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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2016

MALIBLUES

A film by Lutz Gregor

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LOGLINE

MALI BLUES tells the story of four female and male musicians from the West African country of Mali, who espouse with their music a tolerant Islam and a country at peace.

SHORT SUMMARY

The West African country of Mali is considered the birthplace of the blues, brought later by abducted slaves to America's cotton fields. For centuries traditional music has unified Mali's society. Yet the music of Mali is in jeopardy. Radical Islamists introduced sharia law in the country's northern part, prohibiting dance and secular music, destroying instruments, and threatening musicians. Many musicians fear for their lives and flee from the region around the cities of Timbuktu and Kidal. But the Islamist terror has by now expanded to other parts of Mali as well. The UN war effort is being further increased; the German Bundeswehr army has been operating there, too, for the past three years.

The cinematic feature film MALI BLUES tells the story of four musicians who refuse to accept hatred, suspicion, violence, and a radical interpretation of Islam in their country. That is, neither in Mali nor in any other place in the world.

International shooting star Fatoumata Diawara, Ngoni virtuoso and traditional griot Bassekou Kouyaté, young rap singer Master Soumy, and guitar virtuoso Ahmed Ag Kaedi, leader of the Tuareg band Amanar – they all have one thing in common: their music unites, comforts, and heals, and it lends the people the vigor to bring about change and a mutual future in peace.



LONG SUMMARY

MALI BLUES tells the story of four musicians from the West African country of Mali, who, with their music, fight for a tolerant Islam and a country at peace. Mali is one of the world's poorest countries. In musical terms, however, it is richer than most any other country. AfroPop stars like Ali Farka Touré, Salif Keita, and Oumou Sangaré originate from the region between Timbuktu and Bamako in Mali, the birthplace of both jazz and blues. Yet the music of Mali is in jeopardy. Radical Islamists introduced sharia law in the country's northern part, prohibiting dance and secular music, destroying instruments, and threatening musicians. Mali's lifeline is hard hit. Many musicians are muted, have to go into exile, or flee to the capital Bamako. But the Islamist terror has by now expanded to other parts of Mali as well. The UN war effort is being further increased; the German Bundeswehr army is operating there, too. Mali's musicians fight with their instruments, and their voices, for peace and reconciliation, for a tolerant Islam and societal change in their home country.

With subtle sounds and poetic images, though occasionally at full volume, MALI BLUES portrays four

exceptional musicians who, with their music, fight for a new awakening in Africa.

Fatoumata Diawara – AfroPop's shooting star, who tells in her singer/songwriter ballads of life as an African woman, and of obsolete tradition.

Bassekou Kouyaté – the griot and Grammy-nominated world musician integrates traditional African instruments into modern rock music.

Ahmed Ag Kaedi – his rough and rocking Tuareg guitar riffs tell of a longing for the desert.

Master Soumy – the rap singer, voice of Mali's young generation, whom corrupt politicians listen to alike.

They all have one thing in common: their music unites and lends the people the vigor to bring about change and a peaceful mutual future. MALI BLUES is a music film; African hip-hop meets the spirit of Jimmy Hendrix, desert blues meets danceable AfroRock. It is a film about the unifying force of music, rendering, in our times of horror news, a positive image of Africa and her people.



Mali, situated in the heart of West Africa, is considered the cradle of blues and jazz. Slaves brought their native rhythms and sounds to the cotton fields of North America. In Mali, music is a part of the country's cultural identity to this day. Musicians enjoy a high status in society. With Fatoumata Diawara, shooting star on the global pop music scene, we embark on a musical voyage aboard MALI BLUES. We investigate the country's rich musical culture and learn how it is being threatened by Islamists. In the course, we meet committed musicians who dedicate their music to peace and religious freedom in Mali.

