern relatives of Appalachian old-time music, blues, R&B, jazz, and rock 'n' roll—all descendants of a big family, separated generations ago and now reunited in the age of technology.

One of the most striking aspects of Malian music today is the way it blurs the distinction between "traditional" and "modern" music. These are the terms Malians tend to use, but "modern" music is often strongly based on folklore, and "traditional" performances can sometimes include Western instruments, particularly the guitar. Malian musicians are renowned improvisers, and their willingness to experiment and extend into new areas has led to a proliferation of hybrid genres. Older sounds and forms are constantly reinvented. As participants in a living musical tradition, today's Malian musicians have listened to the world. They too have noted that the music of the late American Delta blues icon John Lee Hooker is of a piece with Bambara village music and Songhai folksongs. With the arrival of radios, phonographs, cassette players, wind instruments, keyboards, and especially electric and acoustic guitars, the exchange of ideas between Mali and the West has been a two-way street for a long time.

This is a collection of music being made by today's Malian musicians. Regional and ethnic identities remain distinct, traditional aesthetics are defended and upheld, and musicians largely resist the powerful influences coming out of Europe and the United States. Nevertheless, much of the music in this collection bears a modern stamp. As in any case where an ancient music culture is undergoing change, some people fear that Mali's traditions will be lost in the process. For the most part, these musicians do not share that fear. They remain open to one another and to the West, confident that they can mix it up in the international arena without forgetting who they are.

The Manding Griots

Many West African ethnic groups have a tradition of *griots*, clans or families charged with a particular set of social roles, typically some combination of councilor, historian, diplomat, orator, storyteller, singer, and instrumentalist. At the dawn of the Manding Empire in 1235, King Sunjata Keita assigned special powers and responsibilities to *griots-jeli*, as they are called in Manding languages. Since then, Manding *griots* have created an extraordinary body of music, including an extensive repertoire of songs and a remarkable set of melodic instruments, most notably the *kora* (a 21-stringed harp), the *ngoni* (a spike lute and likely ancestor of the American banjo), and the *balafon* (a xylophone with hardwood slats). At one time, *griots* were the only people sanctioned to be professional musicians in Manding societies. Now, that has changed,

but the descendants of the original *griot* families, Kouyate and Diabate, as well as those more recently associated with *griot* tradition, like Sacko, Sissoko, Kante, and Tounkara, fill the ranks of successful musicians, not only in Mali today, but throughout much of West Africa.

The old masters of the *kora*—Sidiki Diabate, Batourou Sekou Kouyate, Djelimady Sissoko—have passed their art down to their sons, and they in turn, have advanced the music to keep up with the times. Toumani Diabate, Sidiki's son, is a spellbinding *kora* soloist, but he's also recorded with flamenco musicians in the group Songhai, and with Taj Mahal in the group Kulanjan. Similarly, Basekou Kouyate, Mali's most progressive young *ngoni* master, has developed techniques for playing blues and other modern styles on his instrument, and so has changed the way many young *ngoni* players approach the instrument. But the core of the *griot's* art—*jeliya*—is and has always been singing. In their zeal to celebrate history, *griots* have developed a vocal tradition unrivaled in Africa for its power and precision. No wedding or baptism of a new child is complete without one or more *griots* regaling individual guests with songs of praise, laden with passages improvised to suit the gathering. Mali's most beloved *griots* are women (*jelimusolu*). In recent years, these singers have gone into recording studios with their favorite instrumentalists and usually a drum machine to record pop cassettes. Kandia Kouyate, Ami Koita, Tata Bambo Kouyate, and Nainy Diabate are guardians of cultural treasures from the past. They are also among Mali's biggest pop stars.

Savanna Hunters and Wassoulou Songbirds

Before French colonialism, before the Songhai, Manding, and Ghana Empires, before the time of the *griots*, the most powerful people in this part of Africa were hunters. Hunters' culture is the oldest and most revered repository of wisdom in West Africa. In the grasslands south and east of the Malian capital, Bamako, few game animals remain, but the cult of hunters thrives. This part of Mali is home to a number of ethnic groups, including Bobo, Bambara, Senufo, and the Bambara-speaking Fula people in the region called Wasulu, which spills across the Malian border into northern Guinea and Ivory Coast. Bambara pop singers, and especially, stars in the genre now known as Wassoulou music, have gained national attention in Mali, but much other music in this region remains marginalized, despite its venerable history.

A case in point is the music of the Donso, hunter-musicians and storytellers known for their supernatural powers and

their allegiance to pre-Islamic and pre-Christian animist religion. An important instrument among them is the large, six-stringed *donso ngoni* (hunter's harp), which is surrounded by layers of lore and secrecy. A few *donso ngoni* players, such as Yoro Sidibe, have recording careers in Mali, but most reserve their art for ceremonial and private settings.

Hunter's music has made a far more visible, although indirect, entry into popular culture through Wassoulou music. In the 1960s, young musicians began playing the *kamele ngoni* (young man's harp), a smaller version of the *donso ngoni*, tuned a fourth higher. Freed from the strictures of the hunters' cults, the *kamele ngoni* could be used in recreational music, and it became a centerpiece of the emerging Wassoulou sound. Singer Coumba Sidibe was an early figure in this movement, singing Wassoulou songs with the Instrumental Ensemble of Mali, a national folkloric orchestra, in the 1970s. But the real explosion came when 19-year-old Oumou Sangare released her first cassette, *Moussoulou*, in 1989. She combined funky *kamele ngoni* grooves with strong pop arranging and bold lyrics, probing the realities of women's lives in Africa. This formula and her gorgeous alto voice made her one of the top-selling Malian recording artists ever since, and cassette sales of Wassoulou music now rival those of Manding *griot* music. As in other parts of Mali, Wassoulou is home to rich percussion and dance traditions, often using the dynamic hourglass-shaped *djembe* drum. *Djembes* are a ubiquitous feature in Malian popular music, their sharp bursts of rhythm accenting arrangements in many musical genres.

Bambara Blues

The Bambara people split off from the Manding about 400 years ago and resisted conversion to Islam for centuries. The Bambara created a kingdom around the city of Segou (north of Bamako on the Niger River) and ruled themselves from 1712 until the arrival of the French military at the end of the 19th century. Contemporary Bambara music bristles with fierce pride, which, conveyed by aggressive rhythms, raw vocal style, and dark, minor-pentatonic tonalities, invites comparisons with tougher, urban forms of American blues.

