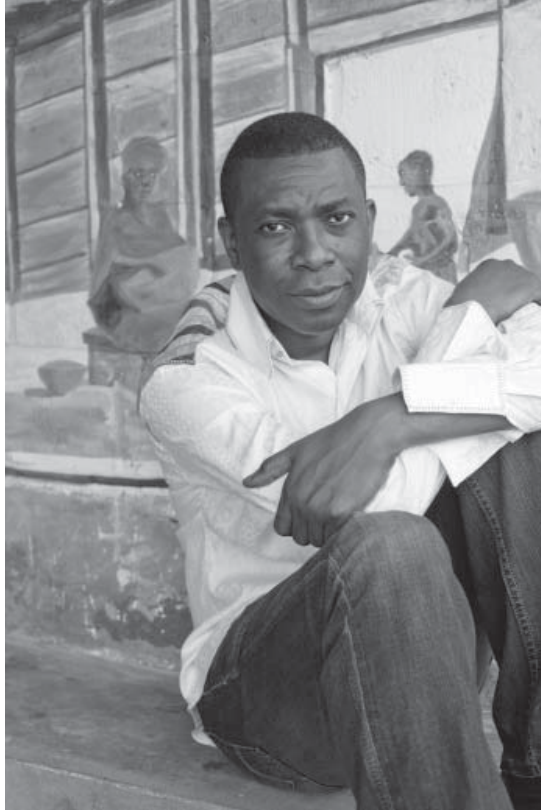


Saturday, July 26, 2008, 8pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## Youssou N'Dour



Youssou N'Dour	<i>lead vocals</i>
El Hadji Faye	<i>percussion</i>
Assane Thiam	<i>talking drum</i>
Pape Omar Ngom	<i>guitar</i>
Ablaye Lo	<i>drums</i>
Moustapha Faye	<i>keyboards</i>
Birame Dieng	<i>backing vocals</i>
Mamadou Mbaye	<i>lead guitar</i>
Habib Faye	<i>bass &amp; keyboards</i>

*Personnel subject to change.*

*Cal Performances' 2007–2008 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank.*

### Youssou N'Dour

With his latest album *Rokku Mi Rokka* (“Give and Take”), Senegal’s king of *mbalax* continues the journey deep inside the traditions of his country that began with the release of *Nothing’s in Vain* and the Grammy Award-winning *Egypt*, the albums now considered his most remarkable achievements to date. More than 25 years into a career that scaled heights once unimaginable for African music, he is still setting the pace for all artists in West Africa.

“What keeps me passionate about music is the freedom I have,” he says. “The freedom to use different sounds and find different vibes. I started my professional life interpreting Cuban music, then I sang *mbalax* and pop, and I think that if I had stayed in one style I would have got a little tired. But, you know, I also have a reputation for bringing something new to the world outside Africa.”

Born in 1959, Youssou first achieved fame as a 12-year-old who sang at religious ceremonies; by 16 he was a *de facto* star, singing with one of the most popular bands of the 1970s, Etoile de Dakar. In the 1980s, as leader of the Super Etoile, he developed a new African form of music known as *mbalax*. “The problem for some people is that *mbalax* is a complex music. If you don’t know our language, Wolof, or our culture, you will get confused, you won’t understand the references. So I had to take a decision to make it easy for people to understand me. I want to communicate with everybody.”

With the global hit single “7 Seconds,” Youssou achieved his goal of reaching out to the whole world. “It opened doors for me and for my music,” he smiles, “It was a magical opportunity.” But with the planet waiting for another “7 Seconds,” he turned his back on making pop records and drew his new audience into the world of traditional Senegalese music (on *Nothing’s in Vain*, released in 2002) and spirituality (on *Egypt*, a collaboration with the Fathy Salama Orchestra, released in 2004).

On *Rokku Mi Rokka*, he continues his adventures in traditional music, but with a twist. “The music and inspiration on this album are from the north, from the desert, from parts of the country that border on Mali and Mauritania. People from those countries will know and understand this music as well as people who come from the center of Senegal.

It is this interaction between two worlds that continues to intrigue N’Dour. In 2006, he appeared in his first Hollywood movie, playing the freed slave Olaudah Equiano in *Amazing Grace*, which told the story of William Wilberforce’s efforts to abolish slavery. “When I read Equiano’s autobiography, I understood that he and I are trying to do a lot of the same things. A lot of the African story about the abolition of slavery remains untold.”

In 2005, he was the sole African to sing on the London stage of Live 8, where he performed “7 Seconds” with Dido before appearing at the Cornwall and Paris shows. “There was a real misunderstanding in the organization of those concerts. I think people like Bob Geldof and Bono now know they would have to involve African musicians if there was another project like this.” But if Live 8 cemented Youssou’s position as the most important African musician of his time, there have been growing rumors that he considering moving into politics. “No, I don’t need to be a politician. A lot of problems in Africa are caused by people getting important political positions when they are not experienced politicians. I’m involved in justice, in human rights: what I’m doing is more than politics and I’m doing my best while following my passion, my music.”

In 2006, Youssou returned to the studio to recording “about 20 songs, and then we had to decide how to mix them. It’s crazy, but Africans like the sound of keyboards and modern instruments, the rest of the world wants Africa’s traditional instruments, but audiences in Africa won’t react to the music unless we use modern instruments. The only thing both audiences like is lots of space for my voice. I have to mix the songs not to sell, but to deliver them to different audiences, so there is an African version and one for the rest of the world.” On *Rokku Mi Rokka*, he is joined by such singers as Bah Mody, Ousmane Kangué and Neneh Cherry, who duets with Youssou on “Wake Up (It’s Africa Calling).”

“Music is a language, maybe the first language, and I use it to deliver a message because people can hear it and understand it first, quicker than if they waited for a newspaper. I sing about reality, about my society, which is more than just Senegal or Africa. I sing about the world.”