As a young girl, singer and songwriter Fatoumata Diawara fled from Mali to escape a pre-arranged marriage. "I left to be able to write down my own story," she says today. "Even though I knew it would be difficult for a black woman like me, who split without her parents' consent. Fighting this pain strongly influenced me and my music." Abroad, Fatoumata Diawara made it big as a singer; she even appeared in the highly awarded film "Timbuktu" by Abderrahmane Sissako, which was featured at the Cannes film festival. When northern Mali was overrun by radical Islamists, she decided to become active again on behalf of

her home country. Now she plans for her very first concert in Mali.

For ten months, northern Mali was under the control of Islamist radicals. The jihadists had occupied the desert cities of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, and were making every effort to destroy the nation's culture. Antique structures were destroyed, and sharia law, banning music as well, was imposed. Musicians were tortured and threatened with death. Many fled to the country's south, towards Bamako. French units and UN peacekeepers came to the aid of the Mali government and started pushing back the Islamists. In the meantime, though, Islamist terror had expanded to other parts of Mali also; even Bamako time and again falls victim to violent attacks. The UN war effort is being further increased; the German Bundeswehr army has been operating there, too, for the past three years.

Tuareg musician Ahmed Ag Kaedi fled from Islamist terror in his hometown, in Mali's northern desert. Now he lives in Bamako and fights loneliness 1,500 kilometers away from his family and the desert.

In his music he processes the longing for a life taken from



him by the jihadists. Ngoni virtuoso Bassekou Kouyaté and rapper Master Soumy, too, deal in their music with the continuing political and religious conflict in northern Mali. Both take a stand for a united and peaceful Mali, and for a tolerant religion. “We musicians have voices stronger than weapons,” Bassekou Kouyaté is convinced.

Her first public concert in her home country Mali is not only a political necessity for Fatoumata Diawara, but also a personal desire. “When I learned that music is prohibited in Mali, my world stopped turning. We musicians are sick, in a way we’re all psychopaths. We need music to survive. It heals our pain.”

Fatoumata Diawara, Ahmed Ag Kaedi, Master Soumy, and Bassekou Kouyaté – however different their songs may be, they have one thing in common: their music is stirring, it moves and connects people, it comforts and heals - and it lends them the power to fight radical Islam, fight for a change in their country, and for a peaceful future marked by tolerance.



Lutz Gregor has been working as a freelance filmmaker since 1983. In his work he is particularly interested in the link between society, music and dance and combines documentary and artistic techniques. Thus he has created numerous films ranging from international documentaries about people and social, cultural or historical issues to dance films. He teaches at media, dance and art schools, especially 'Physical Cinema Workshops'. *KÖNIGSKINDER* (2001, funded by Filmbüro NRW) was shown at the 2002 Max Ophüls Festival, among other venues, and won an award at the 2003 Festival International du Film Indépendant in Brussels for its 'new cinematographic language'. 'Frankfurt Dance Cuts' (ARTE 2004), four short films with dancers from William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt was screened in October 2005 as the German entry for the Temps d'Images' festival in the Villa Medici in Rome.

FILMOGRAFIE (SELECTION)

"Mali Blues", 2016 52, 90 min., gebrueder beetz filmproduktion, ZDF/ ARTE

"Zanzibar's first Women Orchestra", 2015 52 min. Medienkontor, ARTE

"Timbuktu's lost Heritage", 2009 52 min. Gruppe 5, ARTE

"The King's Children", 2001 fictional dance film, 70 min., Contact Film, Filmfund NRW Choreographie: Juan Kruz Diaz de Garaio Esnaola

"Kontakt Triptychon", 1992 dance documentary, 30 min. in coproduction with Tanzfabrik Berlin, 3Sat



