



MWLDAN

**CATRIN FINCH
SECKOU KEITA**

CLYCHAU DIBON

PRESS & MARKETING PACK



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PRESS QUOTES

"an intriguing collaboration that really works... Catrin Finch is a celebrated harpist...this is (Seckou Keita's) most satisfying work to date.... the interaction is remarkable...an elegant, gently exquisite set".

Robin Denselow, The Guardian ****

"a sublime duo of two artists who are masters of their instruments...musicality and architecture at work"

Simon Broughton, London Evening Standard *****

"Blissful"

Financial Times *****

"Using every trick in the rock manual to dynamic effect...magical" **David Hutcheon, MOJO ******

'gorgeous, eloquent, elegant music'

Thomas Brooman CBE

"something quite different.. a really intriguing collaboration... it works so beautifully together – a beautiful album."

Mark Radcliffe, BBC Radio 2

"intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas-de-deux... remarkable"

Neil Spencer, Uncut Magazine

"heavenly music.. that soars, intricately realised, pretty wonderful"

Nigel Williamson, Songlines ****

"Some people spend a lot of money on illegal substances in order to attain the kind of mood this music evokes."

fRoots

"Old Welsh harp songs, Manding kora staples, Latin dashes, Celtic arias and more woven together to create something new that also possessed enough depth to sound sage, even timeless..the marriage of harp and kora seems blessed to be long, warm and fruitful."

Andy Morgan

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Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita: Clychau Dibon – review

(Astar Artes/Mwldan)

★★★★★



Robin Deneslow

theguardian.com, Thursday 10 October 2013 22.30 BST

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Gently exquisite ... Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita

Here's an intriguing Welsh/West African collaboration that really works. Catrin Finch is a celebrated harpist who is best-known for her classical playing but has also worked with the Colombian band Cimarrón and Malian kora virtuoso Toumani Diabaté, while Seckou Keita was born into a griot family in Senegal, now lives in Nottingham, and is the most inventive British-based exponent of the kora, the West African harp. In the past, he has matched African themes against Cuban and flamenco influences, and shown how the kora can be used to play jazz-funk, but this new set of instrumental duets is his most satisfying work to date. The interaction between the two players is remarkable, with the melody lines constantly switching between the kora and harp, as sturdy African themes are mixed with Welsh melodies, and they switch between tranquil, hypnotic passages and more rapid-fire improvisations. An elegant, gently exquisite set.

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Robin Deneslow, The Guardian 11 October 2013



CATRIN FINCH & SECKOU KEITA

Cylchau Dibon

ASTAR AND THEATR MWLDAN

8/10

**Magical suite from
Welsh harpist and
Senegalese kora player**

A star of the classical

world, Catrin Finch has worked with Colombia's Cimarron and Mali kora virtuoso Toumani Diabaté. This set with Senegalese griot Kiata explores the correspondences between the harps of Europe and Africa, an encounter playfully caught by one title, "Robert Ap Huw Meets Nialing Soko". Both players draw on ancient traditions, with mediaeval Welsh airs like "Caniad Gosteg" finding symmetry with C16 Manding tunes like "Macki". The result is a set that's intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas de deux that creates, as one stand-out puts it, "Future Strings". Remarkable.

NEIL SPENCER

NOVEMBER 2013 | UNCUT | **69**

fROOTS

•REVIEWS•

CATRIN FINCH & SECKOU KEITA

Clychau Dibon Astar Mwldan AARCD 025

She was a highly respected Welsh harpist, he was a Nottingham-based master of the West



African kora... together they made beautiful music! No, not the tagline for the unlikeliest rom-com ever made, but rather a description of *Clychau Dibon*, a meeting of musical minds that works like a treat. You can read the cover story of *fRoots* 361 to find out the tale behind the album, but you really don't need to know the details in order to appreciate the simple pleasures on offer here. Finch and Keita play with and around each other as if Wales and Mali were natural musical bedfellows. At times it's hard to work out who's playing what, as the strings ripple and shimmer for all they're worth. There are many wonderful contemplative moments here, but surprising improvisatory edges and flourishes too, with both players pushing just enough to move things away from the pleasant and twee. Some people spend a lot of money on illegal substances in order to attain the kind of mood this music evokes.

www.astarmusic.co.uk

October 18, 2013 7:22 pm

Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita: Clychau Dibon

By David Honigmann

A royal harpist from Wales teams up with another court harpist from Senegal, swapping tunes from both traditions

A royal harpist from Wales teams up with a kora player (which is to say, another court harpist) from Senegal.

Finch and Keita swap tunes from both traditions, one taking the lead while the other fills and improvises around the edges, then seamlessly trading places.

'Robert Ap Huw Meets Nialing Sonko' is the centrepiece: 16th century harp tunes playing off against the blissful melodies of the Casamance.

★★★★★

Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita

Clychau Dibon

(Astar Artes/Mwldan)



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Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita

Clychau Dibon

Astar Artes (56 mins)



*The Welsh harp meets its
Malian equivalent*



The Welsh-born
Catrin Finch has
made her name
playing harp
with some of
the world's most

prestigious orchestras, yet she's no stranger to imaginative cross-cultural collaborations, having worked in the past with Toumani Diabaté and the Colombian band Cimarron. The *kora* player Seckou Keita, descended from a line of Senegalese *griots* but resident in London since 1997, is a similarly well-travelled fusionist. Together they make heavenly music in which harp and kora combine in a Celtic-Mande string summit that soars vertiginously. Instead of merely jamming together and spontaneously following wherever the serendipity of their strings led them (which probably would have sounded pretty wonderful in itself), the seven lengthy tracks here are fully developed, intricately realised compositions that represent a genuine confluence of their different cultures. 'Les Bras de Mer' for example includes snatches of the old Welsh air 'The Bells of Aberdovey' stitched seamlessly into a brace of ancient Mande melodies. And so the collaboration goes on, blending not just strings and notes but stories and histories, the alchemy perfectly captured by John Hollis' sympathetic production.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRY *Bamba*

SONGLINES, NOV 2013

London Evening Standard 11 Oct 13

WORLD

CATRIN FINCH & SECKOU KEITA

Clychau Dibon

(Astar Artes)

★★★★★

Welsh harp and Senegalese kora – a sublime duo of two artists who are masters of their instruments. Yet it might not have worked, because both instruments are plucked and often it's better to have more contrasted textures. But just listening to the way the opening track builds up, you can feel a sense of musicality and architecture at work with both artists drawing on the traditional repertoire of their respective cultures. Both of them are no strangers to collaboration, but this is their most seductive. The overall effect is of a rich web of sound, but they bring moments of drama when necessary. I also suspect that it's something that will get more intriguing and appealing the better you get to know it.

Simon Broughton

The Guardian's Robin Deneslow chose Clychau Dibon as one of this top 5 world music albums of 2013

Finch & Seckou Keita

The best albums of 2013: Robin Deneslow's world music albums of the year

lec/23/robin-denselow-top-five-world-music-albums-of-2013

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What was happening outside the world of rock and pop? Let our world music expert take you on a tour of the globe

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"Intriguing fusion project" ... harpists Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita

Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita: Clychau Dibon (Astar Artes/Mwldan)

This is an intriguing fusion project in which Catrin Finch, the celebrated Welsh harp player, teamed up with Seckou Keita, an exponent of the West African harp, the kora. The result is an elegant instrumental set that mixes tranquil, hypnotic passages with rapid-fire improvisation, as the melody lines constantly switch between the two instruments.

Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino: Pizzica Indiviolata (Puglia Sounds)

One of the most exciting bands at WOMAD this summer, Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino are from southeast Italy and play pizzica, a style said to cure spider bites, thanks to the pounding, hypnotic effect of the insistent frame drum, matched against fiddle, bagpipes, accordion and five-part harmonies.

Phillip Henry and Hannah Martin: Mynd (Dragonfly Roots)

This duo started out as West Country buskers, and are remarkable both for their multi-instrumental skills, playing slide guitar, fiddle, banjo and

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Posted by Robin Deneslow
Monday 23 December 2013
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7 Days Of Funk

★★★★★

7 Days Of Funk

STONES THROW. CD/DL/LP

Snoop Dogg and Dam-Funk unite to "reconnect the mothership".



Having sold over 30 million albums in the 20 years since his debut *Doggystyle*, Snoop Dogg can well afford a little playtime. After last year's headlong but ultimately overcooked venture into roots reggae that was *Reincarnated*, the Long Beach legend recasts himself here as Snoopzilla, in homage to Bootsy Collins, while hooking up with Pasadena's rapidly rising boogie ambassador, Dam-Funk. The gangsta rap equivalent of donning a silk smoking jacket and fluffy slippers, Snoop is in surprisingly tender form on love paeans *Let It Go* and *1 Question*, over woozy synth bass-lines, handclaps and gossamer chordal swooshes. Beats that draw on Parliament, Zapp, Patrice Rushen and Rick James seem to have sharpened Snoop's blunted weapon of a voice on a satisfyingly Zen half-hour of blissful analogue warmth.

