

Mali-based guitarist Habib Koite writes about home



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Habib Koité Malian-based guitarist

Guitarist Habib Koite is a 56 year-old Senegalese musician based in Mali who has lead the West African supergroup Bamada for the past two decades. His music takes traditional styles of the region and fuses them into contemporary, often, Western tunecraft to make some of the most original music coming out of the region.

Koite tunes his guitar to a pentatonic (five-note) scale which is similar to playing the open string lute-like kamale n'goni.

Singing in English, French and Bambara, the musician's eight worldwide releases have ranged from plugged-in to acoustic settings but always with mostly the same players. On his new album *Soo*, Koite has changed up both

personell as well as musical styles. He performs at the Kay Meek Centre in West Vancouver as part of the Capilano World Music concert series in a co-presentation of Kay Meek Centre and the BlueShore Financial Centre for the Performing Arts.

Koite discussed his work over email:

The Province: Over the course of your albums, you've explored a number of different styles and honed your guitar technique and the danssa doso rhythm. After 20 years of playing with the same musicians what made you decide to employ new ones for the latest release Soo?

Habib Koite: "I formed a 2nd group to try other sounds to renovate because I am surrounded by the same group for over 20 years and to be able at some point to renew itself, bring about a change of ideas. So I created a 2nd group democratically with some change of instruments to bring a new sound :

- Mama Kone , percussionist : calabash, djembe, roland pad (Electronic perceived): There is no battery (drum kit). This is a set of acoustic percussion. This is a radical change
- Issa Kone , brother of percussionist, plays banjo and guitar + vocals: He played several years in the Regional Orchestra of Mopti. So he brings with him the group sounds of Northern Mali.
- Charly Coulibaly keyboard and vocals: Uses a lot of sounds Compac 8 program (box sound that offers much of its traditional African instruments whether perceived , strings ...): I wanted to be close to these traditional sounds , to diversify with the presence of a single instrument
- Abdoul Wahab Berthe , bass player and Kamale N'goni just the previous group

Me, I'm still Habib before the group. Once again , I wanted to exploit the richness of Malian music in all its diversity with rhythms from Fulani cultures, Songhai , Tamasheq or Bambara ... in my approach to make connections between micro cultures, with a group of musicians from different ethnic groups , to try to bring people in focusant around from one directory to multiple cultural facet as a link between the Malian people.”

Q: Did recording Soo – which roughly translates to Home in English – in your homeland at a time of civil strife influence the material?

A: “I am talking about, importance of having a place where it feels like home where you were born, where we grew up, it was his family, his friends, his memories .. and made to feel like home particulièrement was a sore point in Mali where we were disturbed in our lives, in our space is our country I myself have traveled extensively around the world (Europe, Usa, Japan, Taiwan, Latin America, Australia ...) and you feel that what you have left, you would find anywhere else.

And right now, where the population is particularly sensitive about the fact of feeling good in his country, city, village, it is important to think positively about being good at home and further improve this property as far as possible. As with the other albums, I propose an album that presents the cultural richness of Mali.

My approach to diversity has nothing to do with the situation in Mali today but that pushes a little more reflection at a critical time in the country and I can only hope that it helps people to turn more to unity.”

Q: You've incorporated banjo on the album. How did that come about? And did you find that the instrument connects to your music well?

A: “I Made an duo Album with Eric Bib, Blues musician from New York (January 2012). We made a long promotional tour in Europ and US. During this concert , I play one traditional song of Mali with the Banjo of Eric. And he gave me the banjo at the and of tour, and I brought it in Bamako and I use on some songs of my new album.”

Q: Khafole is about a mother losing her young child to a circumcision gone wrong. Apparently, the song is over a century old, yet the problem persists?

A: “For a dozen years, there are many associations that fight for the problems that causes and it starts to give good results especially in cities. ”

Q: OK, FIFA World Cup in Rio de Janeiro. Is this the one an African team is going to play in the final? (As I am a Brazil fan, I take if for granted that’s who the other team will be in the last game)

A: “The song Balon Tan is more speaking about the importance of the common live in the small areas, to give to the people the feeling to belong to a small community to support,help, take care of you in the daily life.”

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