CHRISTIAN BEETZ – PRODUCER & CEO GEBRUEDER BEETZ FILMPRODUKTION

Beetz brothers film productions has produced more than 120 high-quality and feature-film documentaries for the international market and, according to the leading industry publication Realscreen, is one of the top 100 most important independent production companies worldwide. The company's productions compete regularly at all international A-festivals and have won numerous respected awards – including three Grimme Awards, the Cinema for Peace Award, three British Independent Awards, the Prix Europa, the HotDocs Filmmakers Award, and the IDFA Special Jury Award. In 2013, the beetz brothers' co-production Open Heart was even nominated for an Academy Award®, and in 2014, the documentary The Wagner Files has been nominated for the International Emmy® Award for Best Arts Programming. Our co-production The Land of the Enlightened has been awarded as best cinematography at the Sundance Filmfestival 2016. Documentary content in the fields of history, culture, and

society establish the productions' main focus. Thereby the spectrum ranges from cinema documentary features ("The Land of the Enlightened", "The Yes Men are Revolting", "Autumn Gold", "Midsummer Night's Tango", "Before the Last Curtain Falls"), to documentaries ("FC Barcelona", "The Wagner Files", "Nelson Mandela: the myth & me", "Hotel Sahara", "Blood in the Mobile"), drama-docs ("Saving the Titanic) and Television series ("Make Love", "The Culture Files", "Gas station happiness").



FATOUMATA DIAWARA

Fatoumata Diawara was born in Ivory Coast. At age 12 she joined an aunt in Mali, where she spent the remainder of her childhood years. Her aunt worked as an actress, and Fatoumata herself soon started playing minor parts, and appeared in early movies, too. "Sia" from the movie "Sia le reve de python" became the part she is best known for – to this day people in Mali address her as Sia. At age 19 she left Mali for Paris, where she struggled along as an actress. As a sideline, she worked as a session musician in productions by Oumou Sangare. Then, however, she took a decisive step by recording with France-based American singer Dee Dee Bridgewater for her album "Red Earth". Thereupon Dee Dee Bridgewater went for a jaunt into Mali's musical world, playing together with quite an array of local stars. In 2011, Fatoumata recorded her debut album for the World Circuit label in London, well-known, for instance, for The Buena Vista Social Club. The songs in this album offer an insight into the emotional world of Fatoumata Diawara. In it she processes her at times

traumatic experiences regarding Mali, her old home. The themes revolve around loneliness, female circumcision, and her escape to France from a pre-arranged marriage in Mali. For MALI BLUES she returns to her family in Mali and plays her first concert ever in her old home country at the festival on River Niger. She does not return empty-handed, however, but as a Mali singer who looks back on one hundred concerts around the world and is considered one of the most successful musicians on the Mali musical scene, even though she never performed in Mali itself.

By now she again has her own house in Bamako, too. The confrontation with her home and past is at a very early stage yet. Fatoumata Diawara still has a lot to tell about her life between two worlds. Not unlike Rokia Traore, she, too, will "use her own pen" to contribute to writing her home country's future, and be a major inspiration not only for young women. First and foremost, though, her fans hope for a new album by her.



BASSEKOU KOUYATÉ

“When the Islamists silence music, they rip out Mali’s very heart,” says Bassekou Kouyaté, one of the country’s most prominent musicians. “Without music, you can no longer marry, no longer be buried. A Sunday in Bamako without music? That then would be completely foreign to our ancestors’ culture and our identity.” And Kouyaté should know: after all, he stems from one of Mali’s oldest praise singer families. His songs date back to the 13th century when Sundjata Keita, the great founding figure of the kingdom of Mali, united the region’s various ethnicities. Until today music is the blood flowing through Mali’s veins, as the praise singers are any family’s mouthpiece and social glue: they mediate strife, sing at weddings, baptisms, and funerals; even the president cannot receive a visitor without a griot at his side. In a country with an illiteracy rate of over 70 per cent, their songs are an essential means of communication, keeping both the past alive and breaking news. When the Islamists conquered the north and prohibited music, they also threatened a century-old tradition with extinction.

