

Cal Performances Presents

Wednesday, October 18, 2006, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Putumayo presents

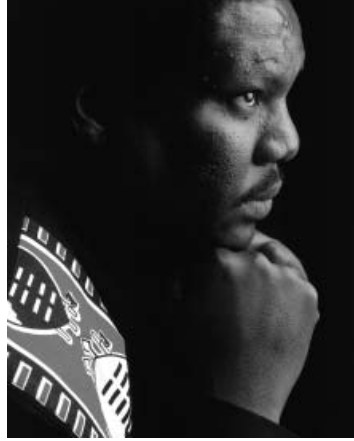
Acoustic Africa

featuring

Habib Koité & Bamada



Vusi Mahlasela



Dobet Gnahoré



Cal Performances' 2006–2007 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Program

Habib Koité *acoustic guitar, lead vocals*
Abdoul Wahab Berthé *bass, kamale n'goni*
Kélétigui Diabaté *balafon, violin*
Mahamadou Koné *percussion*
Boubacar Sidibé *acoustic guitar, backing vocals, harmonica*

Vusi Mahlasela *acoustic guitar, lead vocals*
Ian Hermann *percussion*

Dobet Gnahoré *lead vocals, percussion*
Colin Laroche de Féline *acoustic guitar, backing vocals*
Nabil Mehrezi *bass, backing vocals*
Laurent Rigaud *percussion*

Ronald Van Cutsem *tour manager*
Martial Jacques *front-of-house sound*
Lampthey Taylor *sound monitor*
Sam Bapes *lighting*
Michel De Bock *manager, producer*

About the Artists

Born in 1958, **Habib Koité** comes from a noble line of Khassonké griots. He developed his unique guitar style by accompanying his griot mother, and he inherited his passion for music from his paternal grandfather, who played the *djelly n'goni*, a traditional instrument associated with hunters of the Wassolou region of Mali. "Nobody really taught me to sing or to play the guitar," explains Habib, "I watched my parents, and it washed off on me."

Habib was headed for a career as an engineer, but on the insistence of his uncle, who recognized Habib's musical talent, he enrolled at the National Institute of Arts (INA) in Bamako, Mali. In 1978, after only six months, he was made conductor of INA Star, the school's prestigious band. He studied music for four years, graduating at the top of his class in 1982. (In fact, his talent was so impressive, that upon graduation, the INA hired him as a guitar teacher.) During his studies, Habib had the opportunity to perform with a series of recognized Malian artists, including Kélétigui Diabaté and Toumani Diabaté. He sang and played on Toumani Diabaté's 1991 release, *Shake the World* (Sony), and Kélétigui Diabaté is now a full-time member of Habib's band.

In 1988, Habib formed his own group, Bamada (a nickname for residents of Bamako that roughly translates "in the mouth of the crocodile"), with young Malian musicians whom he had known since childhood. In 1991, Habib won first prize at the Voxpole Festival in Perpignan, France, which earned him enough money to finance the production of two songs. One of those tracks, "Cigarette A Bana" ("The Cigarette Is Finished"), was a hit throughout West Africa. After the release of another successful single, entitled "Nanalé" ("The Swallow"), Habib received the prestigious Radio France International Discoveries prize. This award made it possible for the group to undertake their first tour outside of Africa during summer 1994.

That year, Habib met his current manager, Belgian Michel De Bock. Working together, they recorded his first album, *Muso Ko*. From that point forward, Habib became a fixture

on the European festival circuit and began to spread his infectious music and high energy shows around the world. Habib has played at most of Europe's major venues and festivals, including the Montreux Jazz Festival, WOMAD and the World Roots Festival. In spring 2000, he toured Europe and Turkey as an invited guest of the legendary avant-garde jazz group, the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

Habib's second album, *Ma Ya*, was released in Europe in 1998 to widespread acclaim. It spent an unprecedented three months at the top of the World Music Charts Europe. A subtle production which revealed a more acoustic, introspective side of Habib's music, *Ma Ya* was released in North America by Putumayo in early 1999 and quickly helped establish Habib as one of world music's most exciting new figures.

In February 1999, in support of the US debut of *Ma Ya*, Habib Koité and blues artist Eric Bibb were the featured artists on Putumayo's "Mali to Memphis" theme tour, educating audiences across the country about the connections between the blues and Malian music. Habib returned with his band later that year, performing on festival stages and in concert halls around the United States.

