

Motif:
How Music Speaks Across Cultures



**Afropop Spectacular's SchoolTime Performance of
Trio Da Kali**

Friday, November 4, 2016, 11am
Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley

The Cal Performances Afropop Spectacular featuring Trio Da Kali Engagement Guide was written by Rica Anderson, Sabrina Klein and Marilyn Stanley. It was edited and designed by Rica Anderson, Sabrina Klein and Marilyn Stanley.
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How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #TrioDaKali@Cal.

We invite you to challenge yourself and your students to think with the curiosity and passion of the arts. This engagement guide is organized around 4 key artistic practices (as identified by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

Investigating: Questioning, exploring and challenging.

Imagining: Opening the door to what's possible, and even to what seems impossible.

Creating: Making artistic choices with a work of art in mind.

Connecting: Reflecting on both process and product and making connections to other aspects of life and study.

You'll be able to link on specific subjects that you or your students may want more information about. The body of the Engagement Guide invites exploration before and after the performance, giving each student tools to make personal and meaningful connections during the show.

We've included a pre-performance engagement activity and a post-performance activity for artistic practice and reflection. By no means should you feel limited by these suggestions! Go, make art, learn more...and share your experiences where you can.

Artistic Literacy: Having the skills and knowledge you need to connect meaningfully with works of art—that's what we mean by artistic literacy. We think that means something different than knowing the names of all the different instruments musicians might play, or being able to reproduce the exact melodies you might hear during a show. To us at Cal Performances, it means you and your students will have a significant glimpse into the artistic process and will have a chance to try to solve the problems the artists aim to solve creatively. It means that the next time you see a performance, you'll be able to use these same insights to connect with a work of art through the artist's process and that this will deepen your experience as an audience member.

The artistically literate student audiences comes to understand that every artist draws from a core set of concepts skillfully chosen and applied in performance to create a work of art both unique to the artist, and connected to other works of art.

And along the way, we hope that students of all ages—and their teachers and adult mentors—will be inspired to experiment with artistic decision-making and creativity themselves.

Enjoy the show!

Your ★ STARRING Role in the Theater



As an audience member, you are a STAR, too! You play an important role in the performance community. The artists need YOU in order to give you their best work.

S.T.A.R. Audiences

S = Support the artists by being attentive and focusing on the performers.

T = Tune in: listen and watch for understanding (and for Trio Da Kali, watch for how the musicians work together – listening, watching and cueing – signaling through a gesture, look or sound – each other throughout their performance.)

A = Appreciate the performers by clapping at the right time. For example, when a scene or dance ends, or when the stage lights fade to dark.

R = Respect the performers and other audience members. At a performance, you, the others in the audience and the artists are sharing this experience together and are part of a performance community. Think about ways you can best support the community's performance experience.

We know you will be a STAR today and will help your classmates shine too!



1. About the Performance

Trio Da Kali is a group of outstanding musicians from the Mande culture (an ethnic group in West Africa) of southern Mali who come from a long line of distinguished griots (hereditary musicians). Trio Da Kali take their name from one of the oldest and most iconic praise songs in the griot repertoire, dating from many centuries ago. “Da kali” means “to swear an oath,” in this case, it is the griots’ pledge to maintain their art. The trio combines voice, ngoni and balafon to bring a contemporary twist to ancient and neglected repertoires.

Hawa Kasse Mady Diabaté, daughter of legendary Kasse Mady Diabaté, the singer of the trio is known to have one of the finest griot voices in Mali and is often compared to American gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson. At home, Hawa performs mainly on the wedding circuit, singing at parties held on the streets of Bamako (the main context in which most musicians in Mali make a living).

The most distinctive feature of the trio is the balafon, and Lassana Diabaté, formerly of Afrocubism and Toumani Diabaté’s Symmetric Orchestra, is one of Mali’s most astonishing players. Its cascading lines, rippling and percussive riffs, and buzzing gourd resonators, are a familiar element in many Malian ensembles, but here for the first time the balafon is the lead instrument.

The youngest member of the trio is bass ngoni player Mamadou Kouyaté, the eldest son of world-renowned Bassekou Kouyaté. Still in his early 20s, he is one of Mali’s most creative musicians of the new generation.

