

MONDAVI
CENTER
Arts Education

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Sheet
for Teachers

2008-09 SCHOOL MATINEE SERIES
**SONG AND DANCE ENSEMBLE
OF WEST AFRICA**

FRI, NOV 14, 2008 11 AM



ROBERT AND MARGRIT
MONDAVI CENTER
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
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SONG AND DANCE ENSEMBLE OF WEST AFRICA

DEAR TEACHERS:

We hope you find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at the Song and Dance Ensemble of West Africa school matinee at the Mondavi Center. This CueSheet provides background information on the Ensemble, as well as a review of audience protocol. The Song and Dance Ensemble of West Africa school matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, creates a rhythmic feast that blends traditional music of Togo, Senegal, Guinea, Ghana, Benin, the Ivory Coast, and Mauritania with a contemporary flair.



ABOUT THE SONG AND DANCE ENSEMBLE OF WEST AFRICA

Founded in 1985, the ensemble is composed of accomplished percussionists, musicians, and dancers from Mali (West Africa). The ensemble's colorful and engaging performances are inspired by traditional music and reflect the identity and personality of the group's West African musicians and dancers. The result is an authentic musical experience, with percussionists playing traditional instruments including the djembé, doundoun, and balafon; dancers whose muscles seem to be capable of any movement at any speed; and visually dazzling costuming and choreography.

The group is directed by Bamba Dembele, who is also a star of the Super Rail Band of Bamako, as well as the percussionist in the Super Djata band Karkar.

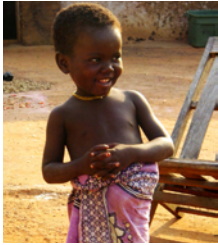
MUSIC OF WEST AFRICA

West Africa is far-reaching, stretching from the Sahara Desert to the Atlantic Ocean. The region's musical heritage includes a wide variety of popular music styles, especially from the countries of Senegal, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. In addition *griots*—wandering musicians and praise singers—are found throughout the region.



REPUBLIC OF MALI

A landlocked nation in Western Africa, Mali is the seventh largest country in Africa, bordering Algeria on the north, Niger on the east, Burkina Faso and the Côte d'Ivoire on the south, Guinea on the south-west, and Senegal and Mauritania on the west.



MANDINGO CULTURE

The Mandingo (also known as Mandinka) are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. They are the descendants of the great Empire of Mali, which rose to power

under the rule of the great Mandinka king Sundiata Keita. After unifying the kingdom, Sundiata began conquering the surrounding peoples. The Mali Empire was one of the great ancient civilizations of Africa that existed along the Gambia River in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The Mandinka have continued to live along the Gambia River into the present day.

The Mandinka live primarily in West Africa, particularly in the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, and even small communities in the central African nation of Chad.

Mandinka culture is rich in tradition, music, and spiritual ritual. Mandinkas continue a long oral history tradition through stories, songs, and proverbs.

The Mandinka have a rich oral history that is passed down through praise singers or *griots*. This passing down of oral history through music has made music one of the most distinctive traits of the Mandinka. They have long been known for their drumming and also for their unique musical instrument, the kora.

PROGRAM

Ensemble of musicians, singers, and dancers performing traditional Malian music mainly from Peuhl, Bambara and Mandingo.

INSTRUMENTS

Balaphon – Directly translated balaphon means talking wood. The balaphon belongs to the instrument family of the xylophone and is increasingly popular in Europe because of its warm, round sound. The Balaphon is the leading melody instrument in West African music and is played en ensemble with the drum. A wooden stand tied with leather thongs and different sizes of hollow gourds increase the sound range.



Balaphon

Bolon – a four-string bridge gourd harp.

Djembe – a skin-covered hand drum, shaped like a large goblet played with bare hands. Also known as djimbe, jenbe, jembe or yembe.

Doun Doun – a double-ended bass drum made with thick cow skin. Often the hair is left on the skin, which produces a warmer and mellower tone. It is the most commonly played as the bass for the djembe.

Kora – the kora is a twenty-one string harp-like instrument made out of a gourd covered with cow skin. The strings are made of fishing line. It is played to accompany a griot's singing or simply on its own.

N'Goni – a three- or four-stringed lute. When used for entertainment purposes, or at weddings, tabaski or ramadan, it may be accompanied by other instruments, singing, or clapping.



Djembe

Bolon

Doun Doun

N'Goni

Kora

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas, ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1 How would you describe the Song and Dance Ensemble of West Africa performance to a friend?
- 2 What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the dancers?
- 3 What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
- 4 Describe the instruments that the performers used. How did they affect the performance?



ATTENDING THE THEATER

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF STUDENT AUDIENCES AT THE MATINEE:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take your assigned seat immediately (*note that all matinees have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance; food is not allowed in the performance hall;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

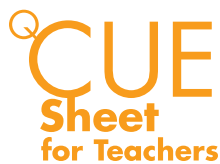
WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT OF YOUR EXPERIENCE IN A PERFORMING ARTS THEATER:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience—whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about—can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the perform-

ers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful.

Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.



ROBERT AND MARGRIT MONDAVI CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

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MONDAVI CENTER ARTS EDUCATION

CueSheets are provided for performances in the School Matinee Series. These study guides provide background information on the artists and art form and are intended to help teachers prepare their students for the school matinee that they will attend at Mondavi Center.

MondaviArts.org
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