Bassekou Kouyaté’s career got started almost 20 years ago. From a local wedding musician he developed to an international star of world music. He revolutionized his traditional instrument, the ngoni, by adding more strings

and new moods, and, over the past ten years, made it known internationally. In 2007, the BBC voted him Best African Artist of the Year, his debut release “Segu Blue” Best World Music Album of the Year. Today he travels around the world and plays in Japan, Australia, the U.S., and Canada. His latest album was even nominated for a Grammy. After years of collaboration with countless musicians from around the world like Taj Mahal, Toumani Diabate, Santana, Bela Fleck, Dee Dee Bridgewater, or most recently, Youssou Ndour, Bassekou Kouyate recently created his own formation: Ngoni ba. The mere idea of a quartet only of ngonis is revolutionary for Mali. For instance, a bass ngoni was devised exclusively for it. Today, influential businesspeople and ministers as well ask him to play at important functions.

At the height of his career even the country’s president - Amadou Toumani Toure, ATT in short - became aware of him. During the final years of his tenure he kept inviting him to represent Mali at important state receptions. Hence Bassekou played for most any West African president in recent years, from Abdoulaye Wade to Blaise Compaore. It is another part of the griot tradition to this day.



MASTER SOUMY

If the griots are Mali's praise singers, then the rappers are its critical journalists. While griots make good money with their praise songs about rich businessmen or politicians, rappers still have a hard time living off their music. No sooner than over the past few years did this change. This change was not in the least triggered by various political crises. Whereas the griots lost some of their authority, ordinary folk, never a subject of praise songs anyway, felt there's a rapport with the rappers.

What started in Senegal in the late 1990s already made headway in Mali only early on in the following decade. In Senegal, in 2000, dozens of rappers spoke out against long-standing president Abdou Diouf, and only recently did the citizens' movement "Y'en a Marre" (I've had it), headed by some of the country's best-known hip-hop stars, prevent Abdoulaye Wade's corrupt regime from attaining a third term in office. There are similar examples in other West African countries like Burkina Faso or

Congo, and hip-hop always comes to bear. In Mali, Master Soumy is considered a pioneer still of the hip-hop scene. Already in his 2007 album Toukaranké he rapped about migration, lack of schooling for girls, but as well more general issues, like blackouts and road conditions. The new thing here is that hip-hop for the first time calls those responsible by name, an unusual move until now in highly conservative Mali. More than ever after the crisis following the military coup of 2012, rappers comment on events. Mind you, over 50 per cent of Mali's population are youths below age 18, and it is they who are most influenced by rap music. Again, when the Islamists started prohibiting music in northern Mali, rappers were the ones to sing against it: Master Soumy contributed the song "Explicque ton Islam" (Explain your Islam). In it, the faithful Muslim asks the jihadists what torture and violence would have to do with Islam, to simply explain what their interpretation of Islam is about when it results in the killing of innocents and the prohibition of sports and music.



AHMED AG KAEDI

Ahmed ag Kaedi is one of the Tuareg musicians from northeast Mali who conquered Europe in the wake of Tinariwen's success. The man from Kidal gained recognition with his band Amanar, best known for their poetic and enigmatic song texts. Like that of so many Tuareg from northeast Mali, his life is intertwined with the political events from Mali's independence on. In the early 1990s a second Tuareg rebellion against Mali took place. At the time, many Tuareg fled to neighboring Algeria, Ahmed being one of them. Living as a refugee in Algeria, he and friends of his eventually decided to move on to Gaddafi's training camps in Libya. Back then, Ahmed Ag Kaedi (like many other fellow musicians) still believed in an armed struggle for the rights of the Tuareg, who were neglected by Mali's central government. Ahmed ag Kaedi and his friends had trained for 11 months already when Gaddafi dismantled the camps because a regional peace treaty had been arrived at. Ahmed swapped his rifle for a guitar and went back to Kidal. He decided to focus on music from now on. At the same time, Ali Farka Toure celebrated his first Grammy Award for Talking Timbuktu, recorded with Ry Cooder. The world started to discover Mali as the place the blues originated from. A music scene evolved in northeast Mali. In early 2000, the legendary music festival in the desert "Festival au désert" took place there – a stage that was to become a unique promotional