The SchoolTime Performance will include these songs:

1. SOLIYO

The Mandé Griot’s rousing song of acclaim and welcome to a patron, a hero or an honored guest: “Bring Out the Horses!” Hawa sings this solo without instrumental accompaniment.

2. DISSA (the white veil)

The godmothers of the newly-wed bride sing this song to the husband's family, just before the bride is due to move in with them. "Treat our daughter well! She has been in the tender care of her family. She is like the white veil that she wears: pure and unsullied. Our white veil is leaving us; we must keep our innermost feelings to ourselves."

3. YIRIMADJO

A song in praise of Yirimadjo, the rural neighbourhood in the south of Bamako, where Trio Da Kali's balafon player Lassana Diabaté has recently moved to, with his wife and four children. "You can find everything in Yirimadjo: farmers, traders, fishermen, and people of all ethnicities. Let's go there, to visit Lassana!"

4. GODMOTHERS (dembaw)

The griots sing this song at wedding parties to the bride's godmothers. "It's a pleasure to be following behind a godmother of high standing, a woman who keeps her word, who truly respects the marriage vows."

5. ROSEWOOD

The keys of the balafon are carved out of rosewood, a tree that grows in the forests of Guinea, a special wood that gives the balafon - one of the oldest instruments of the region - its special, magical resonance.

6. EH YA YE!

The exclamation is a reaction to this popular tale of a trickster called Mono who claims in public that he can conjure up demons – and is unable to do so!

7. LADILIKAN

This song is inspired by Mahalia Jackson's rousing gospel song, "I'm Going to Live the Life I'm Singing About in My Song!": in other words, Practice what you Preach!

8. GUEDE

A song praising the bravery and power of village hunters.

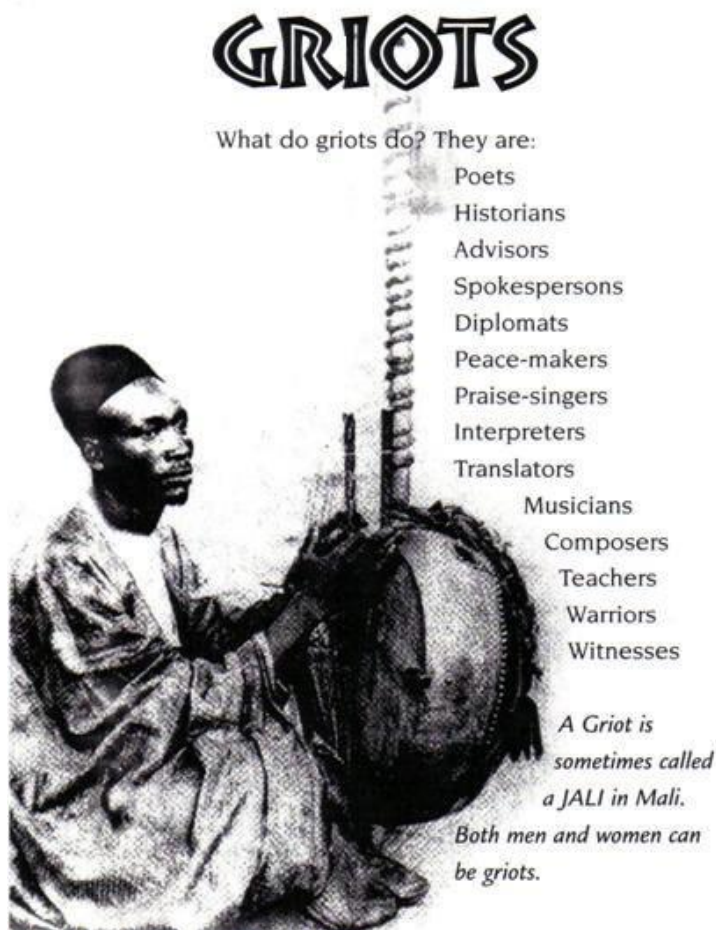


2. Artistic Concept

Motif--How Music Speaks Across Cultures

Listening to music from almost any culture, a perceptive listener will hear certain musical phrases (or succession of notes) that repeat throughout the piece. The repetition takes on meaning, reinforcing in the listener a mood, idea or emotion. A repeating musical passage is called a motif (mo-teef) and conveys a musical idea to the audience through melody, harmony, rhythm, or all three. And often, most of us aren't aware of how a motif is conjuring us to feel or respond to a moment in the music.