Andy Cowan

Africa Express

★★★★★

Maison Des Jeunes

TRANSGRESSIVE. CD/DL

Ad hoc global collective hunker down for a week in a studio in Bamako, Mali.



Previously a Damon Albarn-instigated live phenomenon, Africa Express's debut long-player marries a tranche of Malian musicians with an

eclectic sprinkling of visiting Western producers and artists. Named for the youth club on the banks of the Niger where the album was captured, its 11 essays range from the subtlest hybrids (Two Inch Punch's discreet electronic sieving of Adama Koita's lilting Fantainfalla *Toyé Bolo*; Albarn's hands-off production of Gambari and Kankou Kouyaté's elegant desert ballad, *Yamoro*) to full-on crossbreeds (Timbuktu combo Songhoy Blues in rocking alliance with Yeah Yeah Yeahs' axeman Nick Zinner on *Soubour*) and oblique interventions (Brian Eno's sibilant reverb treatments on Yacouba Sissoko Band's urgent *Chanson Denko Tapestry*). Not an entirely novel idea – WOMAD began provoking spontaneous international cross-fertilisation three decades ago – Africa Express score by proffering a raw immediacy and innovative spirit that instantly expels any whiff of imperialist musical tourism.

David Sheppard



Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita

★★★★★

Clychau Diben

ASTAR ARTES/MWLDAN. CD/DL

Welsh harp meets West African kora.

One player comes from Aberystwyth, west Wales, the other from Ziguinchor, southern Senegal, but the differences don't amount to much when they are in a room together. The two merge,

playing lead, rhythm and bass, weaving as if they'd been doing it all their lives rather than thrown together when Toumani Diabaté couldn't make a date with the Welsh virtuoso. Finch's roots in formal classical music suggest she could have wilted in the face of the in-your-blood improvisational griot tradition (just as Keita should struggle through not being able to read music), but the result is seven instrumentals that demand you turn the volume up to get the effect of the strings not just dancing around each other but using every trick in the rock manual to dynamic effect – check the way *Ceffylau* builds over five minutes, from gallop to frenzy. Magical.

David Hutcheon



Broken Bells

★★★★★

After The Disco

COLUMBIA. CD/DL/LP

Shins-man and Danger Mouse deliver downcast second album.

Over the years, pop has proved as apposite a vehicle for exploring midlife crises as it has been for teenage kicks, and so it is for the second full-length from Broken Bells, the ongoing collaboration between Shins-chief James Mercer and Danger Mouse. *After The Disco* is a set of songs about negotiating the transition between fantasy and reality when – as the title track puts it – "all of the shine just fades away". If that makes the album sound like a bummer, that's

without banking on Mercer and Mouse's gift for expertly-produced melodiousness, which lends sweetness to a slightly bitter lyric sheet, and recalls *H2O*-era Hall & Oates and late-period ELO with its tightly-polished blue-eyed-soul and poised pop. On the lissom ache of *Lazy Wonderland* and the melancholy lilt of *Leave It Alone* in particular, the disillusionment makes for downbeat and decidedly adult pop.

Stevie Chick

Sophie Ellis-Bextor

★★★★★

Wanderlust

EBG'S. CD/DL

Disco diva kicks off her dancing shoes.



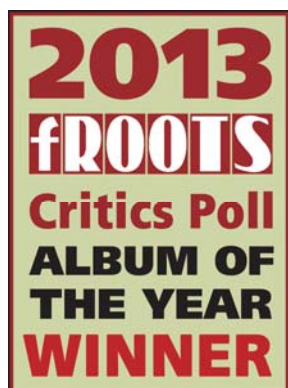
While her *Strictly Come Dancing* stint ensured a quickstep back into the nation's affections, Sophie Ellis-Bextor leaves the dancefloor – murderous or otherwise – behind with her fifth album. Co-written, arranged and recorded with E! Harcourt, *Wanderlust* sees the singer execute an elegant slide into a more stately kind of pop. Ellis-Bextor knows how to whistle up a sense of drama, and *Wanderlust* deliberately embarks on a retro grand tour, the chandelier-crash and cut-glass crunch of *Birth Of An Empire* and *Until The Stars Collide* suggesting stolen icon wrapped in furs and unspeakable happenings at the embassy. *Cry To The Beat Of The Band* features a Bulgarian choir and *Love Is A Camera* is a folkloric old-world waltz, but if *Wanderlust*'s destination is an imaginary bohemia, its roots lie in a charming English eccentricity.

Victoria Segal

A W A R D S

SONGLINES BEST ALBUM 2013

- CLYCHAU DIBON has been named as one of the prestigious **Songlines Magazine Best Ten Albums of 2013** – the first ever Welsh artist / project to be featured



- Clychau Dibon has been awarded the fRoots Critics Poll Album of the Year 2013 (announced on 6th December). Every year since 1986 fRoots has polled experts in the UK and worldwide to select the Album Of The Year in the fields of music which the magazine champions – folk, roots and world music. With over 300 writers, broadcasters and activists on the panel, the fRoots Critics Poll for Album Of

The Year is long established as the most extensively researched and prestigious annual poll of its kind, the de facto flagship industry award.

- Catrin and Seckou have been nominated for two BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards – *Best Duo*, and *Best Traditional Track* for 'Les Bras de Mer' (winners to be announced on 19th February 2014)

fRoots Magazine interview with Andy Morgan

Catrin and Seckou appeared on the fRoots front cover July 2013 edition, accompanied by a 5 page feature by Andy Morgan.







Queen & King Of Strings

It's a pairing of two virtuoso players from ancient harp traditions – Catrin Finch from Wales and Seckou Keita from Senegal. Andy Morgan digs into harp history and many stringed chemistry. Photos: Judith Burrows.

Old rivers and new lands. Fishing line and pumpkins. Fish and chips. Our story is about strange pairings that cut across elemental frontiers; about places, lives and legends that mirror each other in curious, even startling ways; about the unexpected symmetry that belies the chaos of human variety.

It was a breezy Monday morning in late March of 2012 and the world's greatest kora player, Toumani Diabaté, had just spent the night sleeping on the couch in the suite of a prestigious hotel in Cardiff. He could have slept in the hotel bed of course, but he became absorbed in the music of Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita and Welsh harpist Catrin Finch tinkling through his headphones, and ended up dozing off on the couch.

There was a certain urgency in the act of listening to that music. Toumani Diabaté was due to start a five date sold-out tour with Catrin Finch that same evening; just the two of them, on stage with their instruments. But with only hours to go before showtime, Toumani had yet to set eyes on her. In lieu of more conventional preparations, he had spent the night listening to a rehearsal for the tour which he hadn't been able to attend. Instead, his place had been taken graciously and capably by Seckou Keita. "This is beautiful," Toumani declared when he was eventually shaken from his slumbers on the couch, "I love it."

Toumani had arrived at Heathrow airport at midnight the night before and travelled to Cardiff where he was greeted by the mightily relieved figure of friend and tour co-producer John Hollis. "Ah!... Dolphin John!" he exclaimed, in reference to an idea that Hollis had once proposed to Toumani back in the late 1980s. Much had changed since then, but John's reunion with Toumani had a certain circularity about it, like dolphins returning to some fondly-remembered patch of water in a vast ocean.

John and Toumani had become friends and fellow-travellers back in the late 1980s when Toumani was virtually unknown outside Mali and West Africa, like the kora, the instrument he played. The pair spent a couple of years touring the world together, hanging out, swapping sounds – dub, reggae, Bristol mash-ups – sharing interminable flights and bus rides, shooting the breeze, dreaming dreams. John even sent Toumani a few cassettes of Celtic harp music and Toumani had even tried playing with a classical

harpist from Holland. It was just one hybrid idea amongst many. John also tour-managed Amadou Bansang Jobarteh, Toumani's gentle and inspiringly humble kora-playing grand-uncle, the guardian of Toumani's father Sidiki Diabaté, yet another kora legend. It felt like a family affair and John's memories of the period are warm and golden.

In the end, Toumani struck off to become the Grammy-award winning Franz Liszt of the West African kora and John drifted into the family of Toto La Momposina, the Colombian singer whom he managed for years and whose daughter he married. But John always pined for those Manding melodies of West Africa. "That whole African experience felt like something very familiar, very comfortable," he remembers. "Like I'd already been there in a previous life or something. I missed it a lot."

