



HOPKINS CENTER

presents

Orchestra Baobab

Barthélemy Koffi Attisso *guitar/leader*

Mouhamed Latfi Ben Geloune *rhythm guitar*

Charles Antoine Ndiaye *bass guitar*

Seydou Norou Koite *saxophone*

Mamadou Mountaga Koite *drums*

Issa Cissokho *saxophone*

Ndiogou Dieng *voice*

Rodolphe Clement Gomis *voice*

Assane Mboup *voice*

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the summer
arts
festival

Part of Dartmouth's Summer Arts Festival AFRICAS.

Tuesday, June 24 • 5 pm

Hanover Green • Dartmouth College

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Founded in 1970, Orchestra Baobab fused Afro-Cuban rhythm and Portuguese Creole melodies with Congolese rumba, highlife and a gamut of local styles—kick-starting a musical renaissance in the band’s native Senegal, which turned the capital Dakar into one of the world’s most vibrant musical cities. The band produced an impressive number of hits in less than a decade, yet found itself sidelined by the musical revolution it helped create, and disbanded in 1985. However, a groundswell of international interest led to the group’s acclaimed reformation in 2001.

“When I arrived in Senegal in 1968, there was only Cuban music,” says Orchestra Baobab’s Togolese guitarist Barthélemy Attisso. “Back home, we were listening to Nigerian highlife and Congolese guitar music, but if you walked past a club in Dakar, you would swear there were Cubans playing inside. Yet they were all Senegalese!”

Created in 1970 by a group of young businessmen and politicians as an exclusive meeting place near the country’s National Assembly, the Baobab Club quickly established itself as Dakar’s chicest night-spot. Decorated by Senegal’s top artists, it had a bar in the form of the trunk of a baobab—the majestic tree of the savannah.

That same year, former Star Band saxman Baro Ndiaye was brought to the club to provide the music. He quickly poached his former band’s most promising younger members: Balla Sidibe, Rudy Gomis, and Attisso, who, at this time, was a law student who had taken up music to pay his course fees, but was also emerging as one of the city’s most talented guitarists.

The fact that none of the three were Dakar insiders was highly significant in the evolution of the Baobab sound. Sidibe’s and Gomis’s husky voices worked superbly together, their deep-velvet harmonies

redolent of the tropical atmosphere of their native Casamance. Attisso, meanwhile, was steeped in Ghanaian highlife and Congolese music, and was evolving his own idiosyncratic version of the florid Congolese guitar style of Franco and Dr. Nico, filtered through influences as diverse as Wes Montgomery, B.B. King and Carlos Santana.

In contrast to these warm, rich, lyrical flavors, Laye Mboup, another crucial early member, brought the starker, neo-Islamic sounds of the Dakar region. A griot—a traditional praise singer—working with the National Instrumental Ensemble, Mboup sang entirely in Wolof, the lingua franca of Dakar, which was becoming increasingly important as an indicator of national identity. Mboup’s use of the arcane language of the griots, combined with his personal charisma, added greatly to Baobab’s cachet. As Dakar’s elite danced until dawn, packing the Baobab Club five nights a week, Orchestra Baobab became established as Senegal’s top group.

Baobab’s heyday at its eponymous home club lasted seven years, during which time the group also toured in the Cameroon, Tunisia and Guinea. In 1977, Orchestra Baobab accepted an offer to move to the Jandeer nightclub at a vastly increased salary. But things didn’t work out as they’d hoped, and they moved to the Balafon before decamping to Paris in 1978. Their six-month stay there produced two highly rated albums, with up-and-coming producer Ibrahima Sylla, *Baobab à Paris, Vols. 1 & 2*, which included the perennial favorite “On Verra Ca.” Yet it proved an unsatisfactory experience, and the band returned to Senegal out of pocket and without a club residency.

Baobab soon became associated with The Ngalam and proved so successful that the club had to be rebuilt to accommodate the crowds the group’s music attracted. Much of the band’s best material dates from this period. Their 1981 album *Mohammadou*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS CONTINUED

Bamba features stunning vocal performances from Thione Seck on the title track and Ndiouga Dieng on “Bulmamin.” Yet all was not well with Orchestra Baobab. They couldn’t shake off the old nightclub ethos where musicians came and went as the mood took them, and the band’s personnel was never entirely stable.