Like Wassoulou pop, modern music created by Bambara musicians has emerged as a force in Mali. The blind couple Amadou & Mariam were among the first to exploit this music's natural affinities with blues and rock. They now work with a largely European band, emphasizing the rock connection for their international following. Since they began recording, in the late 1980s, they and many other Bambara pop musicians have

been well received in Mali. One who has garnered a strong following in Mali and Europe is guitarist-singer-songwriter Lobi Traore, who maintains a hard-working club band in Bamako, and performs and records in a more spare, acoustic setting during tours in Europe.

The Desert and the River: Songhai, Tuareg, and the Peoples of the North

Mali's north is vast and sparsely peopled, a slow fade from dry savanna to the blowing sands of the Sahara Desert, ever creeping southward. The peoples of the north are sustained by the region's few rivers, especially the Niger, which flows northward from Guinea and then bends alongside the fabled northern cities of Timbuktu and Gao before veering south toward its delta in Nigeria. The people of this region have inherited a wealth of history and culture. The nomadic Tuareg descend from the Berber, the oldest known inhabitants of North Africa. The blue-turbaned Fula are part of a network of once-powerful cattleherders who live in Senegal, Nigeria, and Cameroon. The Songhai once ruled much of this region in an empire that lasted from about 1400 to 1600, based in Gao. And the cliff-dwelling Dogon are world renowned for their artistry and cosmology.

For all this, northern musicians have enjoyed far less access to recording, performing, and broadcast opportunities than have southern musicians. The music of the north has distinctive Arab traits, but most of it (like Wassoulou, Bambara, and other non-Manding West African genres), is built on five-note, or pentatonic, scales. Haira Arby, Fissa Maiga, and Imbrahim Hamma Dicko are the best known singers of this region, but the music of Ali Farka Toure of Niafunke has done the most to change northern artists' fortunes. Beginning in the 1980s, Toure was hailed around the world as an African bluesman, because his folkloric, desert songs, rendered on steel-string acoustic and electric guitars, bear such a striking resemblance to the moody, hypnotic, modal blues of Delta musicians, particularly John Lee Hooker. The blues obsession of international journalists has somewhat obscured the true picture of northern Mali's musical riches, but Toure's success has opened the way for younger musicians from this region, notably his longtime accompanist, Afel Bocoum. Meanwhile, young Tuareg groups that formerly worked only in local settings are beginning to record and perform internationally. The folkloric family ensemble Tartit, and a modern, guitar-oriented group, Tinariwen, are prominent examples.

Modern Fusions and New Trends

Mali achieved independence in 1960. Its first president, Modibo Keita, launched an ambitious program to encourage the arts as a way of building national identity. Electric bands and folkloric ensembles were formed all over the country, and were supplied with equipment and encouraged to reinvent the patrimony of Mali. A system of competitions identified the most talented groups and musicians, and they were promoted, ultimately to the ranks of the National Orchestra, which adapted traditional and modern music using electric bass and guitar, trap drums, and wind instruments. State-sponsored bands became a showcase for singers from many ethnic backgrounds, a laboratory where traditional music could be merged with international genres of the time: jazz, soul, and especially Afro-Cuban music. These bands opened an important avenue for emerging music all over West Africa. They helped establish the open-ended, creative environment that has ever since served Malian music well.

State funding ended under the military regime of Moussa Traore (1968–1991), but the cultural movement that Modibo Keita began has continued. It lives on in the work of surviving dance bands, like the Super Rail Band, and its most famous practitioner, Salif Keita, whose bold experiments with rock and jazz have made him the most famous and successful Malian musician of all. It also lives on in the work of young maverick artists like Habib Koite and Rokia Traore, both of whom freely combine elements from distinct ethnic traditions to arrive at new, quintessentially Malian, musical formulas. As in nearly every country in the world, Mali's younger generation is now appropriating influences from rap and hip-hop, but even here, the Malian variants bear a strong local stamp. For all a group like Les Escrocs have borrowed from current American trends, there is no mistaking the Malian character of their work.

Despite the innovations going on in Malian music today, the local audience retains a certain conservatism. Artists who sacrifice too much of their identity do not fare well, and there remain many settings throughout Malian society where *griots*, hunters, and northern bards perform their music more or less as their predecessors did centuries ago.

The Artists

Kasse Mady Diabate

The Diabate family of Kela, in western Mali, has one of the most distinguished histories of all Mali's Manding *griot* families. Since Sunjata Keita's time, they have sung the praises of the Keita clan. Kasse Mady's grand-

Kasse Mady Diabate



father was the first in the family to have the name Kasse, which means "Weep." The first Kasse Mady was a singer with the power to bring listeners to tears. When his grandson was born, in 1949, few would have imagined that the boy would inherit his grandfather's gift and touch the hearts of a whole new generation of Malians, but it soon became apparent that the family had produced another master.

Kasse Mady's early acclaim for singing at wedding and baptism ceremonies led to a job singing with the band Super Mande in nearby Kangaba, alongside his famous vocalist brother Lafia Diabate. After Kasse Mady's performances helped Super Mande win the regional music competition (Biennale) in 1973, he was recruited into Las Maravillas de Mali in the capital, Bamako. Las Maravillas had studied in Cuba, and Kasse Mady brought Malian authenticity to the band's Cuban *charangas*. He went on to spend a decade in Paris, where he recorded two

internationally acclaimed CDs. In addition to upholding *griot* tradition by performing at ceremonial gatherings, he has collaborated in groundbreaking recording projects, working with jazz piano legend Hank Jones, bluesman Taj Mahal, *kora* master Toumani Diabate, and the group Songhai, in a joint project between Toumani Diabate and the Spanish flamenco band Ketama.

Kandia Kouyate

Kandia Kouyate was born in Kita, an important seat of Manding *griot* culture northwest of Bamako. Kandia, as all Malians know her, is more than a *jelimusolu*, a female *griot* singer; she is a *ngaka*, a person with near supernatural power, unstoppable bravery and honesty, exemplary character, and a voice of superlative power and breadth. Her standing is evident in the fact that she became one of Mali's most beloved cultural figures without involving herself in the quest for international fame on the pop music circuit. By tradition, *griots* praise nobles. The nobles Kandia has sung for have shown their

appreciation with cars, houses, bundles of cash, and in one case, an airplane.