Twenty years later, the harp and kora idea returned like the echo of a past life or an insistent genie that refused to take no for an answer. Strangely, both John Hollis and his co-producer Dilwyn Davies from the Theatr Mwldan in Cardigan had been nursing the same vision of an Afro-Celtic wedding of strings. Having already masterminded several successful encounters between Catrin Finch and the Colombian group Cimarron, who play a hot-rod version of the harp-heavy joropo music of the Los Llanos plains of eastern Colombia, the idea of a West African harp connection seemed both logical and strangely predestined. Both John and Dilwyn knew that if it was to be done at all, it had to be with the best of the best; with musicians who were so fluid and confident with their own instrument that they would have no fear in coupling it with a distant relative from another world.

The harp slot was a no-brainer. Catrin Finch had already given rock solid account of her exquisite virtuosity and fearlessness to the entire classical music establishment, Prince Charles and even more importantly, to John and Dilwyn themselves. As for the kora, well, there was only one possible option there too. "Toumani... it has to be!" thought John, despite the fact that his old friend was now in the champions' league and busy fielding constant offers from around the world, most of which he was in the habit of turning down. Calls were made to agents and managers, and, to the complete and utter amazement of most people concerned except perhaps John himself, Toumani agreed without a

second's consideration. It turned out that Toumani and his manager had already been looking to hook a harpist themselves but hadn't found the right partner. And above all, that old friendship, those old memories just made this project feel right. Toumani was on board and, with help from the Arts Council of Wales, that insistent genie was finally going to get its way.

Late on the evening of March 21st 2012, Toumani boarded a plane at Bamako airport bound for Paris and ultimately Wales. While he was in the air, a group of disgruntled Malian soldiers led by a hitherto unknown army officer called Captain Amadou Sanogo overthrew the democratically elected president of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré, and drop-kicked Toumani's homeland into the worse crisis it has known since independence. When Toumani landed in Paris he called Bamako and heard shots being fired in the distance behind the troubled voices of family members. His home was only a short distance from the Presidential Palace on Koulouba Hill. He was worried.

All this made him averse to the idea of travelling on to Cardiff immediately. Each day that passed, Toumani's manager was on the phone to John and Dilwyn, trying to find solutions. Each day Toumani was talking feverishly with his family back home and with Malian expats in Paris, dissecting the situation and speculating about the future of their country. Each day Catrin Finch grew more and more concerned. Meanwhile rehearsal time began to disappear in the rear-view mirror.

At last, what seemed like a definite arrival date was scheduled for the Saturday 24th March, two days before the first show on the tour. Meanwhile, John took the precaution of inviting Seckou Keita to step in and help Catrin rehearse a repertoire. Seckou was in Rome when he got the call: Can you get your butt over here... rapido?!

Although he was a busy man, Seckou responded manfully to this request and flew back to the UK to join Catrin at Acapela, the studio that she'd built with her sound-engineer husband Hywel Wigley in an old chapel in the village of Penttyrch near Cardiff. "Seckou and Toumani spoke to each other about the repertoire," John remembers. "And Seckou was just solid and professional. Between the three of us – myself, Seckou and Catrin – we put the show together in about six hours."



Through no fault of his own, Toumani didn't make the Saturday night flight. He managed to get on another flight the next day, but his kora managed to miss it. In the end, both finally arrived in Wales, separately but intact.

After emerging from his suite in that Cardiff hotel late-ish on that Monday morning, groggy with lack of sleep but energised by the sweet music that had been bubbling between his ears all night, Toumani came down to the hotel lobby where John was waiting for him. "Mmmm... right, John, mon ami!" Toumani declared, yawning and rubbing his hands together as he breathed in the cool morning air. "Time for some fish and chips don't you think?"

The day was already past its prime. Catrin Finch was pacing the corridors of the theatre wondering how several days worth of rehearsals had scoped themselves down to just a few hours, and even those few hours were now in doubt. "I'm amazed she didn't just walk out," the theatre's marketing manager Tamsin Davies told me. The stress was almost unbearable but a steely courage and belief held things on course. John just wrapped his nerves in ice and kept going. "It was one of those times when I thought... you know... it's not life or death," he remembers. "I kept telling Dilwyn 'It's gonna be alright, trust me!'"

And so it was. Welsh faeries and West African djinns (spirits) took control of events. Toumani finally arrived at the theatre, gracious as only the scion of 77 generations of West African griots can be. There were a few precious hours of preparation before showtime and then the greatest kora player in the world and finest young harpist in Britain took to the stage and something very special just clicked. At the interval, a member of the audience came up to Catrin and said, "That was beautiful! You must have been working on it for months!" "Er... well... a few hours actually," she answered.

As the week progressed this shotgun wedding of the strings just got better. Toumani was flying high on the whole experience, driving through the emerald wetness of Wales with John listening to wicked tunes on the car stereo, just like old times. "We had a great week," says John, "but respect to Seckou, he saved the day!" And it was in recognition of that fact that Seckou was asked to come along and do guests spots with the duo in Brecon and Cardiff.

"Seckou's guest appearance in Cardiff was magnificent," John recalls. "He came on with great charisma but also humility, leaving enough room for Toumani, who was gracious and humble in return, showing respect for Seckou and giving him space to perform. Their elegant interaction was touching." The whole traumatic affair ended on a blissful high and everyone was happy. "Yeah, it was a catalogue of events," Catrin admits with the comfortable smile of hindsight, "and that's how Seckou and I met really."

Everyone wanted to carry on. Talk of international tours, albums and seemingly limitless possibilities remained feverish for a while. But then the faeries and genies intervened again, steering fate down a side alley and onto a different trajectory, as they always do. Priorities. Commitments. Fate. It just couldn't be. In the end, John asked Seckou to step in again, for good this time.

The road ahead was already well mapped out. A few dry runs in the spring of 2013. Then into the studio to record a new album. Then a UK tour. Then an international tour. Then the world, the heavens and... the rest is for the djinns and faeries to decide. Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita were now entrusted with the delicate task of consummating this wedding... or maybe, this 'reunion' of strings.

The moment has come to step back a few centuries, perhaps even millennia. No one can possibly put a date on the moment when the hunter realised that the bow which he used to shoot his prey and feed his family could also be plucked to make patterns with sound and placate the spirits. No doubt voices and claps and hands on skin or wood came first, but after that, it was the tightened string. Like Lucy, our common African ancestor, that first huntsman and his bow were the progenitors of dazzling variety: the koto, kundi, enanga, mangbetu harp, ardin, yaal, veena, lyre, konghou, kafir harp, clarsach, crwth, guzheng, guqin, arpa jarocha, arpa llanera, arpa huayno, double harp, triple harp, concert harp, gravikord, cross-strung harp... the list is almost endless. What's certain is that this is the oldest family of instruments in the world and that the Welsh harp and the kora are cousins, which, given six degrees of separation, is probably true of us all.

No one is 100 percent sure of how the kora came into being. Strangely, the first person ever to mention it was a Scotsman, Mungo Park, who, in an account of the life and culture of the "Mandingo" people of the Gambia river region which he wrote after his travels there in 1795-7, mentions "a large harp with eighteen strings" called a "korro". Historians and ethnomusicologists broadly agree that the kora evolved out of simpler lyres, less well-endowed in terms of strings and majestic sophistication, about 300 years ago in the Manding Empire of Kaabu which spread over territory now in the West African states of Guinea, Senegal and The Gambia. One thing that most local people also agree on however is that the kora was given to mankind by the djinns. Good music always comes to us from the other side.

The Gambian jali or griot Bamba Suso opens his rendition of the great epic of Sunjata Keita, the founder of the medieval Empire of Mali that stretched from Atlantic coast to Timbuktu and Gao, with the following lines:

"This tune that I am now playing I learned it from my father / And he learned it from my grandfather. / Our grandfather's name – Koriyang Musa. / That Koriyang Musa / Went to Sanimentereng and spent a week there. / He met the jinns, and brought back a kora. / The very first kora."

Seckou Keita, born into one of the most eminent griot clans in Senegambia, but with a name that hints at a more regal ancestry, has his own take on the kora's origins. "There are a lot of versions of how the kora was discovered, or, in other words, passed down from the djinns," he told me. "The first guy who received it was Jali Mady Wuleng – Griot Mady 'The Red'. I've always tried to find out why that 'red'? And the pillow of the kora, the pad that goes on top of the bridge on which the strings rest, is always called 'the red'. I've been given a lot of answers as to why that it is, but I haven't got to the truth yet." Interestingly, the word 'jali' or 'djeli', meaning 'griot', is often claimed to have an etymological affinity



with another Mandé word meaning 'blood'. Blood lines, the blood of sacrifice, the flow of great rivers, the flow of life blood red... who knows?

That first kora, built by spirits, had 22 strings but when Jali Mady Wuleng died, one was taken away to mark his passing. Since then, most koras have always had 21 strings.