tool for Tuareg culture. Annually, first near Kidal, then at Timbuktu, Sahara musicians from Mauritania to Mali, from Niger to southern Algeria met there. Quickly, the festival became an insiders' tip for music fans from around the world. Superstars like Robert Plant or Bono went out to the desert to listen to this kind of music. In 2012 the "Festival au desert" took place for the last time in the desert at Timbuktu. Shortly thereafter, Islamists ransacked the venue and took with them whatever could be taken. And when the Islamists conquered Ahmed ag Kaedi's hometown of Kidal, they burnt parts of his equipment and threatened the family with cutting off his fingers should he ever pick up a guitar again. Hence his family decided for him to flee to Bamako, which is where Kaedi thus stranded, like so many other musicians from the north at the time. When the global media interest in the events in Mali erupted in 2013, Ahmed ag Kaedi and his band received numerous offers to play gigs in Europe. As musicians directly affected by the events, they represented the "Festival au desert" at various occasions worldwide. For instance, they performed at a solidarity event for the Festival au désert in Berlin, at Volksbühne theater. These days things around Amanar have quieted down again. Following the "Festival sur le Niger" in Segou in 2015, Amanar recorded their latest album in Burkina Faso.



MALI: WEST AFRICA'S MUSICAL WORLD POWER

Take the lashing rhythms of Wassoulou singer Oumou Sangaré from Mali's south, the stirring ballads of blind duo Amadou & Mariam from Bamako, or the rough and rocking guitar sounds of Tuareg bands like Tinariwen, Tamikrest, or Amanar, with their "stationary" distortions that mirror the vastness of the desert in northeast Mali: hardly another African country in recent years produced a musical output as large as Mali's. International stars the likes of Robert Plant, Ry Cooder, Bono, Damon Albarn, Björk, or Manu Chao have succumbed to that nation's music. And when you think you've seen it all, soon enough you'll explore yet another new aspect. Mali emits a seemingly inexhaustible stream of fresh music. It is a country of opposites: deeply rooted in its ancient musical traditions, it is at the same time Africa's number one exporter of music, even though many of its musical treasures still await discovery. This is true for the chasseurs' magic music, for countless griots like Toumani Diabate or Bassekou Kouyaté, but as well the many musicians who keep chancing it in Paris, to return with new ideas to their old home like Fatoumata Diawara did. The most explicit comments on the current crisis, however, come from the young generation of rappers like Master Soumy, who openly criticize both the jihadists and Mali's corrupt political elite.

1. FROM 1960'S INDEPENDENCE TO THE RAIL BAND

On September 22, 1960, the landlocked West African nation of Mali gained its independence from France. At the time, Africa was reeling with independence euphoria. Everything seemed possible. In neighboring Guinea, charismatic president Sékou Touré elaborated his vision of a New Africa. He wanted for Africa's music, too, to re-invent itself, be modern while striking out on its own. To that end Sékou Touré founded a string of regional orchestras equipped with contemporary instruments and tasked with creating, from its traditions, a modern African music. The most renowned of these is the Orchestra National Bembeya Jazz. Mali soon joined the movement, and again regional orchestras evolved such as Super Biton de Segou, Super Djata, or Kéné Star from Sikasso, blending local tradition with pop music sounds. The late 1960s then saw the founding of Rail Band du Buffet de la Gare, Mali pop music's archetypal outfit and future stepping stone for the careers of stars like Salif Keita, or Mory Kante (and also Amadou Bagayoko of Amadou & Mariam) who to this day shape Mali's pop music. Soon the great opponent would follow: Les Ambassadors, playing at the time rather popular international styles like rumba, foxtrot, or Cuban music. In the late 1970s, financial difficulties got the two bands to try their luck abroad, in the then domineering music capital of Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

In the mid-1980s, Paris would become the global hub for African musicians who wanted to make it big. Salif Keita and Mory Kanté (actually of Guinea origin) subsequently, in the late 1980s, rose to early stardom in the budding market for world music.