By the time Kandia made her first international recording, in 1999, she was already established as one of the most revered singers in Mali, particularly admired for her grasp of history and her ability to evoke it with her poetic words. Her two international releases and subsequent tours have introduced her to a much wider audience, but she remains a deeply traditional person, most happy in the company of her elders, from whom she says she has learned everything.

Kandia Kouyate



True to her role as a *ngara*, she has at times been outspoken on social issues, objecting to the practice of not educating girls, and to that of excision (female genital mutilation), a stance that brought her into public conflict with Muslim authorities.

Habib Koite and Bamada

Habib Koite is a shining star among Mali's new generation of modern musicians. He was born in 1958, in the western city of Kayes, and his family had a *griot* heritage—Koite is a Khasonke variant of the original *griot* family name, *Kouyate*—but his parents did not want him to become a musician. He took opportunities to play guitar as a boy, but his musical training came later, when he went to study at the National Arts Institute in Bamako. He studied jazz, arranging, and international pop, but when he formed his band Bamada ("Mouth of the Crocodile") in 1988, he set about creating songs that incorporated elements of various Malian ethnic traditions.

After Koite won the prestigious Radio France International African Discoveries award for "Cigarette Abana," a playful antismoking song, his recording career began, and he became a sensation in Mali with his first release, *Musa Ko*. International fame, an American record deal, and two subsequent albums,



Habib Koite

photo by Michel De Bock, courtesy of Contre Jour

followed, but he never abandoned his fidelity to Malian sounds. Not schooled in any particular ethnic tradition, he has felt free to delve into *griot* repertoire, hunter's music, the music of the north, and indeed any genre that has struck his fancy. He also developed a unique finger-style guitar approach, playing a nylon-string guitar, rarely heard in West African

music. His artful, uplifting songs encourage Malians to examine their traditions, but never to abandon them in favor of foreign substitutes. Coming from one of the most internationally successful Malian artists in recent years, this message carries weight with young Malians.

Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia

Few women have gained acceptance and respect as players of the *kamale ngoni*, the six-stringed harp used in Wassoulou music, but Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia is one who has. She was born in 1968 in Siekorolen, in the Wasulu region of southern Mali. Her father was a farmer, and she began singing and playing calabash percussion at an early age. Her performances at moonlit village celebrations and wedding parties quickly gained her a reputation, particularly for her calabash playing, which soon made her a musician in local demand. She recalls that fortune-tellers predicted that she would become an artist, but she was neither encouraged nor discouraged by her parents.

When she became interested in the *kamale ngoni*, she simply observed excellent players, like the late Alata Brulaye (who is credited with inventing the instrument) and Yoro Diakite. Doumbia has always made her own instruments, and has never received formal instruction, so although the *kamale ngoni* is literally a

"young man's harp," she has made it her own. She points to two other women who also play *kamale ngoni*, Oumou Sinoyoko and Madina Diallo. Clearly though, Doumbia's rising profile on Mali's national music scene has much to do with her talents as a singer and songwriter. In 2000, she came to the attention of

Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia



photo by Mark Ainley

visiting British rock musician Damon Albarn, and she participated in his *Mali Music* project, an unusual collaboration between Malian and British musicians.

Yoro Sidibe

Yoro Sidibe is a *donso*—a hunter—from Yanfolila. Yanfolila is a town in the heart of Wasulu, a region of southeastern Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Guinea, which has long been inhabited by the Fulani, a nomadic, cattleherding people. It is not clear whether the Fulani came to this area as part of their migration throughout West Africa, or as the result of war, but over the years, the Wassoulou people of Mali have become substantially assimilated into the Bambara culture that surrounds them. Although they speak Bambara, the Wasulu, especially the fraternity of hunters, preserve an enormous amount of ancient culture, much of it shrouded in secrecy. Long before the rise of the Manding Empire under Sunjata Keita, hunters fulfilled some of the nonmusical roles that *griots* later took on, especially as preservers and performers of history and legend. As such, today's *donso* are among the oldest repositories of culture in Mali.

With their flintlock rifles, loose-fitting mudcloth uniforms, and fetish objects—reflecting an ongoing allegiance to pre-Islamic animist religion—the *donso*



Yoro Sidibe

proudly preserve their own cultural identity. Their signature instrument is the deep-toned, six-stringed *donso ngoni*, usually accompanied by the *karagnan*, a serrated metal tube that the player scrapes with a metal bar. Typically, *donso* music is performed at lengthy ceremonial gatherings, some public, some private. Strength and stamina are key skills, as a

donso ngoni player must be able to sing in loud, fast outbursts, and to play for hours at a stretch. Despite the rise of Wassoulou music, the *donso* tradition remains off-limits for modern adaptation, and few musicians from this background have made commercial recordings.

Oumou Sangare

In the 1960s, a musician in Wassoulou named Alata Brulaye devised a way to circumvent the social restrictions surrounding the hunter's sacred harp (*donso ngoni*) and its music. He invented a smaller version of the instrument, and tuned it a fourth higher. The new instrument, *kamale ngoni* or "young man's harp," became enormously popular, and the groundwork was laid for the rise of Wassoulou music that followed in the 1980s and 1990s. By the time young Oumou Sangare set about composing songs for her debut cassette, *Moussoulou* (Women), she worked with her *kamale ngoni* player the way a jazz singer might work with her pianist. It was the centerpiece of her sound. Sangare's nightingale voice and poignant, playful lyrics, focused on the plight of women, made her an overnight sensation in Mali. The cool sophistication and subtlety of her musical compositions also won her an international following.

Sangare has maintained her loyal following with

three subsequent releases and several international tours. Wassoulou musicians often distinguish themselves from *griots* by observing that they chose to become musicians, and are free to sing about whatever they like. Few singers have made such good use of that freedom as Sangare. Over the years, she has dramatized



the anxieties of a girl facing marriage, decried the cruelty of arranged marriages—for her, a practice comparable with slavery, tweaked men for their misinterpretation of the Koran's allowance for polygamy, and explored the suffering common in polygamous households, all in the process of creating irresistibly beautiful music. Despite her rebelliousness, she defends tradition, and upholds it powerfully in her music. With a strong feel for her national culture and a well-managed international career, she has become an important role model for a new generation of Malian divas.

Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko

In 1999, when Mali's number-one *kora* player, Toumani Diabate, sat down to record a duo album with the country's number-two *kora* player, Ballake Sissoko, the two young masters were both making and remaking history. More than twenty years earlier, their fathers had collaborated on a seminal *kora* recording, *Cordes Anciennes* (Ancient Strings), an album that introduced many around the world to the serene and complex beauty of the 21-stringed Manding harp. Toumani and Ballake's *New Ancient Strings* is a homage to their tradition and their fathers, and a bold exploration of new horizons in *kora* music.

Toumani descends from a long line of *kora* players,

that he says goes back to the origin of the instrument. His father, Sidiki Diabate, was an innovator who pioneered playing *kora* as a solo instrument. In his turn, Toumani began his recording career by making a solo *kora* album, and then went on to collaborate with flamenco and jazz musicians, and American blues giant Taj Mahal on the ground-breaking

Ballake Sissoko and Toumani Diabate



photo by Lucy Duran

Kulanjan project in 1999. Just two years younger than Toumani, Ballake too learned from his father, Djelimady Sissoko. He went on to a more conventional career than Toumani's, including eight years in the Instrumental Ensemble of Mali and work backing up some of the country's leading female *griots*, Kandia Kouyate, Ami Koita, and Tata Bambo Kouyate. Toumani and Ballake have known one another and played together informally all their lives. That intimacy shows clearly in their musical interaction. *New Ancient Strings* was their first recording together, but they went on to work together with Taj Mahal on *Kulanjan*.

Abdoulaye Diabate and Super Manden

As the brother of Kasse Mady Diabate, Abdoulaye Diabate shares in the cultural inheritance of one of Mali's most respected musical families: the Diabates of Kela. Abdoulaye has long been a musical ambassador, sharing his ancient and modern art throughout Mali, in Ivory Coast, and since 1996 in the United States. He began with traditional training in the art of *jeliya* under his father, Yamadu Diabate. Early on, Abdoulaye moved to the capital,

Bamako, to begin performing with Tentemba Jazz, a modern band. He went on to sing in Koule Star Band of Kouchala, a roots orchestra that draws upon many traditions, including Manding *griot* music and pentatonic Bambara music.

In 1976, Abdoulaye moved to Abidjan, then the center of the West African recording industry, and collaborated with legendary artists there, including Salif Keita and Mory Kante. It was there that Abdoulaye

Abdoulaye Diabate and Super Manden



photo by Tom Van Buren

formed the first version of his band Super Manden, which worked out of Abidjan throughout the 1980s. In 1992, he joined Ensemble Koteba as a singer and guitarist. In 1996, he came to the United States playing with Le Gos de Koteba, named for its dynamic female vocal trio. Since then, he has lived in New York, collaborating freely with the city's talented pool of West African musicians, as well as with jazz and pop musicians. The version of Super Manden heard here features some of New York's best Manding musical residents, including Abou Sylla on *balafon*, Foussey Kouyate on *ngoni*, Yacouba Sissoko and Mamadou Diabate on *kora*, Chiek Barry on bass, and Moussa Sissoko on guitar.

Tinariwen

Until recently, the idea of forming a Tuareg folk-pop band did not seem like much of an option for members of this largely nomadic ethnic group, who inhabit a vast expanse of barren desert in northern Mali and beyond. In the early years of Malian independence, musicians from this region rarely

recorded or traveled to perform beyond their region. But the worldwide success of Ali Farka Toure, from Niafunke, near Timbuktu, sent a message to young Tuaregs, and Tinariwen, which means "empty places," has built on Toure's legacy. The group formed in a Tuareg rebels' camp in Libya in 1982. After hostilities between the fiercely independent Tuareg and the Malian government cooled in 1995, the members of Tinariwen returned to Mali and began a new phase in their career. Composer-singer-guitarist Abdallah Agur Hussein wanted to combine traditional music with influ-



photo by Rene Goffon

Tinariwen

ences from engaged folk and rock singers like Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Bob Marley, and to play the music with electric guitars and a contemporary sensibility.

Tinariwen became famous and well loved in northern Mali, traveling great distances to perform at Tuareg gatherings. With songs focusing more on reconciliation and peace than on the fight for Tuareg independence, the group also found acceptance in Bamako. In December of 2000, with help from English guitarist and producer Justin Adams and the French world music group Lo'Jo, Tinariwen recorded its first commercial CD, *The Radio Tisdas Sessions*, named for the radio station in remote Kidal, where the recording was made. The following month, Tinariwen participated in the first Festival of the Desert, an ambitious annual event, aimed at promoting and developing the musical arts of Mali's northern peoples. Tinariwen's debut recording and subsequent performances in Europe have won high critical praise and a loyal, growing international following.

Tartit

The Tuareg—or Kel Tamasheck, as they prefer to be called—have lived under harsh conditions in the deserts of Mali, Algeria, Niger, Libya, and Burkina Faso, going back to the time when they left the villages of their Berber ancestors as Muslim Arabs established control over North Africa. A proud people, well accustomed to adversity, the Tuareg of Mali have long endured a difficult relationship with their sub-Saharan neighbors. As recently as the early 1990s, there has been open conflict between Tuareg rebels and the



photo by Jean-Louis Bruyère

Tartit

Malian government. The mostly female members of Tartit have always sung, clapped, and played the traditional instruments of Tuareg women: the *tinde* drum and *imzad* fiddle. But the idea of making a formal group came only at the suggestion of a Belgian visitor to a refugee camp in Mauritania, where core members of Tartit were living.

The women called upon two male Tuareg *griots*, who play the *tahardent* lute, and a talented cousin, Mama (Walel Amoumime), who was living in Belgium. Under the leadership of Fadimata Walel Oumar, also known as Disco, and the *griot* Amanou Issa, Tartit went on to become the first internationally recognized Tuareg musical ensemble, and to record two CDs, *Amazagh* and *Ichichila*. Although Tartit occasionally uses guitar in its music, it remains a strongly folkloric group, whose recordings and performances conjure a sense of the harsh beauty of desert life. It sings songs of peace, love, and the pain of exile. Most of these songs are not overtly political, but the plight of the disenfranchised Tuareg is implicit in many of them.