The jali's roles in life are multiple: musician, oral archivist, genealogist, diplomat, emissary, match-maker, instrument-maker, blacksmith, poet, advisor, spokesperson, flatterer and repository of all traditional knowledge. He's the Swiss Army knife of African bards. Simply put, his duty is to serve great men; kings, warriors, chieftains, clan heads, local dignitaries, wealthy businessmen, patriarchs, matriarchs, prime ministers and presidents. His powers of memory are crucial. John Hollis talks about Toumani Diabaté as having "a griot's memory," in other words one that can recall small but significant details that most of us burn off in the flitting frenzy of our daily lives.

The true jali needs the kind of memory that can reel off 50 generations and end with the following: "Jali Bambou Koumady Cissokho begat Jali Bamba Ba ('Bamba The Great') begat Jali 'Boutata' ('Big Belly Button') Cissokho begat Jali Falaye Cissokho who begat Jali Sambou Cissokho who begat Jali Kemo Ba Cissokho who begat Jali Mady Cissokho who begat Jali Kemo Cissokho who married Bintou 'Ando' Konte, who also came from a long line of griots. Jali Kemo and Bintou Konte's eldest daughter was Fatou Bintou Cissokho and she married a man who came from afar, drawn by a mysterious compul-

sion to the Casamance region of southern Senegal. His name was Elhaji Mamadou 'Soumah' Keita. They had only one son and his name was Seckou Keita, who was born in 1978.

Seckou Keita grew up in Ziguinchor, the capital of Casamance, a strip of land split from the rest of Senegal by the long snaky ex-British colony of The Gambia. His father Mohammed disappeared soon after he was born and his grandfather Jali Kemo, a strict and exacting man, became his guardian and teacher. At the age of seven Seckou started learning how to build koras out of a large uneatable pumpkin called a calabash, a trunk of rosewood or teak, a covering of cow hide and strings made from fishing line. He also had to 'test' play them. A kora must be played endlessly by young child apprentices before its sound 'matures' properly. At the age of 14 he was allowed to master the basic repertoire, especially the cycle of songs about an old Manding warrior hero called Kelefa Saane, which are considered to be the ABC of any aspiring kora player. At the age of 21, according to his grandfather's strict code of jali / kora education, he was free to go out into the world and practice his art.

The truth is that by the time he reached the age of a 'full set of strings', Seckou Keita had already chosen his own path and rebelled against the strictures imposed on him by Jali Kemo and other family elders. He had become expert on various local drums – *seourouba*, *sabar*, *djembe* – and used to skive off school to jam endlessly and perform with local Ziguinchor bands, before returning in the wee wee hours only to have his grandfather

wake him at 5am for morning prayers at the mosque next door. At the age of 17, he accompanied his uncle, the hugely successful and popular kora player Solo Cissokho, on a visit to Norway and then, a year later, to India.

Seckou Keita became, like most of his contemporaries in the Cissokho clan, a West African equivalent of Jules Verne's character Jean Passepartout, in other words, a well-travelled self-reliant survivor whose only weapons were wit, charm, self-belief and, in the Cissokho's case, music. Seckou eventually married and settled in the UK from where he toured the world with Womad and various bands, guested and collaborated with artists as varied as Baka Beyond, Peter Dinklage and his 'family' band Jalikunda, set up the first kora course at SOAS and taught endless drum and kora workshops to hundreds of eager students. In other words, using his jali skills, his passion and innate ability to fit in, he not only got by, but thrived in cold and foreign climes.

Seckou comes across as a man who knows that if you choose to live like a fish out of water, you must be affable, amenable, generally game and ready at all times to charm your hosts. The same is no doubt true of many of the members of his clan. Google 'Kora' and 'Cissokho' and you will come across a modern epic of roving African bards, living in cold corners of Europe on wits and music. Some are famous. Some less so. Some belong to other Cissokho clans. But all carry an essential faith in their culture and jali upbringing with them. And their instrument, the kora, seems divinely suited to intertwine with other musical worlds. Its sweet intricacy is the key to its flexibility and broad reach.



Meanwhile, that distant cousin, the Welsh harp, was also born in a mist of uncertainty, a Celtic fog that covered the British Isles after the Romans departed and the Saxon invaders came from which historians and ethnomusicologist have trouble retrieving their hard facts. By the time the tenth century Welsh King Hywel Dda 'The Good' – codified the activity of the bards in his famous Laws, the harp that was depicted on ancient Pictish stones or carved into Breton rock had, along with the crwth, become the main tool of Welsh musicians and poets. King Hywel's laws speak of the *penrdd* or master craftsman, who, like the griot, had to be adept at a huge number of varied musical and poetic skills, or the *bardd teulu*, the chieftain's personal 'court' bard, who sang for their lordships and also accompanied the war 'posse' into battle. Out of these Laws grew the *cerdd dant* or 'art of the string' and the *cerdd dafod* or 'art of the tongue', in other words a lavish and strictly regulated system of highbrow culture involving harpists, poets and other musicians who entertained kings, dukes, chieftains, ladies, warriors and men of note right through the middle ages.

The ascent of a Welsh family, the Tudors, to the throne of England in the late 15th Century ironically set the old Welsh bardic tradition on a slow and painful decline. The Welsh elites developed a taste for English entertainment, even for melodies and fashions from Italy and other parts of Europe. The bardic arts retreated into folk culture, carried about the green realm by roving minstrels and gypsy harpists, whom the 18th Century Methodist bible-bashers and chapel-goers reviled for their loose morals and thirst for ale. The great essayist Thomas de Quincey may have noted, on his extended walks around Wales in the early 19th Century, that almost every inn possessed a harpist whose job was to entertain the guests, but in truth the old harp music, once an emblematic expression of Welsh culture at its most sophisticated and essential, had

been laid low. But then came rebirth of the Eisteddfod movement in the 19th Century, the beginnings of a revival of Welsh cultural pride and the popularity of musicians like John Thomas, 'Chief of all the Welsh Bards', who was harpist by appointment to the court of Queen Victoria and an accomplished composer. Old Welsh harp music was deemed worthy of resuscitation, even though, just like the Welsh language a century later, it had never really entirely disappeared.

Democracy and the post-Enlightenment liberal mind destroyed that old need to praise famous men that had once driven the Welsh bard to peaks of poetic expression. But that role has survived in West Africa. In fact, along with marriage guidance counselling and resolving family disputes, it's the griot's core duty. The nobler the subject the more the griot has to sing about. And there is no more blue-blooded name in Manding culture than Keita.

Keitas are the descendants of the greatest ruler in Manding history, the founder of West Africa's most powerful Empire, the warrior-king to beat them all, Sunjata himself. Such is the power of Seckou's family name that when a Diabaté, like Toumani, or a Kouyaté, who were the traditional griots of the Keita clan, meets a Keita, he will quite likely launch into a paean of some kind or another, and no doubt expect some reward – money, a beautiful robe or some other gift – in return. We have no name with equivalent power in British culture. Plantagenet, Tudor, Stuart, Hanover, Windsor, Beckham – none of them is likely to get humble musical folk bursting into song for a pound or two.

Catrin Finch was born into a more levelled and less deferential world than Seckou's, barely two years after him. Even though her birthplace was Aberystwyth, she arrived in a decidedly non-Welsh household. Her father was a geographer and agricultural scientist from Yorkshire who had moved to west Wales for his work and her mother was German by birth. Attending a Welsh-speaking school in the seaside village of Llanon south of Aberystwyth however, she ended up speaking both fluent Welsh and RP English. She remembers, "The sea was a big part of lives."

At the age of five, she was taken to the Lampeter Music Club to see a Spanish harpist by the name of Marisa Robles. It was a dazzling epiphany for the little girl. "I remember that event very clearly," she says. "Her glamorous dress, the golden harp, everything about it. She was selling and signing cassettes at the end of the evening and I went up and said, 'I'm going to be a harpist like you.'"

Things moved fast after that. By the age of nine, Catrin had already completed all her grades and, thanks to the willing sacrifice of parents and teachers, she began to take lessons up in Caernarfon with one of Wales' most famous harpists, Elinor Bennett. "Elinor was a big influence in my life," says Catrin. "A lively person, very strict but very kind." The classical rigour of the tuition, which involved a round trip of five hours every fortnight from her home in Llanon, was alleviated by Bennett's passion for all forms of music, including old Welsh songs and airs, and her penchant for leaping up and dancing about the room when the spirits took hold her. Years later, Catrin married Elinor's son Hywel.

Behind Catrin's modest assertion that "I was already making a name for myself by my mid teens and winning competitions," lies the fact that most people around her were convinced they had a child prodigy on their hands. Regular appearances with the National Youth Orchestra, a cupboard full of trophies and even a few spots on Blue Peter only bolstered that view.

