

MASTER OF THE TALKING BALAFON  
FROM BURKINA FASO

# Mamadou Diabate

& Percussion Mania





## MAMADOU DIABATE ...

... is an award winning balafon master and composer born in Burkina Faso based in Vienna, Austria.

He comes from a traditional “Jeli” family of music making and storytelling of the Sambla peoples. His professional music education began by the young age of 5 years. His virtuosity is outstanding - some people say he would have more than two hands. Explicit techniques allow Mamadou to play balafon solos, which create the impression that three balafonists play together.

Since 2001 he has released 13 CD’s. The CD “Keneya” is the world premiere recording of the traditional balafon music of the Sambla people. This music is in reality the Sambla language translated into music. Musicians, who don't speak this language can't play it at all.

Today his unique line up with two balafon upfront as lead instruments characterizes Mamadou Diabate & Percussion Mania. That makes the project the only formation of this kind worldwide, different to all other West African bands. Musical dialogs and spectacular balafon duels between Mamadou and his cousin Yacouba Konate are one of the highlights of the show. Since 2017 he lectures the Sambala Balafon language in various Universities in USA and Canada.

# BIOGRAPHY

Mamadou Diabate was born in 1973 into a West African "Jeli" family in Burkina Faso. In his family there is a long tradition of practising the profession of storytelling and music making. The very first Diabate (originally Dianbaga-te = the irresistible) was mentioned in the Sundiata epic in the 13th century.

He was about 5 years old when his professional education began. His first teacher was his father Peneque Diabate, who in his days was considered the best balafon player far beyond the borders of the Sambla culture. His xylophone solo could be heard as the signal on Radio Burkina for over ten years. His older brothers, Sadama and Sibiri, who, today, are the most popular balafon players of the Sambla, also taught him. He was 8 years old, when he began to complete his apprenticeship with well-known balafon players of the neighbouring cultures like the Siamou, Tusia, Senufo, Gan, Lobi, Dagara and Bobo. Due to Daouda Diabate, his teacher in the Tusia region, his virtuosity became outstanding - some people say, he would have more than two hands. Daouda was the "grand master" of playing the balafon in a sophisticated polyphonic and polymetric way. This difficult technique allows Mamadou in his solo concerts to create the impression that three balafonists are playing together.

At this time the Jelis have already lost their pre-colonial reputation and have become guardians of the tradition, speaker of the rulers and tutor of their children. Therefore the principal of the elementary school has repeatedly chased Mamadou away because his parents could not afford the school fees. At that time he decided to build a school that is free for everyone.

At the age of just 11 years, frustrated by his future prospects, he ran away from home, because he decided to extend his skills and widen his musical horizons in Bobo Dioulasso, the second largest city and musical capital of Burkina Faso. This happened against the will of his parents, who expected him to stick to their Jeli-tradition. With the help of neo-traditional groups such as Farafina, Sababougnoma, and Frères Coulibaly, who later became world-famous, he learnt other instruments like ngoni (hunter's harp), dundun (bass drum), lunga (talking drum) and the most important one in the "Bobo-Dioulasso style" the djembe.

In 1988 his family finally reconciled with him, when his father was looking for a suitable second balafon player for the National Cultural Festival (SNC) of Burkina Faso. The little rebel had, by then, developed into an excellent musician. During the following years they repeatedly won the festival's first prize. The video recordings of their successes can be found in the archives of the Burkina Television.

In 1991, together with Ousmane Dembele ("Zoumana") Moussa Coulibaly and Abdoulaye Dembele, he formed his first band named "Landaya". Mamadou became the composer and the balafon soloist of the group. In 1998 they won the first prize for the National Culture Festival of Burkina Faso.

During a Pan African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou he got to know an Austrian traveller who was fascinated by the music of the Sambla and recognized Mamadou's outstanding musical talent.

A deep friendship arose from this encounter and in 1998 he persuaded Mamadou to present the Sambla and balafon culture in Europe. Knowing that this would offer a major chance for him, Mamadou took the opportunity very seriously.

In 2000, after absolving the initiation-school of his Sambla heritage, he settled down in Austria. (In order to become adults, young men have to learn the tradition - explained in an ancient secret language that has to be learned first - and complete rituals. The Sambla believe that this sacred tradition is essential for a fortunate life and future.)

Since living in Austria he has released 15 CDs with his own music and collaborated with numerous musicians from various aesthetic and ethnic backgrounds like:

Abdoulaye Diabate, Achim Tang, Andre Heller, Arkady Shilkloper, Bil Aka Kora, Cheick Tidiane Seck, Fatoumata Dembele, Günter Meinhardt, Habib Koité, Ismet Ruchimat, Sigi Finkel, Terje Isungset, Thomas Berghammer, Toumani Diabate, Werner Wurm, Wolfgang Puschnig .. and more.

Further, he has given spectacular performances across the world at prestigious festivals such as

Brosella Festival (Belgium), 5em continent (Switzerland), Colours of Ostrava (Czech Republic), Global Village Festivals (Denmark), Saalfelden Jazz Festival (Austria), Ice Music Festival (Norway), Printemps de Musical (LUX), Afrika Festival Wuerzburg (Germany), Global Village Moscow (Russia), Rain Forest Festival (Malaysia), Fleur de Niger (Mali), Sunsplash Wiesen (Austria), Chiala Graz (Austria), Afrika Festival Wassertrüdingen (Germany), Sufi Sutra (India) Jazz a Ouaga (Burkina Faso) Triangle du Balafon (Mali).