2. MALI'S STARS: OUMOU SANGARÉ, TOUMANI DIABATÉ, AMADOU & MARIAM & ROKIA TRAORÉ

Singing of her own volition: Oumou Sangaré

In the late 1980s Mali was ruled by Moussa Traoré's corrupt military regime. Economically, Mali was down and out. The people were fed up with griots and their praise songs. In this atmosphere a new musical style enjoyed sudden popularity; next to the griots' Mande pop music, it is to this day Mali's second popular musical style: Wassoulou music, named after a region in southwest Mali. Contrary to Mande pop music, with its performers for the most part stemming from the caste-like griot scene (with Salif Keita a notable exception), Wassoulou women singers were musicians of their own volition, and they called themselves "Kono" (Songbirds). Just like the griots, you can tell a Wassoulou musician from her last name: it is almost invariably Sidibe, Diakite, Diallo, or Sangaré (while most griots bear names like Diabaté, Diawara (!), Kouyaté, Sissokko, or Koité) The queen of Wassoulou music, past and present, is Oumou Sangaré, who came from poor conditions. As a child, Oumou had to scratch along as a water vendor in the streets of Bamako to earn money for her family. Her mother was the second (neglected) wife in a polygamous marriage. This experience turned into a central message of her songs, and her into a fighter for women's rights in Mali. The propelling force of Wassoulou music is the accents-rich rhythm of the kamale ngoni, the so-called youth harp. To this day the Wassoulou singers' music is, next to Mande Pop, Mali's celebrated pop music. Oumou Sangaré herself, however, is active rather as a businesswoman these days. She runs a hotel, and even a Chinese four-wheel-drive car is sold under her name.

Kora maestro Toumani Diabaté & Ngoni master Bassekou Kouyaté

Already at age 18 the son of one of Mali's oldest griot families proved his talent with his debut album Khaira.

What followed was a career that brought him in worldwide contact with music traditions as diverse as can be, and made him one of the country's most innovative musicians to date. In the late 1990s Toumani Diabaté caused a stir internationally together with Ketama, a neo flamenco band, and the albums Songhai and Songhai 2. Thus he crowned himself Africa's most virtuoso kora player, and provided proof of Mali's music traditions being an art form. Attention was similarly paid to his blues experimentations together with American-born Taj Mahal, with whom he recorded the Kulanjan album. Titled New Ancient Strings, a duo with then as now celebrated kora player Ballaké Sissokko followed, thus providing a worthy successor to the Ancient Strings album, that milestone of traditional kora music their fathers had recorded together. In addition, he released various albums with changing line-ups of his own Symmetric Orchestra. He received two Grammy Awards side by side with the late Ali Farka Touré, with whom shortly before his death he recorded the album twins In the Heart of the Moon and Ali & Toumani. Toumani Diabaté is still today considered one of the most important ambassadors of the griots' century-old music, and one whose virtuosity made sure his ancestors' music has found its place among this planet's well-known art music traditions.

A comparable achievement is that in recent years of Bassekou Kouyaté on behalf of his instrument, the ngoni. Traditionally, the ngoni is a small five-stringed lute played seated. It is said to be Mali's oldest string instrument. Bassekou opened the ngoni to modern music. He, too, stems from a long family tradition. His father and grandfather are seen as well-respected griots and ngoni virtuosos. Bassekou, in contrast, was a young savage. Early on he experimented with new moods. Rather than sit, he would strap on his instrument like a guitar, and add more strings to it in order to be about as flexible harmonically as modern guitar players. After years spent in bands with Toumani Diabaté and, later, Ali Farka Touré, his 2006 debut release "Segu Blue" brought about his international breakthrough. He tours the globe with his own family band ever since, and was even nominated for a Grammy.