After O-levels, Catrin was sent to study at the Purcell Music school in Hertfordshire, a hard move for a 16-year-old from the far west whose family life had recently been shaken by the divorce of her parents. But she was going places. At 18 she went to the Royal College of Music and barely a year later, she received a call from Buckingham Palace to ask if she would accept the newly created post of official harpist to the Prince of Wales. By this mischievous twist of fate, she managed to live a modern version of that musical deference that defined the old bardic tradition.

"I did feel a bit trophy-ised," she admits, "stuck in the corner of the Palace during some huge banquet with a few pretty plants arranged around me and my posh dress on. But there I was... the Royal Harpist! I used to find it quite funny. I mean, I was living in these messy student digs in Willesden Green and every now and then I'd put my dress on and toddle off to Buckingham Palace to be transformed into this glamorous figure. And then I'd come home to Willesden, hopefully in time for the pub!"

The publicity value of the Royal appointment was immense however. Catrin became a star in the classical music world, fielding a frenetic schedule of performances all over the globe and recording offers from the likes of Sony. She was young, very beautiful and technically dazzling, attributes that still shine today, although never by her own admission. Face to face, Catrin is friendly, affable and as glamorous in her dress as she is down to earth in her manners and opinions. She has something of the beatifically talented but thoroughly practical head-girl about her. But when she plays the harp, you get a glimpse of that molten poetic heart without which virtuosity is always just a paltry and mechanical thing.

The River Teifi is raging under the arches of Cardigan's 17th Century bridge the day we arrive for the second part of the second chapter of the harp and kora story. Freak Easter winds lash the sodden slate roofs of the town. Fish and chip signs flap in the breeze. The Teifi Otter is clothed in a soaking red rugby strip of Wales. England 3 – Wales 30. Go Cymru! Shame about the weather.

Catrin is focused and obliging although clearly tense about tonight's concert at the Theatr Mwldan, which is taking place almost exactly a year after her seat-of-the-pants debut there with Toumani Diabaté. Her trip to play in Dubai the following weekend is also understandably preying on her mind. No rest for the über-talented. I ask Seckou what images come to him if he sits back and listens to the harp. "Angels," prompts Catrin, laughing. "Flowers," says Seckou, before adding in a more serious tone, "it just delivers emotion for me, in all sorts of ways, happy or sad."

Catrin admits that kora music sounded indecipherable and... well... 'samey' to her at first. "People come along and ask, 'Are you going to swap instruments?!' assuming that, you know, it's just a bunch of strings. But the harp is a completely different instrument to the kora and I come from a completely different background; classical music, Associated Boards, read your dots... you know. Seckou doesn't even read music. If I'm being really truthful, it doesn't quite make sense that Seckou can do what he does but not know where G is on the stave." At this point she laughs uproariously. "But I love it. So when I get involved with this kind of project, I actually have to shut off my training and all that reading of notes. Because it's all by ear and that's very new to me."

World music was a kind of saving grace to the rock musicians of the early 1980s, who were floundering about in the cul de sac of old formulae and exhausted clichés at the time. Strangely enough, talking to Catrin, you get the sense that it's been the same for some classical musicians too: a blessed relief from ancestor-worship, a chance to strike out into the

unknown without a map or a chorus of mealy-mouthed obsessives shouting "You played that Bach trill all wrong!" For Catrin, it's all about proving to the world, and especially her classical music peers, that the harp can do so much more than is generally asked of it. "The harp has very little respect in the classical world," she claims. Her much-lauded transposition of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* to the instrument was one bold attempt to change that. Her collaborations with Cimarron, Toumani and now Seckou, are another.

"But can the harp express something ugly?" I ask Catrin, "I mean... could it cover a tune by Throbbing Gristle?" "Not really, no," she answers. "It's essentially beautiful." But then she tells me about the harp concerto she's composing for the Welsh Youth Orchestra, which is all about a famous Welsh poet whose pseudonym was 'Hedd Wyn' or 'White Peace'. He died at the battle of Passchendaele in July 1917 and one of his poems, entitled *Rhyfel* (War), contains lines, whose English translation goes as follows:

"Man raised his sword, once God had gone / To slay his brother, and the roar / Of battlefields now casts upon / Our homes the shadow of the war."

The harps to which we sang are hung / On willow boughs, and their refrain / Drowned by the anguish of the young / Whose blood is mingled with the rain."

Both the harp and the kora are old instruments. They naturally express the quietness of an older time. There can be joy, sadness, meditation and longing in their graceful flow. Their challenge now is to penetrate modernity, the "roar of battlefields" and the "anguish of the young" and prove that in that old quietness, as in the flow of an old river before before it reaches the sea, there's something timeless that we shouldn't forget.

Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita's as yet untitled album is a Theatr Mwldan / Astar Artes co-production that will be released in October on the Astar Artes label. They will do a 16-date tour of England and Wales together between October 20th and November 21st, with more dates to be announced for 2014.

www.astarartes.com
www.catrinfinch.com
www.seckoukeita.com
facebook.com/CatrinFinchSeckouKeita
www.mwldan.co.uk



TOUR DATES MAY 2014

May / Mai

2	Fri / Gwener	Wyeside Arts Centre, Builth Wells	www.wyeside.co.uk
3	Sat / Sadwrn	Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea	www.taliesinartscentre.co.uk
4	Sun / Sul	Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan	www.mwldan.co.uk
8	Thu / Iau	The Roses, Tewkesbury	www.rosestheatre.org
9	Fri / Gwener	The Sage, Gateshead	www.sagegateshead.com
10	Sat / Sadwrn	Royal Northern Collage of Music, Manchester	www.rncm.ac.uk
11	Sun / Sul	Usher Hall, Edinburgh	www.usherhall.co.uk
13	Tues / Mawrth	St Davids Hall, Cardiff	www.stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk
14	Wed / Mercher	Bush Hall, LONDON	www.bushhallmusic.co.uk
15	Thurs / Iau	Borough Theatre, Abergavenny	www.boroughtheatreabergavenny.co.uk
16	Fri / Gwener	Welfare, Ystradgynlais	www.thewelfare.co.uk
17	Sat / Sadwrn	MOMA, Machynlleth	www.momawales.org.uk

LINKS TO PRESS SITE, WEBSITES & SOCIAL MEDIA

Link To Press Site	http://www.astarmusic.co.uk/?page_id=1630 Contains links to download the album, press release and album sleeve notes written by Andy Morgan
Press Images:	https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0mshr6686smr6dp/6aJLLSuQzR
Websites:	www.catrinfinch.com www.seckoukeita.com www.mwldan.co.uk www.astarmusic.co.uk
Facebook:	www.facebook.com/catrinfinchseckoukeita
Twitter:	@CatrinSeckou
Storify:	http://sfy.co/pG0L
Tour trailer:	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-4ueQ7rYEs
YOUTUBE clips:	
Live at WOMEX 2013	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= JG8yjS7Xxg http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqd7io7sTt8
Future Strings	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU-H2zg3_BM
Bamba	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLDgG3AKrMc
Medley	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtRfMOMG-tM

BROCHURE COPY SHORT VERSION

Brochure Copy (English 159, Welsh 87)

CYD-GYNHYRCHIAD THEATR MWLDAN | ASTAR ARTES CO-PRODUCTION

CATRIN FINCH & SECKOU KEITA (CYMRU / SENEGAL)

"intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas-de-deux... remarkable"

Neil Spencer, Uncut Magazine

2013 has been an amazing year for welsh harpist Catrin Finch and Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita. Winners of the prestigious fRoots Album Of The Year for their debut album *Clychau Dibon*, nominated for two BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards for Best Duo and Best Traditional Track, and featured in Songlines Magazine top ten albums of 2013, the sky is indeed the limit for this fearless pair of virtuoso musicians whose *'heavenly music...intricately realised'* (Songlines Magazine) and infectious onstage chemistry defies categorisation and continues to merge the boundaries between the genres of classical, world, folk and traditional music.

The harp occupies a vital place in the incredibly rich cultures of both West Africa and Wales and, remarkably, both nations share a centuries-old bardic tradition of intricate oral history, expressed through music, song and verse. Together, Finch and Keita have risen to the tough challenge of blending two completely different musical cultures and creating something coherent, relevant and entirely new.

Mae 2013 wedi bod yn flwyddyn ryfeddol i'r delynores Gymreig, Catrin Finch, a'r chwaraewr kora o Senegal, Seckou Keita, gyda lluo o wobrau ac enwebiadau, gan gynnwys Enillwyr Albwm y Flwyddyn Cylchgrawn fRoots gyda'u halbwym cyntaf Clychau Dibon. Yn wir, ymddengys nid oes terfyn ar orchestion y pâr meistrolgar hwn.

Mae gan y delyn safle canolog yn niwylant hynod gyfoethog Gorllewin Affrica a Chymru, ac yn rhyfeddol, mae'r ddwy wlad yn rhannau traddodiad barddonol hynafol o hanesion llafar cain, wedi eu mynegi trwy gerddoriaeth, cân a phennill.