Lobi Traore

Lobi Traore first encountered a guitar when a teacher came to his village to learn from his father, a marabout. (A marabout is an Islamic cleric with



photo by Banning Eyre

Lobi Traore

supernatural powers.) For Lobi, the guitar provided a natural meeting place for the traditional pentatonic Bambara tunes he grew up singing, and the music of blues and rock acts he loved—everything from John Lee Hooker to AC/DC. Lobi began his musical career as a percussionist, soon playing in a wedding band in Bamako. The band's fans knew that Lobi could put a

mean twist on a Bambara song, and often requested that he come to the microphone and sing. It wasn't long before he was performing on his own.

With help from Bamako-based producer Philippe Berthier, Lobi began recording cassettes in the 1990s, and soon gained a following in Europe as the "Bambara bluesman." Lobi was never entirely comfortable with that tag. For him, the two musics remain distinct, for all that they share. But in his four international CDs, he has shown maturity as a composer, and an impressive ability to find common ground with musicians from different backgrounds. He plays the bars of Bamako often with his small but powerful electric group. He records and tours in Europe with a more acoustic lineup. He is one of the most unassuming and endearing performers on the Malian scene today. Though small in stature, he is increasingly recognized as a musical giant, seamlessly encompassing Bambara roots, blues, and rock 'n' roll. A gifted songwriter, singer, and guitarist, he is poised to achieve growing international success in years to come.

Ali Farka Toure

Mali's most famous guitarist, Ali Farka Toure, was a teenager when he first encountered a guitar, in the hands of Fodeba Keita, founder of Guinea's Ballet

Africaine. The year was 1956, and Toure was already adept at playing the small, one-stringed lute called *njurkel* and the tiny *njarka* fiddle, a fist-sized gourd with a foot-long neck and also just one string. Toure was destined for the guitar, and for world fame as the spiritual cousin of John Lee Hooker, but he remains loyal to traditional instruments, which he has called

Ali Farka Toure

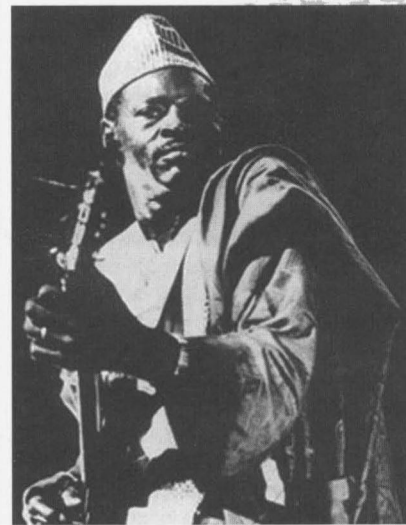


photo by John Milled

his "teachers," not only for their entrancing musical qualities, but for their links to the ancient history of the Malian north, and also to the spirit world.

The blues connection helped make Toure famous around the world, but although he knows and loves blues music, he has always insisted that his most important sources lie in the traditional music he grew up with, especially the music of the Songhai, Tamasheck, Fulani, and Dogon peoples. His international celebrity reached a peak in 1994, when he won a Grammy Award for *Talking Timbuktu*, his collaboration with American guitarist Ry Cooder. Since then, Toure has recorded and toured infrequently, preferring to stay home in Niafunke and tend his rice plantations and fruit-tree groves along the sandy banks of the Niger River. His musicianship, sense of style, and affection for enigmatic aphorisms, parables, and the occult, all bolster his persona as the quintessential African bluesman, but his most important contribution is the attention and recognition he has helped bring to the previously neglected music of northern Mali, where he remains an enormously popular and respected figure.

In 1968, thirteen-year-old Afel Bocoum was recruited to play guitar and sing in Toure's group, ASCO. Over the next thirty years, as Toure became an international celebrity, Bocoum added strong support in Toure's

group. He won local recognition for his talents as a composer and solo performer, including second prize at the 1990 Biennale, but he never recorded under his own name until 1998, when a team from the British recording label World Circuit came to Niafunke to record Toure at home on his farm. During their stay, World Circuit recorded an album of Bocoum's songs, *Alkibar* (Messenger of the Great River). The album was released to high critical praise the following year, and Bocoum's star has been rising ever since.

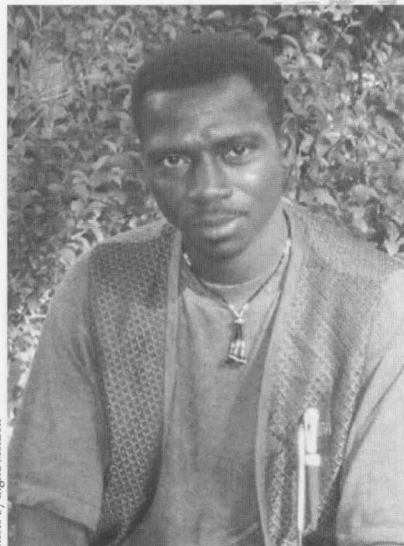
Neba Solo

Souleymane Traore, also known as Neba Solo, was born in 1969, the son of a great *balafon* player of the Kenedougou area of the Sikasso region of Mali. This is the land of the Senufo, an agrarian people. Neba Solo—a name derived from that of his village, Nebadougou—grew up farming by day and practicing the large, pentatonic Senufo *balafon*, called *balamba*, with his father by night. Even as a boy, he was known for his amazing speed on the instrument, and he quickly began playing festivals, not only in his region, but throughout Mali. When he began to make commercial recordings, in the 1990s, most of the *balafon* recordings on the market featured the seven-note Manding version of the instrument and its more formal, stately music. The wild, village energy and irresistible

warmth of Neba's music caught on though, and in 1996, his group was named Band of the Year in Mali.

Neba Solo sings in Senufo and Bambara, a more widely understood language. His songs typically express pride in his people and his region, for example

Neba Solo



praising blacksmiths and farmers. But he has also used his music to deliver topical messages, urging women to set fear aside and vaccinate their children against diseases and to reject the practice of female genital mutilation. With his group, Neba Solo has performed to high praise in Europe. The music delivers the visceral authenticity of a moonlight village celebration, and yet it also speaks to modernity. As evidence of that, international DJs have created high-tech, dance-club remixes of Neba Solo songs.