Amadou & Mariam: there's always hope

A blind duo from Bamako lures us away from art music and back to the streets of Mali, into the world of common



people. Their career makes for one of the most touching stories of Mali pop music. It is the story of a love between two blind musicians who overcome all obstacles and make it to the top, in spite of their blindness. Like so many 1980s stars, Amadou & Mariam tried their luck first in the music capital Abidjan. There, as a blind duo, and thanks to the simple, catchy lyrics of songs like *Combattants* or *Je pense à toi*, they had early hits, particularly with poorer city folk. At one point they ended up again in Bamako. Their breakthrough only came about when Frenchman Marc Antoine Moreau bought a cassette of theirs at the bus station while traveling Mali, only to meet the couple again by accident in a Paris street. Their international debut release made them stars in France already. The collaboration was to climax, however, with the album *Dimanche à Bamako*, recorded together with Manu Chao. The album sold 800,000 copies, making it the top-selling sound recording yet of any Mali artist and, besides, proving that one's fate can be overcome – notwithstanding blindness – even in Africa, and that one can make it to the top.

The new women: Rokia Traoré & Fatoumata Diawara

In Mali hardly another female artist caused as many scandals in recent years as did Rokia Traoré. That is so although the diplomat's daughter simply wanted to realize

her own vision of a pop music with traditional influences. Alas, many in Mali just weren't ready for it yet. Rokia Traoré arranged her songs with a combination, hitherto unseen on any Mali stage, of traditional instruments from various ethnicities. The result was a traditionally sounding, yet essentially very modern music. The guardians of tradition felt attacked by a not only young, but female, singer. To them her music just sounded wrong. From her musicians, too, Rokia Traoré required unusual discipline. They were not to improvise, as was the custom, but minutely adhere to arrangements and melodies. Her modern approach brought her many fans internationally, but Mali itself wasn't always easy going for her. Radio journalists oftentimes refused to play her songs as Rokia refused to give them money, as is customary in Mali.

Fatoumata Diawara started her career well over 10 years after Rokia Traoré started hers. She's not from an intellectual family of diplomats, and she approaches her music a good deal more intuitively. Nonetheless they beg for comparison. Both are consistent with the strong-woman-with-guitar image. Neither came to music – like most Mali musicians – by way of tradition. Fatoumata, too, spent much time in France, and the messages in her lyrics and music are strongly shaped by those experiences. While Rokia Traoré worked her way up over the past ten

years, Fatoumata achieved her breakthrough already with her first album. What drift she will lend Mali's music history in the future remains to be seen.

3. KING OF DESERT BLUES TO FESTIVAL AU DESERT

In the early 1980s some English DJs chanced on early recordings by a musician who sounded like a West African version of John Lee Hooker: Ali Farka Touré. The rapture of a few music nerds in England evolved to a demand for the original. Ali Farka Touré was invited to London and played first gigs. It was quickly apparent that this music by a man from Niafunke, a small town on the River Niger, 100 km west of Timbuktu, was living proof of the blues being African by origin. Ali Farka Toure has always rejected the term blues: he would play the music of the Songhai, the Bozo, the Tamashek, the Fula, actually of countless ethnicities, and if that sounded like the blues, then be it. He enjoyed the height of his career in the mid-1990s when Ry Cooder recorded the album *Talking Timbuktu* with him; for it he was to receive a Grammy award – and a new genre was born: Desert Blues. Countless musicians – from the U.S. in particular – subsequently headed for Mali in search of the blues' roots: Martin Scorsese even made a documentary film about him, "Feel Like Going Home", and called his music "the blues' DNA."