The critical and commercial response to *Ma Ya* was enthusiastic. Habib was featured in hundreds of newspapers and magazines, including *People*, *Rolling Stone*, *Le Monde*, *Songlines*, *De Standaard* and *Le Soir*, and on the cover of *Rhythm*. He has also been featured in the United States on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, WXPN's *World Café*, PRI's *The World* and the *House of Blues Radio Hour*'s "Mali to Memphis" special, as well as prestigious international programs, such as *CNN WorldBeat*. *Ma Ya* reached number one and spent 20 weeks in the top 20 of the CMJ New World music chart, and broke new ground at AAA rock radio, spending several months in regular rotation on commercial stations across the country.

Habib's artistry and powerful personality earned him the admiration of fans such as Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt, both of whom visited Habib in Mali. Each has done a

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great deal to support Habib's music, by promoting private events designed to attract new audiences and performing live with Habib on stage.

In fall 2000, Habib participated in the "Voices of Mali" tour with Oumou Sangare, one of West Africa's most popular artists. The tour was a phenomenal success, selling out large-capacity concert halls throughout North America. While Sangare was the more recognized name, Habib quickly won over the audiences, creating new fans and proving that he was an artist of tremendous crossover potential. During the West Coast leg of the tour, Habib was joined on stage by Bonnie Raitt, who jammed with him in front of ecstatic sell-out crowds in the Bay Area, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles.

Habib's latest album, *Baro*, continues where *Ma Ya* left off, with a set of haunting melodies and virtuoso guitar playing. Habib is backed by Kélétigui Diabaté, Mali's undisputed king of the *balafon* (a West African wooden-keyed xylophone), who recorded with Lionel Hampton in the 1960s. With the support of the rest of the talented members of Bamada, Koité swings from the Cuban-influenced grooves of "Batoumanbe" to the ethereal and entrancing "Sinama Denw." The acoustic, unadorned arrangements reflect centuries of Malian tradition, while incorporating subtle Western influences to create songs that appeal to people from all walks of life. *Baro* even includes a new, Latin-style version of "Cigarette A Bana," the track that made Koité a star in West Africa.

Habib takes some unique approaches to playing the guitar. He tunes his instrument to the pentatonic scale and plays on open strings as one would on a *kamale n'goni*. At other times Habib plays music that sounds closer to the blues or flamenco, two styles he studied under Khalilou Traoré, a veteran of the legendary Afro-Cuban band Maravillas du Mali. Unlike the griots, his singing style is restrained and intimate with varying cadenced rhythms and melodies.

Mali has rich and diverse musical traditions, which have many regional variations and styles that are particular to the local cultures. Habib brings together different styles, creating a new

pan-Malian approach that reflects his interest in all types of music. The predominant style played by Habib is based on the *danssa*, a popular rhythm from his native city of Keyes. He calls his version *danssa doso*, a Bambara term he coined that combines the name of the popular rhythm with the word for hunter's music (*doso*), one of Mali's most powerful and ancient musical traditions. "I put these two words together to symbolize the music of all ethnic groups in Mali. I'm curious about all the music in the world, but I make music from Mali. In my country, we have so many beautiful rhythms and melodies. Many villages and communities have their own kind of music. Usually, Malian musicians play only their own ethnic music, but me, I go everywhere. My job is to take all these traditions and to make something with them, to use them in my music."

With one foot in the past and the other in the future, Habib Koité is an artist for a generation that has witnessed the breaking down of cultural barriers. While he respects and treasures the music of his ancestors, Habib also envisions a day when village chiefs will communicate with the world from their grass-thatched hut via a computer. Habib's music proves that we do not have to forsake the past in order to develop, and that the modern world, for all of its benefits, needs to keep its links to the folklore, mythology and history of the people in order for it to retain its soul.

Vusi Sidney Mahlasela Ka Zwane was born in 1965 in Lady Selbourne, near Pretoria, and grew up in Mamelodi township, where he still resides. Vusi never knew his father, lost his mother at a young age and was raised by his maternal grandmother. Growing up in Mamelodi, a cradle of creativity that has produced a number of noted poets, writers, artists and musicians, the young Vusi began to teach himself to play on a homemade guitar, a remarkable instrument made of tin cans and fishing line. Vusi can't remember a time when he wasn't singing—"I'm sure I learned to sing before I could talk"—and was a seasoned performer by the age of 17. He soon

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discovered that he had a flair for composition and began to write his own music and lyrics.

From the outset, Vusi's songs addressed themes of political and social significance, and so he found himself in demand at political rallies and cultural events. His message of peace also drew him into close contact with poetry groups, especially the Ancestors of Africa, a rousing group of poets, musicians and actors, formed in 1981. He recalls, "We were picked up and harassed in all types of situations, going to church every Sunday and being forced to sign a piece of paper at the police station first. If I was going out of town for a wedding, it had to be reported to the police first. They kept on harassing me with the things I was doing. But I stuck to it."