Essentially, a motif is a short, constantly recurring musical phrase evoking characteristics of a place, person, emotion or idea. We might be most familiar with musical motifs in films, where a musical phrase becomes associated with a particular character, setting, situation or idea through the movie. These phrases alert us to what or who might show up next, or evoke an emotional response on a less conscious level.

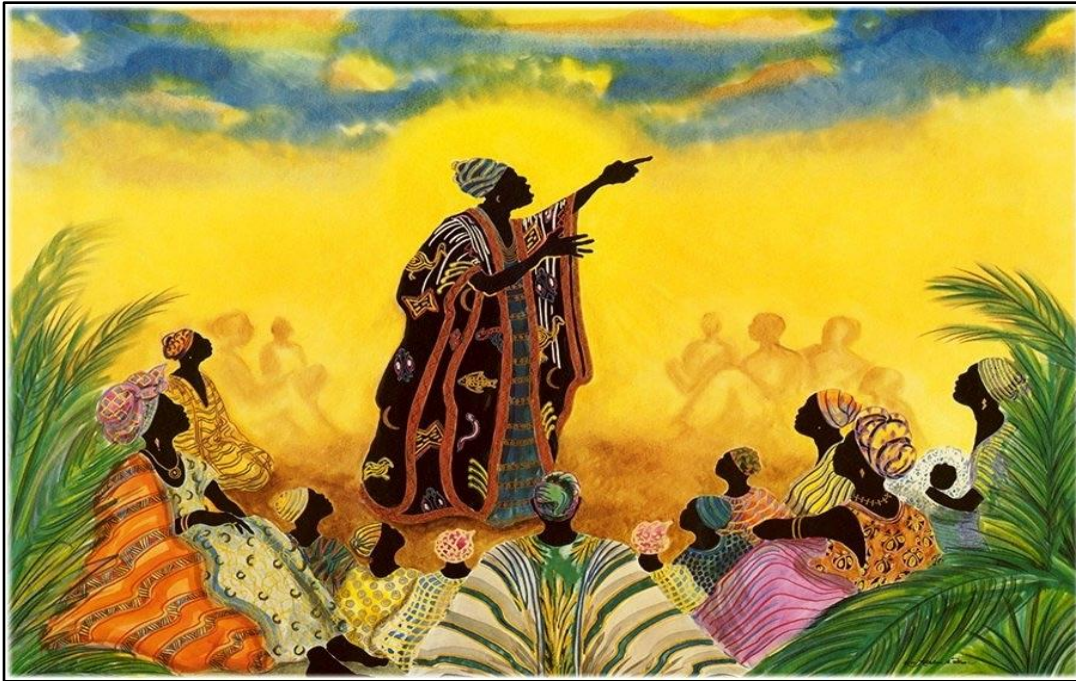


The motif is one of the few musical characteristics that can be found in virtually all world cultures and throughout recorded history. In attentive listeners, motifs help us make even the most unfamiliar music feel cohesive and comprehensible.

Griots, or djeli (jali), are singers who use melody, rhythm and motifs to retell historic events, teach lessons, celebrate individuals and families, and entertain others. Motif is one way for those of unfamiliar with the language or stories to "read" what the griot is sharing with us.

There is a saying, "When a griot dies, it is as if a library has burned to the ground."

<http://science.jrank.org/pages/10319/Motif-in-Music-Structural-Uses-Motif.html>
<https://magic.piktochart.com/output/15095093-west-african-storytellers-the-griots>



3. About Griots (Djeli) of West Africa

As the bride and groom leave the town hall in Bingerville, just west of Abidjan, a group of women sing and dance. The lead singer cups her hands around a small megaphone to project her voice. They sing the praises of the just-married woman, and gather around the more affluent members of the wedding party, praising their nobility and beauty – all with a twinkle in their eyes and an expectation of reward.



