

Tuesday, April 20, 2010, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Baaba Maal



Tyrene Le Bon

Baaba Maal	<i>vocals, acoustic guitar</i>
Aliou Diouf	<i>drums, samples</i>
Mbara Cisse	<i>bass</i>
Ibrahima Cissokho	<i>electric guitar</i>
Hilaire Chaby Hary	<i>keyboards</i>
Mansour Seck	<i>backing vocals</i>
Barou Sall	<i>hoddu</i>
Massamba Diop	<i>talking drum</i>
Momadou Sarr	<i>percussion</i>

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ITHINK THE MUSICIAN'S ROLE is to give advice, to warn people, and to make them aware of what they might not have thought of themselves. We use melodies and harmonies to make songs enter your mind." So declares the celebrated Senegalese master musician **Baaba Maal** of the songs on *Television*, his multilingual album released in June 2009. With its subtle blending of electronic dance elements with the timeless tradition of West African musical traditions, the record is a groundbreaking successor to 2001's Grammy Award-nominated *Missing You*, released the year Mr. Maal closed the South Africa Freedom Mandela Concert in London's Trafalgar Square and headlined at the Hollywood Bowl.

The enigmatically named title track refers to the relatively recent phenomenon in Africa of ubiquitous TV screens. "The television set is like a stranger you didn't ask for coming into your living room," explains Mr. Maal. "You don't care about who he is. He just seems to come from nowhere and gives you information." He uses the tune "Song for Women," explains Mr. Maal, "to talk about how women can be much more powerful in Africa, which can be really helpful for the entire continent. We should encourage that, and I sing about it to give them more power."

Television was recorded intermittently over the previous three years, during which time Mr. Maal maintained his rigorous global touring and continued working on the large-scale Africa Express project, in collaboration with Damon Albarn. In 2009, he headlined the African Soul Rebels tour of the United Kingdom and appeared as the guest on an edition of the esteemed *Desert Island Discs* on BBC Radio 4. In another field altogether, in 2008 Mr. Maal created the soundtrack for the Playstation and X-Box game, *Far Cry 2*; at the beginning of the decade he had fulfilled the same function, working with Hans Zimmer, for the Oscar-winning Ridley Scott movie, *Black Hawk Down*.

Mr. Maal's mission in West Africa extends beyond his music. He is committed to the concerns of families, young people and the future of the continent, as is reflected in his role as Youth Emissary

for the United Nations Development Programme, about which he says: "It strengthens my determination to work harder to contribute more to improving the living conditions of disadvantaged people of the African continent, especially young people, whose future is seriously threatened by illiteracy, poverty and HIV/AIDS. When I am talking about Africa, it is about how Africa will grow into the new millennium. This is why I really wanted to make music, so people can listen more to the music and the messages I am talking about."

His image of uplifting the African continent has long driven Mr. Maal. To this end, in 2003 he played the Nelson Mandela 46664 Concert in Cape Town, South Africa; and the next year he performed at the Nobel Peace Prize Concert in Oslo, Norway, for Dr. Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan environmental campaigner who won that year's Peace Prize. In 2007, he played at the African Union heads of state summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and also performed at the Live Earth Concert in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In 2005, Mr. Maal headlined one of the BBC Proms Concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall as well as the Glastonbury Festival and the Africa Remix Festival at London's Royal Festival Hall. In July of that year, Mr. Maal led off the Make Poverty History March at the G8 protest in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Although the future of all of Africa is one of his priorities, Mr. Maal never forgets his home nation of Senegal. In 2002, he sang the Senegalese national anthem at the opening match between France and Senegal of the FIFA World Cup Finals in Seoul, South Korea. Senegal won the game.

In Senegal, Mr. Maal came from humble beginnings, but he has learned and traveled and now speaks and sings of empowerment, enlightenment and peace. He was born in Podor, a town with a population of 6,000, on the banks of the river Senegal that separates the country of the same name from Mauritania. (In 2006, returning to his home town, Mr. Maal established the now annual three-day Blues du Fleuve festival in Podor.) Mr. Maal's family is Hal Pulaar, known in the

English speaking world as Fulani. He is not from a family of *griots*—the hereditary caste of artists and communicators. His father worked in the fields but was also given the honor and responsibility of using songs to call the worshippers to the mosque. Mr. Maal's mother was a musician who sang and wrote her own songs, educating her son in the musical forms of the area and encouraging her son to value intelligent and thoughtful lyrics. At the same time, Mr. Maal was listening to African-American musicians, such as James Brown, Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Etta James. Later he caught up with Jamaican musicians, such as Toots Hibbert, Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff.

Mr. Maal went to school in St. Louis, the original French colonial capital and, on winning an art scholarship, on to Senegal's modern capital, Dakar. There, he joined Asly Fouta, a group of 70 musicians, and learned as much as he could about the local musical instruments and how they worked. On leaving college, he toured West Africa with his longtime friend, guitarist and *griot*, Mansour Seck, soaking up more knowledge: "It is traditional for young musicians to do that. When you arrive in every village you do a gig. This makes you friendly with all the young people who are in the village. The next day, the young people take you to visit the oldest person who knows about the history of the village and the country and about the history of the music." Mr. Maal then lived in Paris for several years, studying at the Conservatoire des Beaux Arts, with ears still wide open. On returning to Senegal, Mr. Maal formed his band Daande Lenol ("Voice of the People").

As his work with the United Nations Development Programme signifies, Mr. Maal's vision extends beyond music. He often credits his mother with giving him a broader and more sympathetic view of the world than many of his contemporaries. He is a citizen of the developing world who has carved out a place for himself in the first world. Baaba Maal can speak and sing to and for Africa with unprecedented authority.