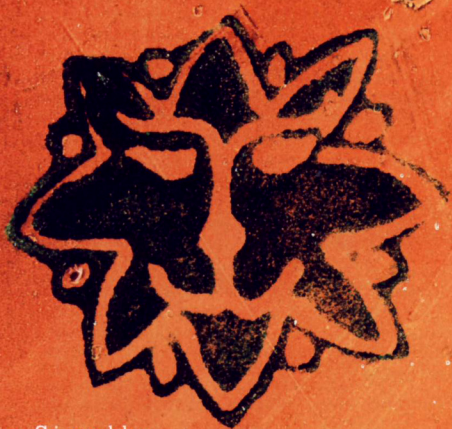


Jean-Jacques Avenel

« W A R A B A »



Yakhouba Sissokho

Lansiné Kouyaté

Moriba Koïta

Michel Édelin



The Manding world, which extends primarily through the Gambia, Guinea, Mali and Senegal, gave birth to a refined music of great richness, that of the *jelis* or griots. These musician tale-tellers and genealogists fascinated western travellers, from Ibn Battûta, the great Arabic traveller of the fourteenth century, to Mungo Park, the Scottish explorer who visited what is now Mali at the end of the eighteenth century.

Jean-Jacques Avenel is among those who have been seduced by this demanding music. The doublebassist is recognized for his work with musicians as renowned as Steve Lacy, with whom he has been associated now for more than twenty years, as well as Don Cherry, Pharoah Sanders, Mal Waldron, Paul Bley and David Murray, not forgetting his French friends Lionel Benhamou, Zool Fleischer, Michel Édelin, Benoît Delbecq and Jean-Louis Méchali. His interest in Manding music was doubtless stimulated in October 1977 when he heard for the first time live at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris the two greatest masters of the kora at that time, Sidiki Diabaté and Batourou Sékou Kouyaté. No doubt he was stunned like many in the audience by this previously unknown musical universe, but for him passive admiration was not enough. Acquiring an instrument from a Gambian master, he set himself to studying this harp by listening to recordings and by seeking out Gambian or Senegalese masters on tour or residing in France.

His encounter with two Manding musicians based in France who are from griot families, **Yakhouba Sissokho** and **Lansiné Kouyaté**, encouraged him some years ago to create the group Waraba (*The Lion*), joined later by the flute player **Michel Édelin**. He plays kora (here in *Pi-Pande* and *Jarabi*) but mostly doublebass, which he has discovered how to adapt with great judiciousness to the esthetics of the Manding world. The ngoni player **Moriba Koïta** joined the group for this recording.

Particular care has been taken in the recording of these sessions using the new Direct Stream Digital system, which recreates with remarkable accuracy the diversity and complementarity of the timbres of strings, xylophone and flute. The extent to which the investigation of those rich and variegated tone colours is one of the essential elements of the charm and refinement of Manding music is well understood.

Kora player Yakhoubba Sissokho was born in the Gambia where he began studying the instrument at the age of five under the tutelage of his father, who was the music director of the Théâtre Daniel Sorano in Dakar. He was a member of the troupe of the Ballet National du Sénégal before coming to France where he played in such ensembles as the Kodja Ballet, Mande Foli, and the Ganni Acoustic group.

Lansiné Kouyaté, a specialist on the bala, is from a village near Bamako in Mali. Born into one of the most prestigious jeli families, he quite naturally found a place in the Ensemble Instrumental du Mali at the age of fourteen. He then went to France where he racked up experience playing in very traditional contexts as well as with musicians such as Manu Dibango, Salif Keita, Mory Kanté and Positive Black Soul. He uses both pentatonic and diatonic xylophones.

Moriba Koita, master of the ngoni, was also born in Mali in the Bamako region. Like his colleagues he was involved with music from early childhood, and joined the Ensemble Instrumental du Mali. Subsequently he played with Malian stars such as Salif Keita, Fanta Damba, Kassé Mady Diabaté, Amy Koita and Kandia Kouyaté before establishing himself in France where he founded Mandé Foli and accompanied Manu Dibango, Mory Kanté and Sekouba Bambino Diabaté.

