School Matinee Series • Study Guide

Mamadou Diabate and Percussion Mania

Thu • November 8 • 10 am
Welcome to the Hop

A performance needs an audience, so be prepared to play your part!

Theater Etiquette

When entering the Hopkins Center, show consideration for all those sharing the building by remaining quiet and respectful in common areas.

Be aware and use quiet voices. Remember that live theater differs greatly from watching television or movies or attending a sporting event. Live performers can hear and see you and are easily distracted by any talking or moving around in the audience. Even the smallest sounds can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to be quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation!

Important to remember: Backpacks, food, drink, and gum are not allowed in the theater. Please turn off all cell phones and note that recording the performance or taking any photos is strictly prohibited. Hats off! It is respectful to remove hats during your time in the theater.

Information for Teachers

Prepare—review this study guide for context that will help your students engage with the performance. Check in with the Hop if you have any questions or concerns about content. Read the email that accompanies this guide—Hop staff often request details about your visit including how many buses you’ll be bringing and what accommodations you need.

Arrive—arrive 30 minutes prior to start time to allow time for Hop staff to check you in and escort the students to their seats. Hop staff will ask you for a head count of students. Please review our bus policy before arrival: hop.dartmouth.edu/online/plan_a_successful_visit

Lunch—sometimes we are able to offer a space for schools to eat bag lunches following the show. Check the email that accompanies this guide to confirm. If staying for lunch, please confirm with Hop staff one week prior to show. The day of the show, please bring lunches in boxes or tubs labeled with your school’s name. Hop staff will take lunches to the lunch space and escort school group there following the show. Schools are responsible for calling their own bus back to the Hop when they are ready to leave.

Ticketing Policy—no tickets are issued for school matinee performances. Seating placement for each school group is determined by Hop staff. Please let them know if you have a seating request or accommodation; we do our best to keep each school group seated together. Payment is required 30 days before the performance regardless of whether all students are able to attend on the day of the show—please feel free to bring extra chaperones or school staff to fill any empty seats.

Photography—though photography by the audience is prohibited, the Hopkins Center may take photographs during the performance for use on our website or other promotional materials. If you or your students do not wish to be photographed, please let Hop staff know.

The Show Must Go On!—we do not cancel events due to school closings for inclement weather. Performances will only be cancelled if the artist is unable to reach the theater. Schools will be notified by phone if this occurs. We do not issue refunds for performances missed due to school closure. Please contact Hop staff if you find your school unable to attend for this reason.

This study guide was created by the Hop’s Outreach and Arts Education team. To download copies of this and other guides, visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach

Enjoy the Show!

Hopkins Center Outreach Department: Stephanie Pacheco, Outreach Manager
Mary Gaetz, Outreach Coordinator

The Hopkins Center Outreach and Arts Education department embodies the Hop’s mission to “ignite and sustain a passion for the arts.” It provides Dartmouth, the community and beyond rare personal contact with artists and a broad context for the performing arts. Unveiling the creative process of extraordinarily diverse artists, Outreach programs touch more than 14,000 lives each year.

Did You Know?

• The Hopkins Center opened in 1962.
• The Hopkins Center was designed by Wallace Harrison, architect of Lincoln Center and the United Nations Building in New York City.
• Spaulding Auditorium houses one of the largest pipe organs in New Hampshire. Can you find it?

hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach • 603.646.2010
About the Show

With deep roots in traditional African music, Mamadou Diabate (ma-ma-DOO die-ah-BAH-tay) and his band Percussion Mania share their love of music and learning. This performance begins with Mamadou, a master of the *balafon*, his brother Sadama, and cousin Yacouba all playing together on the *Sambla balafon*. Additional band members join in to play songs on the *Dioula balafon*, the *djembe*, the *calebasse* and the electric guitar (see more about these instruments later in the guide). To end the concert, students from the Dartmouth College music department will join the band onstage. This upbeat and joyful celebration of African culture teaches the unique ways music can communicate, from everyday conversation to traditional stories.