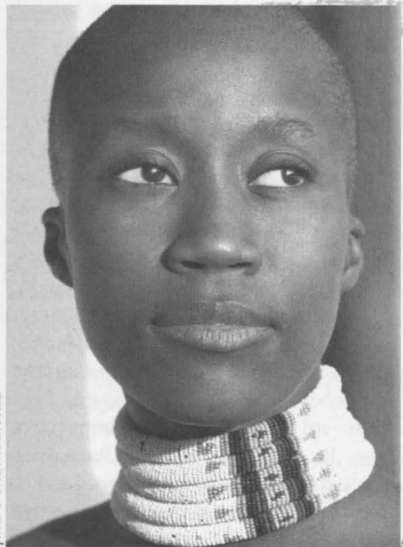
Rokia Traore

Rokia Traore's ancestors lived in Beledugu, the last stronghold of the Bambara Empire, which survived until the eve of French colonial rule, more than a century ago. Traore's father was a diplomat, and at the age of four, she began an odyssey that would take her to Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Belgium before returning her to Mali as a worldly teenager in the 1980s. Determined to create music that would reflect the breadth of her life experience, she took up an acoustic guitar—something practically unheard-of among Mali's legions of female singers—and picked out gentle accompaniments to her songs. Her first efforts won her Radio France International's African Discoveries award and the chance to record her first album, *Mouneissa*, in 1998. An understated work with a gentle blend of pan-Malian

styles, it immediately inspired comparisons between Traore and Habib Koite, often hailed as the most original composer and singer Mali has produced in years.

At the heart of Traore's music is the inspired combination of two contrasting sounds: the deep, throbbing

Rokia Traore



wooden *balafon* of Beledugu—a sound bristling with toughness and village ambiance—and the percussive twinkling of the *ngoni*, the spike-lute used by Manding and Bambara *griots*. Traore also creates her own distinctive vocals, drawing on her ear for jazz and international pop music. A decidedly modern musician, she sings about contemporary life, urging women to be strong and proud and not to wallow in self-pity, and encouraging a society obsessed with the heroes of the past not to forget to find present-day heroes.

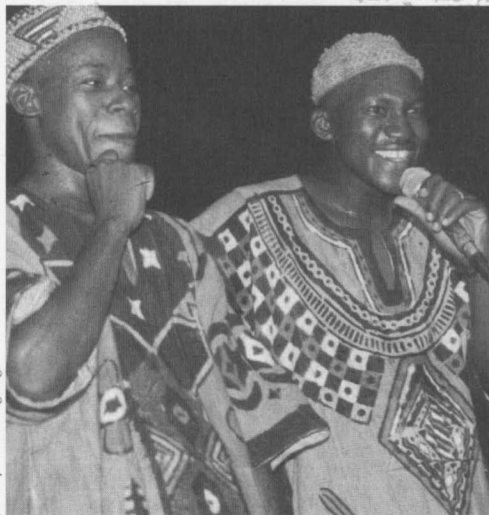
Les Escrocs

Everywhere in the world, the 1990s saw the emergence of local variants on rap. Les Escrocs, literally, "the crooks," are the most significant rap act yet to emerge in Mali. From the start, the group's founders and core members, Mamadou Tounkara and Salim Diallo, were determined to present a candid, youth-oriented view of their society. In an era of blooming democracy, they have tried to pressure the Malian government to encourage its ongoing democratization of the country. Addressing complex subjects, such as cassette piracy, and taboo ones, such as sexual behavior and HIV-AIDS, Les Escrocs have gained respect for being direct and courageous, and for pushing the envelope of public

discourse in a nation long constrained from frank discussion by social and political restrictions.

At the same time, Les Escrocs are committed defenders of tradition. They make a point of calling their music "Mandinka rap," explicitly linking their sound with their ethnic tradition. When they perform,

Les Escrocs



they wear *bogolan*, the mudcloth garments associated with hunters, and throughout their five cassette releases, they make prominent use of traditional Manding instruments, like the *kora*, the *balafon*, and the *ngoni*. Mali's greatest living *kora* player, Toumani Diabate, helped launch the group and played on their debut cassette. Their marriage of old and new ideas has already

stood the test of time; they have remained popular and productive as other Malian rap acts have fallen by the wayside. "CAN 2002," the song Les Escrocs recorded for the African Cup of Nations in 2002, was so successful that the group was invited to tour Mali with the event's international delegation. Les Escrocs represent a new facet of Malian music, but as in all the country's genres, a key to its success lies in its reinvention, rather than abandonment, of older musical idioms.

The Super Rail Band

When independence came to Mali, in 1960, the country's first president, Modibo Keita, set up a national system of regional and national dance bands as a way of promoting a sense of nationhood. These bands created a ground-breaking fusion of

Afro-Cuban dance music, R&B, rock, and Malian traditional music, particularly that of the Manding people. When state support was withdrawn, in the late 1960s, the directors of the Malian Railway Company sought to pick up the pieces by sponsoring a band that would play at the Buffet Hôtel de la Gare, the hotel next to the Bamako train station. Since its inception in 1970, The Super Rail Band has remained a powerful force in West African music. The band has produced such luminaries as Salif Keita and Mory Kante, but its deepest magic lies in its ensemble work. Combining elements from many genres into

one profoundly swinging sound, the Super Rail Band rates as one of the greatest examples of West Africa's golden age of dance bands.

Djelimady Tounkara, the Super Rail Band's lead guitarist and chief arranger, is widely recognized as one of the best guitarists in Africa. Under his leadership, the band has continued to record and perform, even as tastes in Mali have moved away from dance bands and toward singing stars. In 1996, the band severed its connection with the railroad, and began a new phase in its career. It left the Buffet Hôtel de la Gare, where few

young people ventured, and set up its new home base at the Club in Bamako's Lafiabougou neighborhood. The band plays to kids who hadn't been born in its heyday. To reach these listeners, Tounkara has revitalized the band's blend of styles, keeping the tempos up to drive the dance floor, and dazzling young listeners with hot new arrangements of Super Rail Band classics. Meanwhile, the band's 1990s recordings are belatedly earning it an international following.

The Super Rail Band



The Songs

Jon Kertzer

1. Kasse Mady Diabate "Eh Ya Ye"

From Kassi Kasse, *courtesy of Discos Corasón* (www.corason.com). Produced by Lucy Duran and Eduardo Llerenas.

Kasse Mady Diabate, vocals; Fanta Mady Kouyate, 1st guitar; Demba Kouyate, 2nd guitar; Orlando 'Cachaito' Lopez, double bass; Dramane Coulibaly, flute; Koma Wulen Diabate, *ngoni fitini*; 'Petit' Kasse Mady Kamisoko, *ngoni ba*; Moriba and Awa Diabate, chorus; Diakaridia Diawara, *jembe*; Lasana Diabate, *balafon*.