Festival au désert: Tuareg music

The story of the Festival au désert begins in early 2000. In the course of 10 years a site for annual meetings of Tuareg from the Sahara desert turned into one of the world's most exciting music festivals, which again met a sudden end in 2012 when Islamists captured the region and penalized music making. The festival's renown is closely linked to the history of one of the best-known bands from northeast Mali: Tinariwen. Tinariwen is perceived as spearheading a revival of Tuareg music. The band comprised former MNLA rebels who laid down their arms when peace had come about in the mid-1990s, focussing again on music. Ironically, they received one of their first instruments as a gift from Iyad Ag Ghali, the very same man who in 2013, with his Islamist splinter group Ansar dine, proclaimed shariah law in Timbuktu and had music prohibited. Since midyear 2000 Tinariwen, aided by their appearances at the "Festival au desert", attained the status of being one

of Mali's major music exports. The world was fascinated by the musicians' pursuit of freedom and the forgotten Tuareg people who had fought for their recognition since Mali's independence in 1960. It saw an evolution here, from Ali Farka's Desert Blues to desert rock. That euphoria was slightly dampened, as the attempt to declare a Tuareg nation, AZAWAD, culminated in the Islamist takeover of the region. With the crisis in Mali's north, the Festival au désert has become a symbol of freedom in the fight against Islamism. Over the past 10 years the festival managed to rouse media interest in Tuareg music, the former solidly benefiting the cultural region as well as a whole string of bands: Tamikrest, Bombino from Niger, and, as ever, of course, Tinariwen, who received a Grammy even. One of the bands hardly known yet in this country is Amanar, with singer and guitarist Ahmed Ag Kaedi at its center. He is one of the many musicians displaced by the Islamists from his hometown of Kidal.

4. GENERATION HIPHOP – CA SUFFIT!

"Ca suffit," it's enough, Master Soumy raps into his mike. Les sofas de la republique have recorded this song together: a rap collective with some of Mali's best-known rappers as members. Hip-hop has been booming in Mali for well over 10 years. The present crisis now brought about the urban musical style's breakthrough. Confidence in the state is shattered. The one-time highly popular praise singers lost some of their popularity in the crisis. They used to sing about politicians nobody believes in anymore (see item no. 2). Never before have musicians, and young musicians at that (outrageous in a country where age is still met with respect), expressed their opinion on the crisis in terms of such clarity. "In a traditional social order bribery might work reasonably well," explains Amkoullél, currently one of Mali's internationally best-known rappers, "but we live in a democracy." Yet Rappers like Amkoullél, Sidiki Diabate, or Master Soumy want to enlighten the public as well: "There's more to voting than getting that free t-shirt and ticking off somebody. Everyone must take their share of responsibility." A comparison with Senegal and its youth movement "Y'en a marre" (I've had it) downright imposes itself. In early 2012, they contributed to the ouster of an old and corrupt president, Abdoulaye Wade, from office. There, too, rap activists, albeit more experienced ones,



are the movement's driving force. Once already, in early 2000, Senegal's hip-hop movement drove out a president: Wade's predecessor Abdou Diouf. Since the late 1990s the stars of Senegal's hip-hop scene are popular in Mali, too. Rappers might be the only musicians calling Mali's present issues by name. The powers that be still have to get used to the rappers' direct language. Mali's critical journalists are somewhat more seasoned in this. Since the coup d'état, quite a few were arrested, threatened, and silenced. Yet Master Soumy doesn't mince his words – his themes include radical Islamists, corrupt politicians, the ailing school system, but just as well his compatriots' mentality. In the wake of the military coup he wrote a song titled "We're All Responsible." In it he criticised his

fellow countrymen for their long-standing acceptance of gifts from corrupt politicians, yet now all of a sudden old president ATT alone would be blamed for the national misery. "We were all actors in his movie," Soumy sings. Akin to the citizens' movements in neighboring Burkina Faso or Senegal, Mali's population shall go about taking their history into their own hands finally, instead of, as always, merely waiting for, and then praising, some benefactor.

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