**Supported by the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales, and Arts Council England.
Wedi ei noddi'n rhannol gan Gyngor Celfyddydau Cymru a'r Llywodraeth Cymru, a'r Gyngor Celfyddydau Lloegr.**

BROCHURE COPY LONGER VERSION

(English 333, Welsh 351)

CYD-GYNHYRCHIAD THEATR MWLDAN | ASTAR ARTES CO-PRODUCTION

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Hot on the heels of her innovative collaborations with Cimarron from Colombia and Toumani Diabate from Mali, Catrin Finch is once again proving her radical and adventurous musical spirit with this wedding of Welsh and West African musical culture. Seckou Keita is a member of the renowned Cissokho clan of 'griots' or bards from southern Senegal who has already blended his

kora (21-stringed West African harp) with jazz, funk, rock, Indian classical and all manner of other musical styles.

2014 sees them guest alongside Eliza Carthy, Spiro, Olivia Chaney and Chris Wood at fRoots 35th anniversary celebrations at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's Southbank in March, before a major UK tour in May which will take in Usher Hall Edinburgh, Bush Hall London and the Sage Gateshead before hitting the summer festival circuit in the UK and overseas.

Their debut album *Clychau Dibon* has attracted huge critical acclaim and a clutch of 4 and 5 * reviews from National and Industry press with UNCUT Magazine's Neil Spencer describing it as "*intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas-de-deux... remarkable*" *****, "*a sublime duo of two artists who are masters of their instruments... musicality and architecture at work*" Simon Broughton, London Evening Standard *****, and '*remarkable...an elegant, gently exquisite set*'. Robin Denselow, The Guardian ****

Don't miss your chance to see one of the most blissful and exciting music collaborations ever to come out of Wales.

Mae 2013 wedi bod yn flwyddyn ryfeddol i'r delynores Gymreig, Catrin Finch, a'r chwaraewr kora o Senegal, Seckou Keita. Enillwyr Albwm y Flwyddyn fRoots gyda'u halbwm cyntaf *Clychau Dibon*, wedi eu henwebu am ddwy Wobr Werin BBC Radio 2 am y Deuawd Gorau a Thrac Traddodiadol Gorau, ac wedi eu cynnwys ymhlith deg albwm gorau 2013 Cylchgrawn Songlines, nid oes terfyn ar orchestion y pâr hyderus hwn o gerddorion meistrolgar y mae eu '*cerddoriaeth nefolaidd...wedi ei gwireddu'n gelfydd*' (Cylchgrawn Songlines) a'u perthynas llwyfan amlwg yn herio cael ei chategoreiddio gan barhau i mewnffrwydro / uno ffiniau rhwng arddulliau cerddoriaeth glasurol, byd, gwerin a thraddodiadol.

Yn dynn ar sodlau ei chydweithrediadau dyfeisgar gyda Cimarron o Golombia a Toumani Diabate o Fali, mae Catrin Finch unwaith eto yn amlygu ei hysbryd cerddorol radical ac anturiaethus yn yr undod hwn o ddiwylliannau cerddorol Cymreig a Gorllewin Affricanaidd. Mae Seckou Keita yn aelod o dylwyth enwog o 'grigots' y Cissokho o Dde Senegal, sydd eisoes wedi asio ei kora (telyn 21 tant Gorllewin Affrica) â jazz, ffync, roc, cerddoriaeth glasurol India a phob math o arddulliau cerddorol eraill.

Yn 2014 byddant yn ymddangos fel gwesteion ynghyd ag Eliza Carthy, Jim Moray a Chris Wood yn nathliadau pen-blwydd fRoots yn 35 mlwydd oed yn Neuadd y Frenhines Elisabeth ar Southbank Llundain ym mis Mawrth, cyn cychwyn ar daith fawr o Brydain ym mis Mai bydd yn cynnwys

ymweld â Neuadd Usher yng Nghaeredin, Neuadd Bush yn Llundain a'r Sage Gateshead cyn dechrau ar y sîn gwyliau haf yn y DU a thramor.

Mae eu halbwm cyntaf wedi denu canmoliaeth feirniadol fawr a llu o adolygiadau 4* a 5* o'r cyfryngau Cenedlaethol a Diwydiant gyda Neil Spencer o'r cylchgrawn UNCUT yn ei ddisgrifio fel *"intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas-de-deux... remarkable" ******, *"a sublime duo of two artists who are masters of their instruments...musicality and architecture at work"* Simon Broughton, London Evening Standard ***** , and *'remarkable...an elegant, gently exquisite set'*. Robin Denselow, The Guardian ****

Peidiwch â cholli'ch cyfle i weld un o gydweithrediadau mwyaf dedwydd a chyffrous erioed i ddod o Gymru.

Supported by the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales, and Arts Council England.
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PRESS QUOTES:

'gorgeous, eloquent, elegant music' Thomas Brooman CBE

"something quite different.. a really intriguing collaboration... it works so beautifully together – a beautiful album."

Mark Radcliffe, BBC Radio 2

"heavenly music.. that soars, intricately realised, pretty wonderful"

Nigel Willaimson, Songlines *****

ALBUM INFO

ALBUM TITLE Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita 'Clychau Dibon'

CATALOGUE NO. AARCDA025

LABEL: ASTAR ARTES | MWLDAN

RELEASE DATE: 14TH OCTOBER 2013

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 55.51

TRACK LISTINGS

1. Genedigaeth Koring-bato **6.36**
(Pour notre frère Toumani Diabate)
Beth Yw'r Haf I Mi. Macki. Pontypridd. Kéléfa Ba.
2. Future Strings **7.25**
3. Bamba **8.40**
4. Les Bras de Mer **7.59**
Conset Ifan Glen Teifi. Bolong. Niali Bagna. Clychau Aberdyfi.
5. Robert Ap Huw meets Nialing Sonko **6.59**
Part I Nialing-Caniad Gosteg Part II Kéléfa Koungben-Caniad y Gwyn Bibydd
6. Ceffylau **5.19**
7. Llongau Térrou-bi **8.57**

VISIT OUR BANDCAMP PAGE: <http://astarartes.bandcamp.com/>

Book

A bilingual English / Welsh book written by Andy Morgan '*Finding the One – The Strange and parallel lives of the West African kora and the Welsh Harp*' accompanies the tour.



PRESS RELEASE

Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan and Astar Artes:

Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita *Clychau Dibon*

UK Tour May 2014

"Wales' most celebrated harpist and Senegal's most inventive kora player join together in a unique marriage of virtuosity and strings."

2013 has been an amazing year for welsh harpist Catrin Finch and Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita, whose UK Tour visits (your venue) on (your date). Winners of the prestigious fRoots Album Of The Year for their debut album *Clychau Dibon*, nominated for two BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards for Best Duo and Best Traditional Track, and featured in Songlines Magazine top ten albums of 2013, the sky is indeed the limit for this fearless pair of virtuoso musicians whose 'heavenly music...intricately realised' (Songlines Magazine) and infectious onstage chemistry defies categorisation and continues to merge the boundaries between the genres of classical, world, folk and traditional music.

Hot on the heels of her innovative collaborations with Cimarron from Colombia and Toumani Diabate from Mali, Catrin Finch is once again proving her radical and adventurous musical spirit with this wedding of Welsh and West African musical culture. Seckou Keita is a member of the renowned Cissokho clan of 'griots' or bards from southern Senegal who has already blended his

kora (21-stringed West African harp) with jazz, funk, rock, Indian classical and all manner of other musical styles.

2014 sees them guest alongside Eliza Carthy, Spiro, Olivia Chaney and Chris Wood at fRoots 35th anniversary celebrations at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's Southbank in March, before a major UK tour in May which will take in Usher Hall Edinburgh, Bush Hall London and the Sage Gateshead before hitting the summer festival circuit in the UK and overseas.

Their debut album *Clychau Dibon* has attracted huge critical acclaim and a clutch of 4 and 5 * reviews from National and Industry press with UNCUT Magazine's Neil Spencer describing it as "*intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas-de-deux... remarkable*" *****, "*a sublime duo of two artists who are masters of their instruments...musicality and architecture at work*" Simon Broughton, London Evening Standard *****, and '*remarkable...an elegant, gently exquisite set*'. Robin Denselow, The Guardian ****

Catrin Finch is a star in the world of classical music and widely recognised as one of the world's finest harpists. A nominee for a Classical Brit Award, she has performed with orchestras all over the globe (including the Royal Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Pops) and was the first Royal harpist to HRH Prince of Wales in modern times.

Seckou Keita has performed around the world a solo artist, a bandleader and a collaborator with Baka Beyond and the Jalikunda Project. He's a master of both the kora and a wide range of west Africa drums and percussion instruments. He set up the first kora course at London's School of Oriental and African Studies and his teaching skills are highly prized.