"Eh Ya Ye" is the opening song on Kasse Mady's most recent recording, *Kassi Kasse*, produced by Lucy Duran for Mexico's Discos Corason. The lyrics, in the Bamana language, talk of the traditional spirits or "jinns," and the inability of people with evil intentions to draw out these spirits.

2. Kandia Kouyate "San Barana"

From Biriko, *courtesy of Stern's Music* (www.sterns-music.com). Produced by Ibrahima Sylla

Kandia Kouyate, lead vocals; Djelimady Tounkara, guitar; Ousmane Kouyate, guitar, arrangements, and musical direction; Mahamane Diabate, *balafon*; Issa

Conde, *ngoni*; Mamadi Diabate, *kora*; Modibo Diabate, guitar; Amadou Sodia, *bolon*, vocals; Ali Wague, African flute; Maimouna Barry, Mimi Barry, Astrid Yellow, Oliza, Iblouse Kouyate, backing vocals.

From her most recent recording released in 2002, this song, "San Barana" (It's Raining), features the beautiful acoustic guitar accompaniment of Super Rail Band's Djelimady Tounkara. Kouyate sings about the problems of living with cowives in the traditional Malian Muslim household, and how to cope with the situation and keep the family strong.

3. Habib Koite and Bamada "Nimato"

From Muso Ko, *courtesy of Contre-Jour* (www.contre-jour.com). Produced by Contre-Jour.

Habib Koite, guitar, vocals; Souleymane Ann, drums, vocals; Abdoul Wahab Berthe, bass; Boubacar Sidibe, guitar, vocals, harmonica; Baba Sissoko, talking drum (*tamani*), *taman-ba*, *coragnon*; Sidiki Camara, *djembe*.

This song, "Nimato" (If You Don't Stop), comes from Koite's debut international CD, recorded with his

group, Bamada, in 1995, and features the interlocking acoustic guitar work and harmonica that makes his sound so distinctive.

4. Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia "Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia On River"

From Mali Music, *courtesy of Honest Jons Records Ltd.* Produced by Studio 13-Damon Albarn and Simon Burwell. Ko Kan Sata Doumbia, vocals and *kamele ngoni*.

Ko Kan Ko Sata Doumbia plays *ngoni* and sings this song from a boat on the Niger River. The lyrics explain that in Mali, parental blessings are highly valued, and seen as a key to getting into heaven.

5. Yoro Sidibe "Noumou Koulouba"

From Yoro Sidibe, *courtesy of Mali K7*. Produced by Siriman Diallo.

Yoro Sidibe, vocals and *donso ngoni*; Abdoulaye Traore, *donso ngoni*; Harouna Doumbia, *karagnan*.

A song about blacksmiths, a hereditary caste in Mali, extolling their special powers, and similar to the hunter's caste, which Sidibe comes from. Each group is known for its possession of secrets, magical knowledge, and supernatural powers. Sidibe (a Wassoulou hunter) is praising the blacksmiths and saying that, by looking into the smith's house, he wants to absorb some of the smith's knowledge.

6. Oumou Sangare "Ya La"

From Laban, *licensed courtesy of World Circuit Records* (www.worldcircuit.co.uk). Produced by Boncana Maiga.

Oumou Sangare, vocals; Baba Salah, guitar; Gui N'Sangue, bass guitar; Baba Galle, traditional flute; Basadi Keita, *djembe*; Zoumana Tereta, traditional violin; Kassini Sidibe and Benogo Diakite, *kamale ngoni*; Brice Wassy, drums; Ze Luis Nascimento, percussion; Jean Toussaint, tenor sax; Mike Williams, alto sax, flute; Paul Jayasinga, trumpet; Julia Saar, Coco M'Bassi, Oliza, Alima Toure, Nabintou Diakite, Ramatou Diakite, and Tata Diakite, backing vocals.

This song was released in Mali in 2001, as part of the *Laban* CD, and became a big hit there. As of this writing (March 2003) it has yet to be released in the West. It was recorded in Paris by veteran Malian producer and arranger Boncana Maiga, who has worked with many of West Africa's best-known artists over the past 25 years.

The title means "wandering" or "travel," which is something that Sangare does a lot of herself as a world-famous musician. While the word has a straightforward meaning, it also has pejorative connotations, namely idleness, aimlessness, or possibly loose morals on the part of the one doing it. Sangare uses this song to warn listeners of the dangers of wandering, while acknowledging that she faces them herself.

7. Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko "Cheikhna Demba"

From New Ancient Strings, *courtesy of Hannibal Records* (www.rykodisc.com). Produced by Lucy Duran. Toumani Diabate, *kora*; Ballake Sissoko, *kora*.

An old *griot* song composed in the 18th century for the Malian king Bambuguchi Diarra, who is known for the construction of an irrigation canal from the river Mali to a town in Segou in central Mali. This version is a modern adaptation of a pentatonic tune, with words of praise for Toumani Diabate's patron, Cheikna Demba. It features a deft interplay and lightness of touch between the two *kora* masters and friends, Toumani and Ballake.

8. Abdoulaye Diabate and Super Manden "Fakoli"

From Badenya: Manden Jaliya in New York City, *Smithsonian Folkways 40494* (www.folkways.si.edu). Produced by Tom Van Buren and the Center for Traditional Music and Dance in New York City.

Abdoulaye Diabate, vocals; Abou Sylla, *bala*; Fousseny Kouyate, *ngoni*; Yacouba Sissoko, *kora*; Mamadou Diabate, *kora*; Chick Barry, *bass*; Moussa Sissoko, guitar.

From the ancient Sunjata epic that *griots* have played for many generations, this is an historical song that tells

the story of Fakoli, a key aide to Sunjata, a powerful sorcerer and warrior.

9. Tinariwen "Tessalit"

From The Radio Tisdas Sessions, *courtesy of Wayward Records*. Produced by Justin Adams and Lo' Jo. Foy Foy, guitar, vocals; Ibrahim, guitar, vocals.