About the Artist

Mamadou Diabate is one of the world’s best *balafon* players. Mamadou was born in Burkina Faso, which is in West Africa. His family has a long tradition of making music and telling stories—at age five, Mamadou started training with his father to keep the tradition alive. His goal as a performer is to bring people together using the power of music. His *accolades* include winning the Grand *Prix* of the “Triangle du Balafon” competition in Mali in 2012 and becoming a Knight of the National Order of Burkina Faso in 2016. Passionate about education, Mamadou is the founder of a free elementary school in Burkina Faso. He now lives in Austria and tours all around the world sharing the music of his people.

Contextual Background

About Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is a country in West Africa. West Africa is a region of the African continent which includes the countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

In square miles, Burkina Faso is about the size of the state of Colorado. Its capital is Ouagadougou (wah-gah-DU-goo). Though several dozen languages are spoken in Burkina Faso, the official language of the country is French. This is because France invaded the country in 1890 and *colonized* it, taking the land from indigenous ethnic groups such as the Mossi and the Bobo and *imposing* French rule and culture. When the French were in power,
they named the country Upper Volta, referring to the Volta River that runs through the region. After the French returned rule of the country to its original inhabitants in the mid-20th century, then-President Thomas Sankara chose a new name using local languages. “Burkina” from the Mooré language means “men of integrity,” and “Faso” from the Diouala language, means “fatherland.” When used together, these names mean “the land of honest people.” The people of Burkina Faso refer to themselves as Burkinabé—the suffix “bé” means “men or women” and comes from the language spoken by the Fula people.

The Sambla People

Mamadou Diabate comes from the Sambla ethnic group; sometimes it is also spelled Sembla. They are a small group of people who live in 12 villages in the western part of Burkina Faso. The Sambla are farmers who grow millet, corn, peanuts and cotton. The climate is extremely dry and hot and the ground is hard and stony. There are no passable roads and no electricity. The use of agricultural machinery is almost impossible so the harvest is very small, leaving the people extremely poor. However, the Sambla are unimaginably rich when it comes to music. Each village, each important family and every profession has its own unique piece of music. Music is composed for every important occasion. Any work carried out by the village community is accompanied by music.

Language and Music

The music of the Sambla is unique because it is also a version of the Sambla language. When the Sambla balafon is played by a trained musician, it can sound like a voice speaking Sambla. People listening to the balafon can understand the words and stories communicated through the instrument. Some Sambla families are called jeli or griot (GREE-oh) families. They are responsible for learning and keeping this special musical language alive. The Sambla believe that these musical traditions are essential for a fortunate life and a happy future. Mamadou comes from a jeli family—the name “Diabate” goes all the way back to the 13th century C.E. and translates to “irresistible.” Children of jeli musicians learn the Sambla musical language at the same time as the spoken language, so Mamadou’s musical training began when he was very young. His first teacher was his father. Once trained, master musicians can communicate everything they might say with words using music instead: stories, current events, even just a casual chat with a friend.

Did You Know?

Each year fewer and fewer people are learning the Sambla language. To make sure it does not go extinct, some people are working to conserve, or save, this language and the music it embodies. One of those people is Dartmouth College professor of linguistics Laura McPherson. As part of the National Science Foundation’s Endangered Language Program, Dr. McPherson is documenting the ways the language and music of some African cultures—including Sambla—work together.
About the Balafon

The instrument used by Mamadou to play his language is a type of xylophone called a *ba or balafon*. Balafons have been played in Africa since the 12th century and are found throughout the western part of the continent. They have between 16–27 wooden keys strung over a frame, with hollow, dried calabash gourds underneath which act as resonators. A small hole in each gourd is covered with a membrane traditionally made of a spider’s egg sac; now these are made of paper or thin plastic film. The instrument is played by striking the wooden keys with two mallets that have rubber on the ends. The balafon can be played by one, two or three musicians at the same time. When three musicians play together, one musician is the soloist. The other two musicians listen closely and play music that complements the sounds the soloist makes. The result of their teamwork is new rhythms and melodies that could never be created by a single musician.