Origins

The griot tradition has proved remarkably resilient in West Africa, seven centuries after its beginnings during the Malinke Empire which stretched from modern day Senegal to Timbuktu and Gao in Mali and even included parts of Côte d'Ivoire. The griots were advisors to court, story-tellers, musicians and praise-singers drawn from five leading griot families.

The Mande term *jeliya* (meaning "musicianhood") is sometimes used for the knowledge of griots, indicating the hereditary nature of the class. *Jali* comes from the root word *jali* or *djali* (blood), which evokes both the griot's lineage and the common understanding that they serve as the lifeblood of their society, holding its culture, history and traditions within their oral tradition. *Jali* is also the title given to griots in areas corresponding to the former Mali Empire. Though the usage of "griot" is far more common in English, some griot advocates prefer the term *djeli* or *jeli*.

At a roadside café in Williamsville, Abidjan-based griot Bakary Koita greets me with a broad smile. As I ask my first question, he recites a prayer in Arabic, praying for our conversation to be successful. "The word griot means lots of different things," he tells me. "First of all, a griot's first job is to be serious. In all that you do, you need to be professional. When there are family problems in your neighborhood, it's the griot that intervenes. When there are arguments, the society calls on a griot, so a griot has a big role to play. He shouldn't be false, he should have a good behavior, he's a guide – others look to see how he lives and how his family live. That's a start on what griots are – they're do-gooders." Bakary is the

treasurer of the *Association de Griots d'Abidjan* (English: Association of the Griots of Abidjan). "You can't make yourself become a griot. You're born that way. Being a griot is an art. You're born with it, and you need to exercise it at any moment," says Bakary, who is a hereditary griot on both his father's and his mother's side.

The social tasks of a griot

Traditionally, griots were a social caste, dedicated to preserving the memory of society. "Without us, the names of kings would be forgotten, we are the memory of humankind. By the spoken word, we give life to the facts and actions of kings in front of the young generation," said griot Mamadou Kouyaté, quoted in Djibril Tamsir Niane's *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue* (English: Soundjata or the Mandinka epos). The exact role of a griot is multi-faceted, but in general, the work is a service, particularly to the richer members of the community and for those who (at least in the traditional sense) are considered to be nobility. While griots can be called upon to work at any moment, their specialty is formal ceremonies. "When there's a marriage, it's for us. When there's a baptism, it's us. When there's a funeral, it's us," says Bakary.

The griot expects a reward for his services as part of a patronage system of wealthy lords, though some griots may also practice a separate trade on the side, such as leather work. A griot does not belong to one person; he belongs to all of society. Bakary explains his position: "I'm a griot – I don't have things to sell or set up a stand at the market! But I need to feed myself, pay my rent – where does this come from? It comes from the nobles. I'm in the service of the noble. Through him, I can serve all the community."

The griot in modern times

While the spoken word remains the key tool of a griot, he also retains a close bond with music. There are both male and female griots, though the latter tend to specialize in singing and generally do not play more than simple percussion instruments. The four principal instruments are the kora, the balafon, the ngoni (lute) and the voice. Accordingly, some of West Africa's high profile musical stars are also tied to the griot. Artists such as Guinea's Mory Kanté and Senegal's Mansour Seck come from traditional griot castes, and the Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour has a maternal connection to the griot caste. But in a break with tradition, others – most notably Salif Keita – have adopted a cultural role which in a traditional society wouldn't have been theirs to fill.

Beyond music, the concept of the griot has proved flexible and attractive. A whole variety of artists have found meaning in the title which helps them tap into centuries of authentic tradition. The Senegalese film director, Djibril Diop Mambéty, whose most famous work *Touki Bouki* (1973) is considered one of Africa's best films, said that "the word griot (...) is the word for what I do and the role that the filmmaker has in society... the griot is a messenger of one's time, a visionary and the creator of the future."

Griots frequently compare their work to an ancient baobab tree or a library – a living, speaking testimony to a society's history. "We can say that they are the memory of the Mande people," says Professor Dagri. "There's a Mande proverb that says "May God move so that griots never perish in war, on the battle field, but every battle field needs a griot, for without his presence the history of what happened would be forever lost."