In 2016, Mamadou was made Knight of the National Order (Chevalier de l'Ordre National) of Burkina Faso. In 2019, he received the "Best International Artist" award of Burkina Faso. Since 2016, he has been working on a linguistic project exploring "The Language-Music Connection" with Laura McPherson at Dartmouth College (USA).

Mamadou Diabate's extraordinary creativity is a never ending stream of musical creations, keeping his important and special culture and music traditions alive. Without a doubt, his virtuosity will continue to enrich our world.

## About the linguistic lectures

Mamadou's "Balafon language" got recorded and he gets regularly invited for a linguistic residency & lectures program.



## SABABU School Burkina Faso

The most burning heartfelt desire for Mamadou since his childhood, to help poor children in Burkina Faso to get education, came into reality on the 14th September 2010, when after 6 years of hard work and with the great help of benevolent people and organisations in Europe his elementary school in Bobo Dioulasso was officially opened. Today over 600 children learn there free of charge. His school was the seventh best among the 38 primary schools of Bobo Dioulasso in 2019.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Knight of the National Order of Burkina Faso
- Winner of the "Grand Prix" & "Prix de la Virtuosit  de Festival Triangle du Balafon" in Mali (2012)
- Winner of the Austrian World Music Award (2011)

# LIVE SHOWS



[Yan Yoro Kaw \(live @TivoliVredenburg Utrecht\)](#)



[Kalanso \(live @TivoliVredenburg Utrecht\)](#)

[Live in India](#)

Pure Energy On Stage!



## SEENGWA

### New Album 2022

Seengwa - a musical homage to the "talking balafon"

Released on April 1st, 2022, balafon master Mamadou Diabate's new album *Seengwa* is unique in the world music scene: Traditional West African music meets jazz and classical music.

*Seengwa* is a tribute to the almost forgotten musical traditions of the Sambla people of the region of the same name in Burkina Faso. The Sambla are one of the very rare peoples in the world who have developed a language with the xylophone (the Sambla call it balafon). This music is actually the tonal language of the Sambla people translated into music, a function known as surrogate speech. Musicians who don't comprehend this language are unable to master this instrument.

Mamadou Diabate connects them with the "here and now" by working with top-class musicians from Europe and his homeland. The renowned Austrian jazz saxophonist *Wolfgang Puschnig* is just one of the 6 musicians who complement Mamadou Diabate's 6-piece "Percussion Mania". In the song "*Duniya banaba*", the balafon language is translated into French for the first time by the poetry slammer *Malika La Slamazone* from Burkina Faso.

*Seengwa* takes the listener on a rhythm journey - from tradition to modernity. Mamadou Diabate and Yacouba Konate provide the basic tone with their two balafon as lead instruments and lead into African spheres through djembe and calabash, enriched with wonderful melodies and polyphonic singing by two female vocalists, strings, piano and kora, as well as electric and bass guitars.

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## DISCOGRAPHY

2001 - Sababu Man Dogo

2002 - Keneya

2003 - Sira Fila >>

2005 - Folikelaw

2008 - Kamalenya

2010 - Yala

2010 - Fenba

2011 - Kanuya

2012 - Balanfolo >>

2014 - Masaba Kan >>

2015 - Barokan

2016 - Douba Foli: Noir et Blanc

2019 - Nakan

2022 - Seengwa



 [Listen here!](#)

 [Press Downloads!](#)

# LINE UP

## Mamadou Diabate & Percussion Mania

Mamadou Diabate - Balafon, Kora, Lead Vocals

Yacouba Konate - Balafon, Vocals

Hamidou Koita - Calabash, Drums, Lead Vocals

Seydou Dao - Djembe, Vocals

Igor Bezget - E-Guitar

Byron Cortes - Bass



## Seengwa

Mamadou Diabate - Balafon, Kora, Lead Vocals

Yacouba Konate - Balafon, Vocals

Hamidou Koita - Calabash, Drums, Lead Vocals

Seydou Dao - Djembe, Vocals

Juan Garcia Herreros - Guitar

Byron Cortes - Bass

Malika La Slazmzone - Vocals

Monique Adjouhoun - Backing Vocals

Charlotte Tiendrebeogo - Backing Vocals

On special request: Wolfgang Puschnig - Saxophon



## STAGES

Africa Festival Hertme Netherlands - Fordefestival Norway - Murszene Austria - Afrika Tage Landshut Germany - WOMAD Great-Britain  
- Summer Festival Antwerpen Belgium - Windsor Festival Germany - Transform Festival Norway - Sufri Sutra Festival India - Eine Welt  
Winterthur Switzerland - Treibhaus Innsbruck Austria - Moods Zürich Switzerland - Printemps Musical Luxembourg - Jazzhaus Freiburg  
Germany, Afrika-Tage Donauinsel Wien Austria - Festival 5eme Contiente Switzerland - Afrika Festival Schloss Mamlingen - Afrika  
Festival Wassertrüdingen Germany - Kultursommer Kaiserwiese Wien Austria - Vidor Festival Hungary  
and many more ....

