

Biography

Malian virtuoso Ballaké Sissoko has taken over the mantle of greatest touring virtuoso on the kora. Ballaké is a seminal improviser with an ability to unlock every possible nuance on the kora with subtleties rarely heard on any instrument.

Derek Gripper is a classical guitarist from South Africa whose love of the kora set him transcribing and recording some of the greatest works of the instrument and starting a twenty year career performing this music all over the world, changing the face of classical guitar and giving the instrument its very first African repertoire.

The two musicians met in 2022 in Paris for one show. They share no common verbal language yet managed to perform a unique show together of completely improvised music. They returned to the stage in London a month later, and then to the recording studio for a full-length album to be released in 2023. Their performances and recordings are all achieved without any verbal communication, just a mutual love of their shared repertoire and the possibilities of the plucked string.

Taking the griot practice of spontaneous variation to a new level Ballaké and Derek explore Mande music almost as Keith Jarrett explored jazz in his improvised solo piano concerts: unpremeditated listening, allowing music to flow freely between improvisation and quotation, taking off from a shared musical language, in their case not jazz, but Manding music.