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**BMG****TOUMANI DIABATÉ AND THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA****NEW ALBUM 'KÔRÔLÉN' OUT 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL****[www.worldcircuit.co.uk](http://www.worldcircuit.co.uk) / [www.bmg.com](http://www.bmg.com)**

Set for release through World Circuit on 23<sup>rd</sup> April '**Kôrôlén**' is a very special collaboration between two titans in music: **Toumani Diabaté**, the Grammy-winning Malian kora virtuoso, and the **London Symphony Orchestra**, renowned worldwide for their performances of orchestral music on record, film and stage. Diabaté, a griot whose musical lineage stretches back generations, is well known as one of the most creative musicians on the African continent and is almost single-handedly responsible for bringing the iconic sound of the kora to worldwide audiences. No stranger to a genre-defying collaboration, he has recorded two Grammy-winning albums alongside desert blues pioneer Ali Farka Touré, as well as projects with Taj Mahal, Björk, Béla Fleck, Damon Albarn and Afroclubism.

Commissioned as a special project by the **Barbican Centre** in London and produced by **World Circuit**, these recordings feature Diabaté and his group of eminent Malian musicians (including Kasse Mady Diabaté and Lassana Diabaté), accompanied by the soaring presence of the LSO in dedicated arrangements by Nico Muhly and Ian Gardiner and conducted by Clark Rundell. The title bestowed by Diabaté on this unique and groundbreaking release, '**Kôrôlén**', translates from the Mandinka language as 'ancestral' - a fitting theme for an album that brings together ancient griot melodies and Western orchestral arrangements, resulting in an achingly beautiful and fresh Afro-neo-classical sound that will appeal to admirers of African, traditional and new classical, and ambient music.

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African music has famously produced some of the world's most danceable grooves - but as Toumani Diabaté has shown better than anyone, there is another gentler and more meditative current to its creative flow. "There's a mystic and classical side to African music, a divinity," says the world's most celebrated kora player. "It is not only about dance, and people need to know this." It's one of the reasons why Toumani embraced the invitation to work with the London Symphony Orchestra and conductor Clark Rundell.

The result is a remarkable collaboration between West African griot/jeli tradition and European conservatoire-trained classicism that thrilled those who were privileged to be in attendance when the project was staged at the Barbican in 2008. Now for the first time the recording of that unforgettable night is being made available to a wider audience as the album *Kôrôlén*.

It's a record that touches many bases, from ancestral African to western classical via ambient and the contemporary neoclassical stylings of composers such as Max Richter and Nico Muhly. As Toumani puts it, the aim was to say to audiences, "Look at this music in a new way, look at African music in a different way."

Never before had a kora been deployed as a solo instrument in a symphony orchestra and so the collaboration required careful preparation to find the common ground where the improvisational and interpretative strengths of Malian ancestral music could meet with the more structured demands of an orchestral score. After Toumani and Clark had laid the groundwork, Ian Gardiner and Nico Muhly were brought in as arrangers to create a score with which the LSO could work. "The important thing was to write music for the orchestra that left room so the Malian musicians could speak over the top," Gardiner explained.

Muhly adopted a similar approach, seeking "to avoid the awkwardness of the pairing of non-western instruments with the orchestra and to create a subtle architecture that would leave space for embellishment and with cues that Toumani could react to in his improvisations."

Yet a template is only an outline and once the arrangements were completed, the symbiotic process of establishing mutual lines of communication between two different musical traditions really began. Toumani made his own adjustments to the arrangements to facilitate the improvisations of his band, drawn from Mali's most celebrated griot families and including guitarist Fanta Mady Kouyaté, balafon player Lassana Diabaté, singer Kasse Mady Diabaté (who appears on the closing track), ngoni player Ganda Tounkara and percussionist Fode Kouyaté on calabash and tama.

"Our music is older than Bach", Toumani enjoys pointing out - but at the same time it is music that exists in the moment and which comes to life in the imagination of the musicians playing it. And so the music altered again in rehearsal under Clark Rundell's baton, as the orchestra began to explore the infinite possibilities of working with Toumani and his musicians, tentatively at first but with an increasing vitality and confidence.

In addition to the Barbican concert presented on *Kôrôlén*, there were two further symphonic performances in Liverpool and Oslo, each with a different orchestra and with subtle variations in how the pieces were played, although the core of the material remained the same. With this record Toumani Diabaté urges us to "look at African music in a new way." Yet *Kôrôlén* does something more than that. It shows how different cultures can come together to find a spirit of shared humanity that transcends the artificial barriers that divide us. And right now that has never been more needed