Michel Édelin plays several flutes here including alto flute and bass flute. After creating Triode and Flûtes Rencontre, he performed with musicians such as Andy Emler, Nico Nissim, François Couturier, François Mechali, Jacques Di Donato, Byard Lancaster and Jean-Jacques Avenel before joining Waraba. He has developed original ways of integrating his instrument with the group rather than trying to copy Fulani (Peul) flute players, who are generally associated with this music.

The repertoire of the group includes original compositions as well as classic griot tunes. *Lamba* is a very old piece that evokes the ancient Empire of Mali and is connected with the balafon and the Kouyaté family. Conceived for dance, it celebrates the fact of being a jeli. *Tubaka* is a love song, as is *Jarabi*, a modern piece that was probably originally worked out on guitar and exists in several versions. *Denko* is another classic; the words of the sung version tell us that «nothing is more precious than a child.» *Kaïra* («Peace» in Arabic), popularized by Sidiki Diabaté and later by his son Toumani, was originally composed on the accordion by the Guinean Gese Kemo Diabaté and became the theme song of a Malian youth movement around 1946.

(Henri Lecomte, translated by Tony Reif)



INSTRUMENTS :

BALA

The bala, better known in the West as the balafon (which means in fact to play the bala) is a xylophone consisting of a low frame on which are arranged from seventeen to twenty-one hardwood strips, from long to short. Under each of these keys is attached a calabash; the size of its opening is carefully matched with the key. Membranes cover one or more holes hollowed out of the sides of the gourds, which enriches the timbre. The range is about three octaves. The instrument, played with sticks whose ends are covered by strips of rubber, is usually pentatonic, but Yakhoubia Sissokho uses as well a diatonic instrument.

NGONI

The ngoni is a lute with a boat-shaped wood sound box covered by a skin soundboard. It remains very similar to the gongenti of the Egypt of the Pharaohs. Its cylindrical neck has from three to five strings, nowadays of nylon. It is played with the fingers and exists in several tonalities.

KORA

The kora is a harp-lute with twenty one nylon strings in two parallel rows. The strings are attached on one side and the other of a bridge and are perpendicular to the cowskin soundboard. The latter is stretched across a half-gourd pierced through by a cylindrical neck of sandalwood or sometimes mahogany. There are two sticks, one on either side of the neck, for holding the instrument. The strings are played with the thumb and index finger of each hand. A small hole, like the sound-hole of a violin, is cut in the side of the half-gourd.

1	LAMBA	7' 39''	Mande traditional
2	PI-PANDE	4' 32''	Jean-Jacques Avenel
3	BATOU KAGNI	5' 44''	Moriba Kolta
4	GUELEMA	5' 26''	Lansiné Kouyaté
5	N'DONDORÉ	6' 32''	Moriba Kolta
6	JARABI	5' 19''	Trad.
7	KAÏRA	6' 04''	Trad.
8	DENKO	4' 37''	Lansiné Kouyaté
9	DESTIN	6' 12''	Lansiné Kouyaté
10	TUBAKA	9' 42''	Trad.



TOTAL TIME 62' 12''

Info / bookings : jjavenel@free.fr

Produced by Benoît Delbecq

Executive producer : Tony Reif

Recorded to DSD February 7-9, 2003 by Thierry Balasse (Inouïe), and mixed in analogue to stereo and 5.0 DSD March 11-13, 2003 by Thierry Balasse assisted by Djengo Hartlap (Hartlap, Paris), at La Muse en Circuit, Alfortville-Paris. DSD engineer and editing : Djengo Hartlap. Mastered (SBM Direct) by Dawn Frank, Sony SACD Project, Boulder. Thanks to Roel Verberk, Sony Europe, Amsterdam, and Hask Collective Paris for their invaluable assistance.

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WARABA

Jean-Jacques Avenel

Yakhoubia Sissokho

Lansiné Kouyaté

Moriba Koita

Michel Édelin

double bass and kora

kora

bala

ngoni

flute, alto flute, bass flute

WARABA : the extraordinary
French bassist teams up with his
Mande friends for an intense set
of improvisations.

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Compositions

(SACEM) by
Jean-Jacques Avenel (2),
Moriba Koita (3,5),
Lansiné Kouyaté (4,8,9),
Mande traditional
(1,6,7,10).

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