



Eye for Talent, Inc.

The Best in World Music

Mamadou Diabate
CD Review – *Douga Mansa*
Songlines – Nov/Dec 2008

“This album is comprised of single-take recordings” say the liner notes of this fourth album from the US-based kora musician Mamadou Diabaté. While Malian-born Diabaté, barely in his 30s, riffs and rolls the harp’s 20-odd strings through its paces, one can’t help but give a thankful thought that some music, somewhere, is still made in this way. The result of this style of recording from someone so young and talented is 12 tracks of clean, clear, musical excellence, pushing Diabaté to his limit, while he keeps masterful control of the whole creation.

Anyone who has listened at any depth to kora player Toumani Diabaté or had the chance to hear any of the traditional Mandinka repertoire from the Gambia or Guinea, will recognize elements of many of these songs - performed entirely solo. Where some of the traditionals can feel hard to access, Mamadou Diabaté’s great skill is in improvising his own way, making seemingly light work of these West African classics. *Bolomabory* is a fine example of this, an improvised track recorded at the end of the recording session which explores the strings he felt had been left out in the other tracks – it’s exceptional stuff.

The melodies are light and sparkly, the bass lines rip and reverberate at just the right moments, and there’s a good pace throughout. These are not songs for quiet contemplation – there’s plenty of time for young Diabaté to don a woolly cap and pluck away under the acacia tree in later life. Instead, these are songs full of ideas, innovation and youthful interpretation. This might just be the new contender to the kora throne.

Rose Skelton