![A balafon](image1) ![Balafon mallets](image2) ![Calabash gourd on the vine](image3)

This performance uses two different types of balafon: the Sambla balafon and the Dioula balafon. The difference between the two balafons lies in the tradition—each instrument is associated with different tuning, songs and languages. The Sambla balafon is very specific to the Sambla ethnic group, especially in the ways it contributes to language. The Dioula balafon is more popular and is used by many musicians in Africa and around the world for entertainment purposes.

Instruments

**CALEBASE**
The *calebase* (cal-BAHSS) is a percussion instrument made from a calabash gourd that has been dried and hollowed out to an even thickness. It looks like a large bowl turned upside down. It is played with open hands, fists or a stick. The *calebase* is made from the same gourd that is used to make the balafon.

**DJEMBE**
The *djembe* (JEM-bey) is a goblet-shaped drum made of wood and covered with animal skin. A set of ropes are used to tune the drum. In the Bambara language of Mali (a country next to Burkina Faso), “djé” is the verb for “gather” and “bé” translates as “peace.” It is a versatile drum that is used in many different styles of music, from traditional African to jazz to pop.

**ELECTRIC BASS GUITAR**
This is a western instrument with four metal strings that produce low sounds when they are plucked or strummed. Bass guitars were developed in the early 20th century as a portable replacement for large double basses. Since it is electric, it is easily amplified to be loud enough to be heard with all the drums.
Pre-performance discussion questions

• Have you heard music from Africa? If so, how would you describe it? If not, how do you think it will sound?

• Why is listening to music and hearing stories from other places in the world important?

• Burkina Faso is very different from the United States, but it is also similar. Make a list of similarities and differences based on the information in this guide and other research.

Post-performance discussion questions

• Though you don’t speak the Sambla language, did you see and hear the balafon communicating? How could you tell? Do you think other instruments might be able to say things?

• How would you describe the music to a friend? What makes it similar to music you listen to? What makes it different?

• What questions do you still have about Africa and its music?

Learning Activities

Move It! (grades 1–2)

The balafon and other instruments make music because of vibrations. A vibration is quick back-and-forth motion, sometimes very small, that creates sound. When a mallet hits the balafon, the wood vibrates and that is what we hear. Students can explore making their own vibrations. Ask them to stretch elastic bands between their fingers and have a partner pluck or strum them. Can they feel the vibration in their fingers? Does it make a sound? Can they see the movement of the bands? Switch so their partner can try. What other things vibrate around us, even if the movement is so small that we may not be able to see it? How do we know its moving?

EXTEND: Use the slow-motion feature on cellphone video to capture the vibration and playback for students. What are some words you would use to describe how the movement looks when it is slowed down?

Zany Xylophones (grades 3–4)

For this activity, you’ll need 5–8 drinking glasses similar in size (they need to hold at least 1.5 cups of water). You’ll also need liquid measuring cups and wooden spoons; food coloring is optional.

Working in pairs or small groups, give students an empty glass and a wooden spoon. Ask them how they might make music with these items. How can you make different sounds? Will the sound change if you pour water into the glass? Experiment with pouring water into a glass and tapping the glass with a spoon. Have students note their observations.

Next, read out the “recipe” below and have students take notes, writing down the fractions needed for each glass:

• GLASS 1: one and 1/2 cups water
• GLASS 2: one and 1/4 cups water
• GLASS 3: one cup water
• GLASS 4: 7/8 cup water
• GLASS 5: 5/8 cup water
• GLASS 6: 3/8 cup water
• GLASS 7: 1/8 cup water
• GLASS 8: no water

Have students put the glasses in order from most water to least, not touching each other. Tap the sides or the rims of the glasses one at a time with the spoon to play a scale. If one of the glasses sounds “off,” have students re-measure or adjust the water: if the pitch is too high—add water; if too low—pour a little water out. If you have a piano, you can match each tone to a piano note, or you can use https://virtualpiano.net/. This will tell you if your glasses are in tune.