The 1982 album *Ken Dou Werente* included many of Baobab’s most famous songs: “Coumba,” “Ledi Njemme Mbodj” and “Utru Horas”—Rudy Gomis’s slow-burning lament that predicted the civil war in his native Casamance. While the album should have been the band’s defining masterpiece, it went largely ignored. Faced with dwindling audiences, departing band members and the unsuccessful infusion of younger band members to update the group’s sound, Baobab failed to find an audience.

In the late 1980s, when Orchestra Baobab was at the lowest point of its popularity in Senegal, its music was being discovered on the burgeoning Western world music scene. Baobab’s earthily melodic sound struck a chord with listeners discovering African music for the first time. *Ken Dou Werente* became a sought-after cult classic. In 1989, it was re-released to much acclaim under the title *Pirate’s Choice*.

Baobab appeared at a special Dakar concert at London’s Barbican in May 2001. The Barbican

concert received many accolades from the Western media. Rather than deviate from its musical base, as many fans feared it would, Orchestra Baobab sounded as though it had stepped through a 1970s time-warp. *Pirate’s Choice* was re-released as a re-mastered double album with additional rare tracks, and a year of euphoric international touring followed. Finally, in June 2002, Orchestra Baobab made a triumphant return to Senegal to coincide with the release of a new album, *Specialist in All Styles*. It was the group’s first in nearly 20 years. In 2003, Orchestra Baobab won two awards at the BBC Radio 3 Awards for World Music 2003 (one in the Africa category and the other for Album of the Year), earned a Grammy nomination, was the subject of a VH1 Special and took part in the highly prestigious Nobel Peace Prize Concert in Oslo.

The band has recently taken up a Dakar club residency for the first time in nearly 20 years, playing hugely popular Saturday night sessions at the Just 4 U Club. It is here that the band developed material for its most recent release, *Made in Dakar*, an album that takes them back to their lo-fi roots in the clubs and streets of Dakar.

As Attisso puts it, “The Baobab is a strong tree. Even if you cut it down, it will keep on growing. So when you speak of Orchestra Baobab, you know that we’re not the kind of band to disappear quietly.”

COMING EVENTS

For tickets or information call the Box Office at 603.646.2422 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu

REGGIE WILSON/FIST & HEEL PERFORMANCE GROUP

The Tail: Npin Nkutchie and the Tail of the Golden Deck

In styles ranging from ancient African mating rituals to ballroom, disco and the Electric Slide, Reggie Wilson and his Brooklyn-based Fist & Heel Performance Group tell *The Tale* of how dance has ritualized and playfully disguised libido and love, intimacy and devotion. Inspired by folk traditions from Southern and Western Africa and the Caribbean, performers weave rhythmic breathing, body percussion, improvised singing, intricate partnering and looped “house” music—from R. Kelly to the French ballad *La Vie en Rose*—as they coax out a universal sensuality in a seamless collage of music and dance.



Friday & Saturday, June 27 & 28 • 8 pm

The Moore Theater • \$28 • Dartmouth students \$5

★ *Post-performance discussion with the artists, The Moore Theater*

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arts Part of Dartmouth's Summer
festival Arts Festival AFRICAS

Community Shout!

Tuesday, June 24 • 7 pm • Top of the Hop • Free

Let your voice be heard! Join Reggie Wilson and members of Fist & Heel for a rejuvenating, transformative sing-a-long. Learn about the important role of songs and storytelling in African, Caribbean and American South oral traditions. *All ages welcome. For more info, call Hop Outreach at 603.646.2010*

Intermediate Level Dance Master Class with Reggie Wilson

Wednesday, June 25 • 5:30 pm • Straus Dance Studio • \$10

Reggie Wilson instructs participants in his own movement idiom, bringing contemporary technique and post-modern structure together with rhythmic folk traditions. *Enrollment limited to 25, ages 16 and up. To register, call the Hop Box Office at 603.646.2422 or sign up online.*

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