John James, Côte d'Ivoire, 2012 <http://www.goethe.de/ins/za/prj/wom/osm/en9606618.htm>

Griots are specialists of the spoken/sung word and the power—called **nyama**—that it releases. They may belong to special castes (**nyamakalaw** - or handlers of nyama) or inherit their calling through generations of the same family.

"The Mande see *nyama* as a hot, wild energy that is the animating force of nature. *Nyama* is present in all the rocks, trees, people and animals that inhabit the Earth. It is similar to the Western notion of the soul but is more complete than that. It controls nature, the stars and the motions of the sea.

Nyama is truly the sculptor of the universe. While *nyama* molds nature into its many forms, the *nyamakalaw* can shape *nyama* into art. The *nyamakalaw* spend their entire lives perfecting special secret skills that are passed down from generation to generation.

The *nyamakalaw* are the only people in Mande culture that can use magic and are often skilled as sorcerers, blacksmiths, leather workers or bards."

--From *The World of the Mande: History, Art and Ritual in the Mande Culture, and Caste Systems in Mande Society*, Anthropology/Africana Studies 269, Prof. Mandy Bastian

4. About the Musical Instruments of Griots (Djeli)

The **balafon** is a kind of wooden xylophone or percussion idiophone which plays melodic tunes, and usually has between 16 and 27 keys. It is believed to have developed independently of the Southern African and South American instruments now called the marimba. Oral histories of Mande griots date the balafon to at least the rise of the Mali Empire in the 12th century CE. It has been played throughout Africa since the 14th century. The Atlantic Slave Trade brought some balafon players to the Americas. The *Virginia Gazette* records African-Americans playing a *barrafoo* in 1776, which appears to be a balafon.



The **ngoni** or "n'goni" is a string instrument originating in West Africa. Its body is made of wood or calabash (gourd) with a dried animal (often goat) skin head stretched over it. Referred to as the *jeli ngoni* when played by griots, it can produce fast melodies. Griots typically play the instrument at celebrations and special occasions performing traditional songs called *fasas*. Another larger type with six strings, called the *donso ngoni*, is still largely reserved for ceremonial purposes.

The *ngoni* is known to have existed since 1352, when Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveler reported seeing one in the court of Mansa Musa. It is believed to have evolved into the banjo in North America after Mande slaves were brought there. Battuta also reported seeing the balafon.

The **shekere** is an instrument from West Africa consisting of a dried gourd with beads or cowrie shells woven into a net covering the gourd. Throughout the continent there are similar gourd/bead or gourd/seed percussion instruments.

The shape of the gourd determines the sound of the instrument. A shekere is made by drying the gourd for several months then removing the pulp and seeds. After it is scrubbed, skillful bead work is added as well as color.

The instrument is used for folkloric traditions as well as some of the popular music styles. In performance it is shaken and/or hit against the hands.



5. Engagement Activities

Engagement Activity #1 (Pre-performance)

STORY SONGS: Artistic Exploration

Guiding Questions

How can we listen for energy and expression in what someone is singing?

How can we musically express ideas, qualities or emotions through *motif* (repeated musical passages)?

How can we make artistic choices that strengthen the content and performance of our story-songs?

Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive listening. Close Observation. Finding themes and motifs. Expressing.
Variation. Perspective. Composing. Dynamics.

Overview

Time needed: 60 minutes (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will interview one another, then compose a short story-song about their partner using rhythms, melodies, rap and spoken word.

Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to stand and move around a bit (no large dance movements required).
- Writing materials for students (paper, writing implements, journal)

Instructions

Step 1

Warm Up

Start with everyone standing, preferably in a circle if there's room.

- Begin by making a simple rhythm with your body (for example, clapping slowly or tapping your foot)
- Everyone imitates this rhythm/movement
- Change your rhythm and sound (for example, snapping, patting your body, stomping your feet) as the group continues to imitate you.
- Now focus on making rhythms with your voice. You might begin with simple noises for the group to imitate (shh... shh... Hmm...Hmm... Whoo Whoo... Whoo Whoo...) then gradually add more melodic sounds or musical phrases.

Option:

Going around the circle, volunteers can offer their own rhythmic sounds using their bodies, then their voices, which the group then imitates.

