

SADAMA DIABATE'S FADENYA

This is the **first** of three CDs intended to present the musical treasury of the Sambla-, Tusia- and Siamou-**Diabates**.

The Diabates have always been on the top of the West African music scene. The Sundjata epic from the 13th century explains how the name **Dian-baga-te** (the irresistible) was given to our ancestor, a hunter originally called Oulamba **Traore**. Since then we are **jelis**, for whom storytelling, composing and playing music is a family profession. This, however, doesn't mean that we adore the cold ashes of the past. There is a permanent artistic competition among us that guarantees the survival and, above all, the continuous development of our musical tradition. For us of the Mande culture, **Fa-den-ya** (children of the same father but not the same mother) is associated with challenge, courage, competition and aggression. That's why I named this CD-collection **Fadenya**.

Our original musical instrument might have been the **donso-ngoni** – the hunter's harp. Today, the Diabates in the north-western Mande area - Mali, Senegal and Gambia - mainly play the **kora**, a 23-string harp-lute. We in the Southeast - Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso - are more focused on the **balafon** (a xylophone).

After the disintegration of the Mande empire my ancestors headed to the East and at last they lived in the area of Orodara among the **Siamou** then in Banfoulagbe among the **Tusia**. The ruler of the **Sambla** in **Takon** (Kongolikan on the modern maps) was so attracted by the culture of the Siamou and Tusia - where the balafon plays a central role in all aspects of life - that he convinced my ancestor **SiGonbita** to become his jeli and settle down in **Tué** (Torosso on the modern maps). SiGonbita had not only introduced the balafon and its extensive use in everyday life but its faculty of speech too. To do this, however, he had to adapt the tuning of his balafon to the language of the Sambla.

The most striking feature in the music of the Siamou, Tusia and Sambla is the rich ornamented virtuoso balafon solo. You could say that it speaks! Indeed, what outsiders consider to be beautiful music is in reality our language transposed into music. We learn it in early childhood alongside the spoken language. We can tell everything verbally expressible with the tunes of the balafon.

Today we can resort to an unimaginably rich balafon tradition. Each village, each important family, and every profession has its own piece of music that functions like a **coat of arms**. Music is composed for every important occasion, and any work carried out by the village community is accompanied by music.

In 2002, with my CD **Keneya**, I have already published some highlights of the **Sambla** music-tradition. Now I am very happy, to release a new selection with my brother **Sadama** as a soloist. He, now the head of the Sambla-Diabates, is not only a brilliant interpreter of the tradition but also a gifted composer. Some of his compositions are so popular that many believe they belong to the core of the Sambla-tradition. My brother **Sabwe** plays the first accompaniment in the bass, Sadama's son **Diaka** plays the second accompaniment and my great-uncle **GoGardi** plays the dundun.

1. JELIYA

This piece is the coat of arms of my family. Sadama lists here the age old duties, rights and prohibitions that jelis have to keep in mind.

2. MOGOTIGIYA

Sadama explains here the old Sambla-wisdom, why the possession of one's own family and especially children (**Mogotigiya**) is of higher value than material wealth (**Waritigya** or **Fentigiya**).

3.KONYO DON

This piece controls the flow of the traditional wedding ceremony of the Sambla. The jeli at the balafon welcomes the attendees, praises the bride, the groom and their families. Then he questions the bride people in detail, whether they are willing to respect the obligations and the rights arising from the marriage. Of course, all this without opening the mouth, because all people understand the balafon language. The bridal party responds verbally.

4.KAMALEN DIABO

If a Sambla youth wants to get married he has to prove his ability to take care for his future family, otherwise he has no chance to marry the girl he desires. Young men used to challenge each other at their work to see who was the strongest. This "competition" is hard and long, because it starts with the sowing and ends after the harvest. In this praise-song Sadama tells the story of a Sambla-youth from the remote past, who, due to his work ethic, diligence and performance, stands to this day as an ideal.

5.SAYA

This music is played at funerals. In many places, not only in Africa, death (**Saya**) is perceived as the epitome of evil and destruction, and as the antithesis to the divine order of creation. In cases of death it is common that enraged spirits (**Jinne**) or evil sorcerers (**Subaga**) become suspected as perpetrators. It is then necessary to calm the spirits or to persecute and punish the sorcerer. "This is absolutely wrong." - says Sadama. "The Creator God (**San**) alone decides on life and death."

6.TSYE DIAN

This was once the coat of arms of the highly respected **SaTen**, a very wealthy and, due to his power, a fearsome Sambla.

7.KWA GULI

With this piece the jeli opens the working season on the fields, as the first rain ends the dry season. This is one of the rare pieces played by a single musician. **Kwa guli** means: Fetch the hoe!

8.SIBORO SO

This song was the coat of arms of **SiBoro**, installed as the "Chef de Canton Sambla" by the French in 1915. He was a faithful servant of the colonial power and a representative of the new rulers, who mainly used their position for their own benefit. Since he didn't understand the balafon language, he could not know that this praise song, composed by my great-grandfather **SiMongwa**, was to denounce his tyranny and the suffering of the forced labourers.

9.SAMA

This piece was originally the coat of arms of the **Sama** (Elephant) family. With a slight change (stating the elephant is **not** the ruler) it became a dedication to **SiBoro**. What he could not have recognised was the reference to an ancient fable, where the rabbit, a small nobody (**SiBoro**), stirred up hatred between the elephant (traditional African rulers) and the lion (French colonial power), to benefit from it.

10. TIMI GOSARA SO

This is an ancient praise song for the very first village chief of **Timi** (Karankasso on a modern map). Festivals in Timi always start with this song because it has become the coat of arms of the village. Elsewhere this music is played to honour guests from Karankasso.

11. SIPE SO

This virtuosic piece of music is the **Kamalen-Donkili** and, at the same time, the personal coat of arms of my ancestor **SiPe** from the second half of the 19th century. He was a very famous and wealthy jeli, an unsurpassed balafon virtuoso. The most difficult pieces of Sambla music-tradition are attributed to him. Here he sang about his wealth in terms of **Mogotigiya**. In the Mande world **Kamalen** (young man) is associated with strength, courage and energy. **Donkili** means song.

12. MUSO NYUMAN

This mischievous piece is the **Kamalen-Donkili** and the personal coat of arms, of my father, Penegue, who was a notorious womaniser. "**Muso nyuman te kelen ye**" (there are plenty of good women) - he often said.

13. YENDO GO

This music calls to **Yendogo**, the most ancient and powerful spirit of the Sambla, if somebody or the community is in need. Yendogo gives his answer or advice through the medium, who has the ability to fall in trance. He resides in **Kuruwoko** (Surukudinka on modern maps) and he is revered far beyond the borders of the Sambla country. When calling Yendogo, his wife **Musokoronin** must also be called.

14. MUSOKORONIN

This music calls to **Musokoronin**, the Earth Mother, the wife of **Yendogo**. Traditionally, she should only be called together with her husband.

Mamadou Diabate