After joining the Congress of South African Writers in 1988, Vusi developed a new level of confidence as a poet and a writer. He struck up a creative friendship with South African poet Lesego Rampolokeng at the same time he was falling under the spell of artists such as Miriam Makeba and Phillip Tabane. He was also exposed to the work of Victor Jara, whom Vusi acknowledges as a central influence on his own music and lyrics.

His first record, *When You Come Back*, was recorded and released by Shifty/BMG in 1991 and produced by Lloyd Ross. The album is widely acknowledged as a South African classic. Then, in 1994, Vusi was asked to perform arguably the most important gig of his life: the inauguration of South Africa's new president, Nelson Mandela. That same year, with South Africa undergoing a massive transition, Vusi released his second album, *Wisdom of Forgiveness*. The album saw Vusi receive a finalist nomination for Best Male Vocalist at the FNB SAMA (South African Music Award). Vusi has released three albums since *Wisdom*, including the gold-certified and double-SAMA winning *Silang Mabele* (1997), *Miyela Afrika* (2000) and his most recent, *Jungle of Questions* (2002), which Vusi produced and recorded alongside his Proud People's Band backing outfit.

Vusi is featured in *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*, the celebrated film about

the importance of music and song in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. After garnering two awards at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, *Amandla!* was released to theaters across North America in February 2003 and earned tremendous critical acclaim and more awards. The *Amandla!* companion album, which spans 40 years of South African music, was released on ATO Records and features four songs by Vusi, in addition to Hugh Masekela, Abdullah Ibrahim and others. In a rave *Los Angeles Times* review of the soundtrack, Robert Hilburn said, "Vusi Mahlasela's voice is so pure and commanding.... You wonder whether you should have gotten an entire album by him."

An accomplished guitarist, percussionist, composer, arranger, bandleader and performer, Vusi now enjoys an ever-growing worldwide following. Among his most ardent supporters is Dave Matthews, who is a native of South Africa and has long aimed to make Vusi's music known in the United States. In fact, when Matthews founded ATO Records in 1998, one of his foremost goals was to sign Vusi to the label. In 2000, he invited Vusi to contribute guest vocals on the title track of the Dave Matthews Band's multi-platinum album *Everyday*. In 2002, ATO was approached by the producers of *Amandla!* and enthusiastically secured rights to release the soundtrack. Matthews further realized his goal in 2002, signing Vusi to ATO. Mahlasela made his North American recording debut with *The Voice*, a definitive collection handpicked by Vusi which spans his recordings over the previous 11 years. ATO released the album in August 2002.

More recently, Vusi's voice may be heard on the soundtrack of the film *Tsotsi*, winner of the 2006 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

Dobet Gnahoré, a singer, dancer and percussionist from the Ivory Coast, inherited the force of the "Bété" tradition from her father, Boni Gnahoré, a master percussionist who plays with the Abidjan-based Ki-Yi Mbock Company, directed by Werewere Liking.

It was within this Ivory Coast-based company that Dobet met French guitarist Colin

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Laroche de Féline, who had gone to the Ivory Coast to immerse himself in African melodies and rhythms, after being introduced to them by Toroma Sika in France. Having spent some time in the well-known Tché Tché dance company, in 1999 Dobet decided to form a duo with Colin, *Ano Neko*, which means “Let’s create together” in the Bété language. The duo toured widely in France (1999–2000), where they lived temporarily following the instability that struck the Ivory Coast. They also worked together on different projects, including the creation, with Ba Cissoko, of *Le Cabaret Nomade* and *L’Entre Deux Monde*.

When they returned to Abidjan in 2001, they took part in the MASA Off festival, and, while there, recorded eight songs under the supervision of the late Marcellin Yacé, who was killed during the first day of rioting in autumn 2002. They then decided to return to France until peace and stability once again reigned in their beautiful country.

In 2003, their artistic collaboration re-focused on Dobet, and the duo expanded when they were joined by a backup vocalist and a percussionist. Then, *Contre Jour*, which had taken Dobet’s career in hand, produced her first album, entitled *Ano Neko*, making the link with Dobet and Colin’s story. This CD comprises songs recorded in Abidjan and Belgium during summer 2003.

From Mandingue melodies to Congolese rumba, from Ivory Coast *ziglibiti* to Cameroon *bikoutsis*, from Ghanaian High-Life to Zulu choirs, the group’s jazz-influenced compositions are varied and colorful. The *sanza*, *balafon*, *calabasse* and bongos support the guitar, backing vocals and Dobet’s warm and powerful voice. She sings in a range of African languages, including Bété, Fon, Baoule, Lingala, Malinke, Mina and Bambara, replicating the Pan-African tradition of the Ki Yi Mbock Company. On stage, her voice, charisma and huge presence, the result of years of theatrical and choreographic work, delight audiences worldwide.