- Now, say or sing your name in a rhythmic or musical way (group repeats)



- f) Going around the circle, each person rhythmically or musically expresses their name and the rest of the group repeats. You can also add movement (that the group repeats) when you sing/say your name.
- g) Now, rhythmically say or sing the name of someone in the group (group repeats back)
- h) Going around the circle, each person chooses someone in the group and rhythmically says or sings their name, the group repeats back.

Option:

You can keep a steady body rhythm that the group imitates as each name is sung and repeated back.

- i) Reflect together on the experience of finding a rhythm or tune and singing your own name in contrast with finding a rhythm/tune and singing someone else's name.

Step 2

Interview your partner

Find a partner.

- a) Ask your partner these questions (you can write down their answers so you remember what they said):
 - What's your name? Where did your name come from? What does it mean?
 - Where were you born and how did that place shape who you are?
 - What's important to you today?
 - What's your dream for tomorrow?
- b) Listen carefully to your partner's responses and watch how they tell you about themselves. What's their energy like as they share this information? Are they excited, are they serious, do they laugh at certain moments? What does their voice sound like? Is it soft or loud? Does it go up and down or stay steady?
- c) Once your partner is finished answering questions, repeat back to them what you heard and wrote down. Ask them if they'd like to add or change anything, and write this down or remember it.
- d) Now, answer your partner's questions.

Step 3

Create your partner's story-song

- a) Think of how you want to communicate your partner's story through a tune, a rap and/or by accompanying yourself using body rhythms. You can choose to use a melody, rap beat or rhythm you already know, or you can create something original in the moment.
- b) Choose a short musical phrase you can repeat to evoke your partner's energy and/or personality.

Option:

You can choose to speak or perform spoken word during some of your story-song about your partner, while you sing other parts of it.

- c) Find a new partner and share the story-song you created about your original partner.
- d) Give each other suggestions and make choices about your story-song. Do you want to change anything? Add or edit some parts of your story-song? Make some parts stronger and more dynamic, or some parts softer and more nuanced?
- e) Revise your story-song as you rehearse 3 or 4 times for your new partner.
- f) Everyone share their story-song with each other.

Step 4 Conduct Group Reflection

You may first **journal** about your experience, then reflect together as a group. **Discuss:** what did you notice about your process as you moved from listening, taking notes and repeating what you heard to making musical choices about how to express your partner's responses in a story-song. What was challenging for you as you composed your piece? What did you wonder about when you heard your classmates' compositions?

If you have scheduled a Teaching Artist visit, they will support and build on students' story-songs, adding rhythms and melodic support.

Engagement Activity #2 (Pre-performance)

After you've conducted these exploratory activities with your students, share the video of Trio Da Kali performers. Note how these performers use rhythms, melody and musical phrasing to tell stories in song form.

After a teaching artists visit, encourage reflection on the activities they conducted with your students, review your students' expectations for what they will expect to see, and encourage them to write about the artistic process they went through to create their own songs.

They will be invited at the performance to connect what they will see and hear to their own creative process, and watch and listen to the choices the artists have made. After the performance, encourage them to connect their expectations before the performance to their actual experiences:

What did they see and hear?

What surprised them?

What seemed a little familiar?

What seemed really strange?

What questions would they want to ask the artists if they could?

What artistic advice might they share with someone who was going to see the performance?

You might consider seeking curricular connections to the performance in social studies, history or literature. If you design a lesson that you'd like to share, please let us know! We'd like to include it on our blog or in future workshops for teachers...

6. Resources

Online

Trio Da Kali in residency at Brandeis University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhT0rvekUCU>

Trio Da Kali playing with Kronos Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewflAclOut0>



Books

Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music (African Expressive Cultures)

Thomas A. Hale, 1999

Indiana University Press

Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande

Barbara G. Hoffman, 2001

Indiana University Press

The Griots of Oakland: Voices from the African American Oral History Project

Angela Zusman and Mi Zhou, 2013

Story Bridges

Voices from Twentieth Century Africa: Griots and Town Criers

Chinweizu (Editor, Introduction), 1989

Faber and Faber

In Griot Time

Banning Eyre, 2000

Temple University Press

Places to Visit:

Museum of the African Diaspora

685 Mission Street (at Third Street)

San Francisco, California 94105

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