Sung in the Tamashek language of the Tuareg people, Tessalit is a small city on the desert north of Timbuktu. The lyrics to this song were written by guitarist Foy Foy, who says of it: "In Tessalit, I left my love, and all my friends. I cannot forget the youth of my country. This is a song we wrote. The singer wants to go there again. The song is sung from a distance, out of nostalgia for friends, love, and ways left behind there." The song features two members of Tinariwen, a collective group that also includes guitarists Ibrahim, Mohammed "Japonais" and Abdallah, percussionists Hassan and Seyid, and singers Nina, Anina, and Bogness.

10. Tartit "Iya Heniqa"

From Ichichila, *courtesy of Network Medien* (www.networkmedien.de). Produced by Gerald Fenerberg and Michel Winter.

Fadimata W. Mohamedun, vocals, *tinde*, clap; Arahmat Walit M. Attaher, *tinde*, vocals, clap; Fadimata Walett Oumar, vocals, *tinde*, clap; Mama

Walet Amoumine, vocals, *tinde*, clap; Fatoumata Haidara, chorus, clap. Tartit also includes Amanou Issa, *tahardent*, vocals; Aboudacrine Ag Mohamed, vocals; Ag Mohamed Idwal, *tahardent*; Mohamed Issa Ag Oumar, electric guitar, vocals.

This is the story of a married man who falls in love with another woman. He neglects his wife and accuses her of terrible things. He is caught between the two. He then sings to his wife, cruelly telling her that the other woman is more beautiful than she is.

11. Lobi Traore "Duga"

From *Duga*, courtesy of Mali K7. Produced by Philippe Berthier and Pilippe Conrath.

Lobi Traore, vocals, guitar; Vincent Bucher, harmonica; Bakary Traore, *djembe*; Chaka Cenvint Doumbia, *bongolo*; Brema Kouyate, bass guitar; Mama Diabate, *ngoni*; Alou Traore, calabash; Moussa Kone, acoustic guitar; Ramata Diakite, Tata Diakite, vocals.

This Bambara song is about the vulture. In the Bambara tradition, the vulture is a symbol of bravery. Lobi Traore applies an image of the vulture to musicians, who will spread the word of love with their music, and he dedicates this song to his "brave" musician friends.

12. Ali Farka Toure with Afel Bocoum "Hilly Yoro"

From *Niafunke*, licensed courtesy of World Circuit. Produced by Nick Gold.

Ali Farka Toure, guitar, vocals; Afel Bocoum, guitar, vocals; Souleye Kane, *djembe*; Hamma Sankare, calabash, vocals; Oumar Toure; congas, vocals.

A song from Toure's most recent recording, made in his hometown of Niafunke on the banks of the Niger River near Timbuktu. On this song, Toure sings and plays guitar with Afel Bocoum, whom he has mentored. The song has a strong message, telling the listener that "life is a combination of tears and smiles, and everyone should follow their own route."

13. Neba Solo "Vaccination"

From *Kene Balafons*, courtesy of Mali K7. Produced by Philippe Conrath.

Souleymane Traore (Neba Solo), vocals, *balafon*; Siaka Traore, *balafon*; Zatien Gonsogo, *tambor bara*; Lamissa Traore, *tambor bara*; Mamadou Traore, *karignan*, vocals; Ibrahima Dembele, *titiara*.

"Let us vaccinate our children," sung in Bambara. A recent song from Neba Solo (Souleymane Traore), was written as a public-health warning in Mali, where there are many life-threatening diseases, of danger

especially to children. Solo urges parents to vaccinate their children against all threatening diseases.

14. Rokia Traore "Yere Uolo"

From *Wanita*, courtesy of Label Bleu (www.labelbleu.com). Produced by Thomas Weill.

Rokia Traore, lead vocals; Adama Diarra, *balafon*; Mamah Diabate, *ngoni*; Andra Kouyate, *ngoni ba*; Sidiki Camara, percussion; Coco Mbassi, vocals.

Taken from Rokia Traore's most recent recording, "Yere Uolo" features many traditional Malian instruments, including the *balafon*, and multistringed *ngoni*, but in a new setting. The song talks of traditional doctrines taught to Zambian children, doctrines that draw upon the spirit of Djossi and hold as a model this noble warrior's bravery and dignity.

15. Les Escrocs "Pirates"

From *Kalan*, courtesy of Les Escrocs. Produced by Les Escrocs.

Salim Diallo, vocals; Mamadou Tounkara, vocals; Sayon Sissoko, *ngoni*; Lassana Diabate, *balafon*; Yacouba Sissoko, calabash; Moussa Sissoko, *tamani*; Soulemane Diabate, bass guitar; Sekou Diabate, *djembe*; Aminata Coulibali, Ami Sylla, vocals.

These lyrics are an assault on music piracy, which in Mali has a stranglehold on the market for recorded music. In much of Mali, it is difficult to find cassettes or CDs that *aren't* pirated—which means that hardly any profits from the sale of Malian recordings find their way back to the musicians. Les Escrocs depict "blood-drinking evil pirates" operating with the complicity of the government and the music industry, robbing struggling artists of their livelihoods. "Pirates" is a call to action, telling the public about the extent of the problem and asking for their help in solving it.

16. Super Rail Band "Mansa"

From *Mansa*, courtesy of Label Bleu. Produced by Label Bleu.

Djelimady Tounkara, lead guitar; Kabine Kieta, saxophone; Fotigui Keita, bass; Ali Dembele, rhythm guitar; Maguett Diop, drums; Lassana Bagayogo and Bamba Dembele, percussion; Damory Kouyate, Samba Sissoko, Adama Fomba, vocals.

Super Rail Band has composed this song, "Mansa," as a praise song for its patron, Hamady Bathily, also known as "Piment." In the Mandinke griot tradition, one praises those that support the musicians and their music, and the Super Rail Band continues this in the more modern setting.

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Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos, New York City

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Thanks to: Eric Charry, Bruce Whitehouse, Oumou
Coulibaly, Lucy Duran, Jack Corneal, Sean Barlow,
Ingrid Monson, Ed Ashcroft, Ken Braun, Robert
Urbanus, Martha Fritz, Michel de Bock, Genevieve
Bruyndonckx, Alan Scholefield, Nick Gold, Jo Bull,
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Christian Mousset, Jean Trouillet, Salim Diallo, Alison
Loerke, Keletigui Diabate, Tom Haxell, Mark Ainley,
Daouda Ballo, Deborah Cohen, and all the artists from
Mali featured on this recording.

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