'Clychau Dibon' represents the first fruit of Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita's much-anticipated summit of strings. 'Clychau' is the Welsh word for 'Bells', and alludes to the heavenly peels that feature on the album. The Dibon is a member of the hornbill family which lives in the Northern tributaries of the River Niger in Guinea and the Sahel of Sub-Saharan Africa. A romantic bird, the Dibon pairs for life, but males and females spend the night sleeping in separate trees; early in the morning call to each other, the male using the lower notes and the female higher ones. So compelling and distinctive are the calls of the Dibon, that they have worked their ways into the rhythms of many of the local traditional hunting and farming songs, giving rise to the Mandinka rhythm 'Dibon', and the name for the second bass string of the left hand side of the Kora.

The harp occupies a vital place in the incredibly rich cultures of both West Africa and Wales and, remarkably, both nations share a centuries-old bardic tradition of intricate oral history, expressed through music, song and verse. The remarkable affinities between the harp and the kora as well as the Welsh and West African cultures from which they have emerged are fused on this album into a single intensely inspiring river of music.

The album is produced by John Hollis, engineered by Owen Shiers and recorded in Wales.. This co-production is another project from the stable of Theatr Mwldan and Astar Artes, who over the years have worked together to bring productions such as Billy Cobham and Asere, Catrin Finch and Cimarron, and Catrin Finch and Toumani Diabate to UK and international audiences.

A book 'Finding The One', written by Andy Morgan, has also been inspired by the project and the fascinating journey behind it.

Don't miss your chance to see one of the most blissful and exciting music collaborations ever to come out of Wales.

The Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita Project is supported by the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales, and by Arts Council England.

Tour Dates:

May / Mai

2	Fri / Gwener	Wyeside Arts Centre, Builth Wells	www.wyeside.co.uk
3	Sat / Sadwrn	Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea	www.taliesinartscentre.co.uk
4	Sun / Sul	Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan	www.mwldan.co.uk
8	Thu / Iau	The Roses, Tewkesbury	www.rosestheatre.org
9	Fri / Gwener	The Sage, Gateshead	www.sagegateshead.com
10	Sat / Sadwrn	Royal Northern Collage of Music, Manchester	www.rncm.ac.uk

11	Sun / Sul	Usher Hall, Edinburgh	www.usherhall.co.uk
13	Tues / Mawrth	St Davids Hall, Cardiff	www.stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk
14	Wed / Mercher	Bush Hall, LONDON	www.bushhallmusic.co.uk
15	Thurs / Iau	Borough Theatre, Abergavenny	www.boroughtheatreabergavenny.co.uk
16	Fri / Gwener	Welfare, Ystradgynlais	www.thewelfare.co.uk
17	Sat / Sadwrn	MOMA, Machynlleth	www.momawales.org.uk

ENDS/

Please contact Tamsin@mwldan.co.uk or Lisa @mwldan.co.uk at Theatr Mwldan on 01239 623925 for further information, press tickets and interviews.

Editor's Notes:

The Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita project is a co-production between Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan, and Astar Artes.

Catrin Finch and Seckou Keita project is produced with support from the Welsh Government, Arts Council of Wales and Arts Council England.

The album was recorded at Acapela Studio, Pentyrch, near Cardiff and is produced by John Hollis and engineered by Owen Shiers. This co-production is another project from the stable of Theatr Mwldan and Astar Artes, who over the years have worked together to bring productions such as Billy Cobham and Asere, Catrin Finch and Cimarron, and Catrin Finch and Toumani Diabate to UK and international audiences.

Album Info:

CATALOGUE NO.	AARCDA025
LABEL:	ASTAR ARTES MWLDAN
RELEASE DATE:	14 TH OCTOBER 2013

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 55.51

LINK TO PRESS SITE & DOWNLOADS: http://www.astarmusic.co.uk/?page_id=1630

TRACK LISTINGS

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Genedigaeth Koring-bato | 6.36 |
| 2. | Future Strings | 7.25 |
| 3. | Bamba | 8.40 |
| 4. | Les Bras de Mer | 7.59 |
| 5. | Robert Ap Huw meets Nialing Sonko | 6.59 |
| 6. | Ceffylau | 5.19 |
| 7. | Llongau Térou-bi | 8.57 |

Press and publication Quotes:

"an intriguing collaboration that really works... Catrin Finch is a celebrated harpist...this is (Seckou Keita's) most satisfying work to date.... the interaction is remarkable...an elegant, gently exquisite set".

Robin Denselow, The Guardian

'gorgeous, eloquent, elegant music'

Thomas Brooman CBE

"something quite different.. a really intriguing collaboration... it works so beautifully together – a beautiful album."

Mark Radcliffe, BBC Radio 2

"intricate, ethereal and entrancing, an elaborate pas-de-deux... remarkable"

Neil Spencer, Uncut Magazine

"heavenly music.. that soars, intricately realised, pretty wonderful"

Nigel Willaimson, Songlines

"Some people spend a lot of money on illegal substances in order to attain the kind of mood this music evokes."

fRoots

"Old Welsh harp songs, Manding kora staples, Latin dashes, Celtic arias and more woven together to create something new that also possessed enough depth to sound sage, even timeless..the marriage of harp and kora seems blessed to be long, warm and fruitful."

Andy Morgan

CATRIN FINCH BIOGRAPHY



"The Queen of Harps.....Catrin has done more than anyone in harp history to bring her instrument to a wider public."

- Classic FM magazine, 2004

"With one touch of the strings - the opening notes of the Bach Toccata and Fugue - she pulverised the stereotype of harpists as pretty, angelic strummers....."

- New York Times review of Catrin's Carnegie Hall debut, 6 April 2005

Described as “The Queen of Harps”, Catrin has delighted audiences with her performances in the UK and worldwide. Inspired to learn the harp at the age of five, her rise to prominence started almost immediately, achieving the highest mark in the UK for her Grade VIII exam at the age of nine. She studied with Elinor Bennett for eight years before entering the Purcell School. Catrin graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in 2002 where she studied with Skaila Kanga and received the Queen’s Award for the most outstanding student of her year.

Her first major competition success came in 1999 winning the Lily Laskine International Harp Competition in France, one of the premier harp competitions in the world. On winning the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York, Catrin went on to play in over thirty states in the USA, including recitals and concerto debuts in New York, including the Lincoln Centre and Weill Recital Hall, Boston and Washington D.C. In May 2004 she was nominated for a Classical Brit Award and has also received an “Echo Klassik” in Germany.

Catrin is the former Royal Harpist to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. Holding the appointment from 2000-2004, she had the honour of reviving this ancient tradition last held in 1873. During her period as Royal Harpist she played regularly at the Royal Palaces and performed to Royalty from around the world.

She has performed extensively throughout the U.S.A., south America, the Middle East, Asia, Australia and Europe. She has appeared with many of the world’s top orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Pops, the Philharmonia, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the London Mozart Players, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, the Lake Charles Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony and the Manchester Camerata. Festival appearances include Salzburg, Edinburgh, Spoleto, Smithsonian Folklife, MDR Musiksommer Festival in Leipzig, Le Domaine Forget and Lanaudiere Festivals in Canada and the Gödöllő Harp Festival in Hungary.

In November 2012 Catrin released a CD on the DG label celebrating a new collaboration between Catrin and celebrated composer, John Rutter. The Cd, which also features a composition by Catrin herself, the Celtic Concerto went to number 1 in the UK classical charts. This follows the

success of her J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations which entered the UK Classical charts at number 1 in 2009.

2012 highlights include concerts in North Carolina, New York, Hong Kong and Australia, concertos with the European Union Chamber Orchestra, the BBC NOW, premieres of two new harp concertos written for her, a tour with Malian kora player, Toumani Diabaté and various recitals.

2013 plans include performances in Holland, Hungary, France, Poland, Dubai and Germany, the Royal Albert Hall and various music festivals. She will continue to develop the collaboration with kora player Seckou Keita and will release two new CDs this year. Finch has also received her first commission – a concerto which will be performed by the National Youth Orchestra of Wales in 2013.

Catrin has appeared on all the major television and radio networks in the UK and many abroad. Among her earliest appearances on TV were two features on the BBC's 'Blue Peter', and since then there have been many appearances on radio and television in the UK. In 2003, Catrin presented a TV documentary about herself entitled 'Charlie's Angel' which was awarded a BAFTA Cymru/Wales award for the best music programme. She has recently been heard presenting concerts with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales live on BBC Radio 3 from the Hoddinott Hall in Cardiff Bay. Recent TV appearances include BBC Breakfast and the Andrew Marr Show.

She has collaborated closely with composer Karl Jenkins on stage and disc, including the première of a new double harp concerto commissioned by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. She has received half a million hits on You Tube for her performance of Karl Jenkins' Palladio.