For visual fun, add food coloring to each glass. Ask students what colors they want, then have them add 2–3 drops of food coloring to each glass. They can also experiment with mixing colors.

Experiment with playing a song by ear. “Twinkle Twinkle” and “Mary Had A Little Lamb” are nice, simple songs to start with. Hold the spoon lightly from the end so the vibrations ring. If the students have trouble finding the tune, have one of the students who has figured it out play slowly so others can draw colored circles that represent the color of each glass as it is played. Play glasses according to color to play the song. Ask students: How do fractions and ratios make the xylophone work? How accurate did you have to be in your measuring? What factors may have kept the experiment from being successful? How could you try to control for those in a future experiment?

The Sounds of Africa (grade 4)

Africa is a large continent with many types of indigenous drums, percussion and stringed instruments, and many of these instruments have traveled to other continents, influencing modern instruments. Have students research an instrument from Africa and write a two-page report about where it comes from (physical location as well as culture/ethnic group), what it sounds like and why, and how it is played. Is there sheet music for this instrument? Why or why not? Is this instrument the ancestor of a more modern, non-African instrument? If so, how did that crossover happen? How much and what kind of training is needed to play this instrument? Is it played for specific events or at a certain time of year? Ask students to find or draw a picture of the instrument to accompany their report. Students can switch reports with a partner and briefly talk together about the instruments. Have students present to the class about their partner’s instrument. Some instruments to research include: kora, entongoli, umuduri, oud, endingidi, adungu, duff (also spelled daf), dunduk, djembe, namunjaloba, ohangla, n’goni, shekere, ekwe.
### Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accolades</strong></td>
<td>awards or privileges granted as a special honor or as an acknowledgment of merit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Amplified</strong></td>
<td>made louder, often by using electronics</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Calabash</strong></td>
<td>this gourd is either harvested young to be consumed as a vegetable, or harvested mature to be dried and used as a utensil. The gourd was one of the world’s first cultivated plants grown not primarily for food, but for use as container.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colonized</strong></td>
<td>taken over by another country or people</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Complements</strong></td>
<td>completes or supplies what was otherwise missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extinct</strong></td>
<td>gone, no longer in existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Griot</strong></td>
<td>a member of a group of traveling poets, musicians, and storytellers who maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imposing</strong></td>
<td>the act of controlling something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indigenous</strong></td>
<td>originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistics</strong></td>
<td>the study of language</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Membrane</strong></td>
<td>a thin, pliable sheet or skin of various kinds</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Millet</strong></td>
<td>a fast-growing cereal plant that is widely grown in warm countries and regions with poor soil</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Percussion</strong></td>
<td>musical instruments played by striking with the hand or with a handheld or pedal-operated stick or beater, or by shaking, including drums, cymbals, xylophones, gongs, bells and rattles</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prix</strong></td>
<td>pronounced “pree,” French for “prize”</td>
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<td><strong>Resonators</strong></td>
<td>devices that increase the sound of something, especially a hollow part of a musical instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rituals</strong></td>
<td>act or series of acts performed according to a traditional or prescribed form</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Savanna</strong></td>
<td>a grassy plain with few trees located between rainforest and desert</td>
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<td><strong>Soloist</strong></td>
<td>a singer or other musician who performs all or part of a song alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Xylophone</strong></td>
<td>a musical instrument played by striking with one or more wooden or plastic mallets a row of wooden bars of graduated length</td>
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### Resources

Read more about Mamadou at: mamadoudiabate.jimdo.com/

Read more about Laura McPherson at her website: dartmouth.edu/~mcpherson/

### References

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Laura McPherson: sites.dartmouth.edu/mcpherson/