Catrin has recorded for most of the major international recording companies, including Universal Records, Deutsche Grammophon, EMI and Sony Classical, both solo and with notable artists such as Bryn Terfel, Sir James Galway and Julian Lloyd-Webber.

Her versatility in different musical genres is demonstrated in her many recordings, which range from solo classical recitals and concertos, her own arrangement for harp of J S Bach's Goldberg Variations through to an eclectic cross-over mix with her own 14 piece band "CF47" and the

presentation of some of Wales' most popular traditional melodies in an innovative and refreshing way using electric harps, state of the art technology and groundbreaking sound effects.

She has received honours from the University of Wales Aberystwyth and Bangor, Glyndwr University, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music. She is a visiting Professor at the latter two musical institutions and is in great demand for masterclasses. In July 2012 the first ever Catrin Finch Academy Summer School was held on the outskirts of Cardiff and future plans include developing the project online where Finch will post exercises for young harpists to follow.

Known for her work within the community and with the younger generation, Catrin is committed to promoting the harp and classical music in general to a new and wider audience.

www.catrinfinch.com

SECKOU KEITA BIOGRAPHY



It's a daunting task to write your lifestory... I am still young but so many things have already happened. Where to start? I embrace the challenge and will tell my story in the only way I know, starting from the beginning...

I was born on 14th February 1978 in Ziguinchor, the capital of the Casamance in Southern Senegal. Ziguinchor is a dusty and vibrant city where people of different ethnicities live along side one another. Their many musical traditions coexist and often come together, making my home town one of the most interesting and inspiring musical centres in West Africa.

I was raised by my mother's family, the Cissokho's in my grandparents' house. So I grew up side by side with my uncles and aunties. We are a family of kora players, a traditional Griot family where music and stories are passed down through generations from father to son. I was educated in this traditional way and you could say I was destined to become a kora player. Music was part of my everyday life whether in my grandfather's compound, out in the streets or as the centre of the many local celebrations. Once this music becomes part of you it sticks with you your whole life.

There is no formal route to becoming a kora player, you just have to listen, memorise, and experiment, then keep trying til you get it right. In my grandfather's house, you are taught how to build a kora at the age of 7, then by 14 you start experimenting and learning the repertoire. Only when you have earned it do you have a kora built for you. I got my first kora when I was 18!

Traditionally, you only learn the music and stories from your own family. In my family this included kora music and the drumming associated with it which we call 'Jali dundun'. But as a child I was also intrigued and inspired by drumming rhythms outside of my own, so I decided to learn and study some without telling my grandfather. I started on Seourouba with Souti Silamé. Then on Sabar with Pa Cor N'diaye and Djembé with "Machine" Sylla. I remember skiving off school to go and perform with my teachers. By the end of my formal training at home, my outside interests were exposed, and I got caught out. I was told off by my grandfather who was worried of my whereabouts because I was only a child. But then my family discovered my skills and I became the main drummer in my family.

By the age of 10 I was following my uncles and cousins everywhere and drumming at their concerts all over the region. Then at the age of 17, my uncle Solo Cissokho entered me and his young brother in a talent competition. And we won! This was the beginning of my international career. We were invited to Norway to take part in a collaboration with musicians from Cuba, India and Scandinavia. The project toured all over Norway including at the Forde Festival. After this came a tour in India where i was amazed by the genius of Indian violinist Dr L Subramaniam. I returned to Norway from India and moved too the UK in 1998.

In 1999, my daughter Bintou was born so I relocated to the UK to be with her. As soon as I arrived, Martin and Su from Baka Beyond, who I had met in Ziguinchor a few years earlier,

invited me to join the band as a drummer. This was the beginning of busy touring life with concerts all over Europe and North America. I had other projects including working with Peter Badejo OBE in creating music for Contemporary African Dance. I took part in the premiere of the Lion King in London. I taught and prepare for the first Kora exams at SOAS (School of African and Oriental Studies).

While not touring I started teaching drumming to children in schools, some as young as 4 years old. This is something I still do today whenever I have the time. I found a strong community of drummers around the UK and became a regular teacher at drumming festivals across the UK. Actually many people from this community became true friends. Until 2000 I was mostly working as a drummer and I loved it. I was earning my life as a musician, I was meeting new musicians everyday, going to new places, meeting new friends. But something was missing. Kora playing was always a part of what I did but I felt it was time for me to come back to it on a more intense basis. It was calling me... and I followed. Thus began my return to the kora. I never fully left the drumming world in this time and when in 2005 I met one of the greatest living Djembe drumming masters Mamady Keita it was a dream for me. I learned so much from him and was truly honoured when he invited me to perform and record "live at Couleur Café" a CD/DVD in Belgium in 2006. There are other exciting organisations involved in drumming since th 2000 like Sewabeats, Music for Change and Womad Foundation.

You know as a kora player, you learn the traditional repertoire. By the time I was about 18 years old I knew it, but it is what you do with this knowledge that really determines your life as a kora player. So that was my new direction. In 2000, I had some new songs and it was time to record them. Martin and Su helped me make my first solo album "Baiyo" (later retitled Mali by the label!!!), meaning Orphan, and performed in a few songs.

The defining theme of the album came about almost by accident... One day I was looking after my daughter and trying to get some writing done. I started playing to find that I had tuned up wrong. Strangely enough, I loved what I heard and tried to build on it. It was different, and did take me a while to get used to but with some hard work and an open mind I developed this new configuration further. The result was Tamala, the first track I ever recorded with one of my new experimental tunings.

In 2001 and 2002, I toured with 'Baiyo' in amazing places and started to make a name for myself as a kora player. I played at many festivals; Glastonbury, Sacred Music festival in Ireland, and my first Womad in the UK which then took me to Singapore, Australia and The Canary Isles. I was also so happy and proud to open a club concerts for Salif Keita on his Moffou tour and Youssou N Dour Colston Hall show in Bristol on his From village to Town album tour.

In 2003, I invited 8 members of my family and 3 great musician friends to breath new life into a project that my uncle Solo had started, the Jalikunda project. This was my family's music, a family project, with the family band. After my first solo album, I felt ready to produce and arrange the family album. We called it 'Lindiane' after the suburb where we grew up. We toured it all over the UK, Spain and Sweden.

In 2004, I again felt it was time to experiment with something new. I wanted to work in a smaller band to try a different style of music. I wanted to work with Juldeh Camara, an amazing Riti player (one string violin). I also approached my good friend Davide Mantovani, a fabulous and eclectic bass player, and my young brother Surahata Susso, already a promising musician at the age of 17.

Right from the first, this combination of musicians felt special. I felt so free and new tuning configurations would come to me almost effortlessly, my tunings became my signatures. This was a band where we all felt we grew as musicians, it was a challenge for each of us, we were coming together from such different musical backgrounds and trying to create something new to us all.

Quite early on, it became clear that Juldehl wouldn't be able to stay with us long term, we needed to find another musician. So Davide recommended Samy Bishai who he knew from the London scene. We met up for an initial audition and immediately we connected. He is such a flexible violinist, which is hard to find in classically trained musicians. He also brought his Egyptian roots with him which had a strong influence a few of my songs including Mande Arab.

By the end of 2006 the album 'Tama Silo: Afro Mandinka Soul' was released and I felt ready to take this music back home to Senegal and showcase it to my family and friends there. While I was there I asked my younger sister Binta Suso to join in on a few songs. Again, it all connected

straight away. When we toured back in England without her, we felt a bit empty, So she came to work with us on the next album, 'The Silimbo Passage' released in mid 2008.

The whole project was so successful that with the band alone, I've done 400 concerts in 30 countries since 2004! This obviously was amazing but at the same time, I and other members of the band were a little worried about the impact of our activity on the planet. So in 2007 we made a pledge to reduce our carbon foot as much as possible in all aspects of our work, including administration, marketing, management and transport. Some of the tours have been offset to finance green project in the UK and East Africa. Of course we could always do more, but we are trying our best! Other key projects that started in 2007 includes an innovative and interactive project in which audience participation is fully part of the show! It is called Do you Speak Djembe? On this I work closely with Doug Manuel (founder of the show and Director of Sewabeats) and Philip Fournier (Lyon Symphonic Orchestra Director).

Recently I launched a partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross. I feel privileged to be able to live off my music and I want to go one step further. I want to be able to support the work of a humanitarian organisation that is close to my heart: The Red Cross. They have been working in my country for a long time and they are always present in places where people need it most. Since 1 Nov 2010, 50% of proceeds from sales of The Silimbo Passage are donated to the ICRC.

On this extraordinary journey I have met wonderful people from all walks of life; musicians, promoters and audience members alike and many have become friends. Touring is not a glamorous activity, it is very tiring, but the reward is immense. It's is all worth it in the end. I feel blessed and I am looking forward to the next part of the journey.... like my new album.

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