TOUMANI DIABATÉ
with the
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

Tuesday 21 October 2008 7.30pm
Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

TOUMANI DIABATÉ kora
CLARK RUNDELL conductor

Fode Lassana balafons
Fanta Mady Kouyaté acoustic & electric guitar
Fode Kouyaté pumpkin & tama (traditional African percussion)
Mohamed Koita bass
Kasse Mady Diabaté vocals
Ganda Tounkara ngoni
Johannes Bellinck sound engineer

ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
leader James Clark

Orchestral arrangements by
NICO MUHLY and IAN GARDINER

This concert has been rescheduled from 25 October

Commissioned by the Barbican (London) and Liverpool Philharmonic Hall & Events, produced by the Barbican, and supported by the Arts Council of England and Liverpool Culture Company Ltd as part of the 2008 European Capital of Culture Programme

Songs with Orchestra

MANCHESTER TUNE
kora & orchestra
arranged by Ian Gardiner

DJOUROU KARA NANY
kora, balafon, acoustic guitar & orchestra
arranged by Nico Muhly

CANTelowes
kora, balafon, acoustic guitar & orchestra
arranged by Nico Muhly

MAMADOU BOUTIQUIER
kora, vocalist, ngoni & orchestra
arranged by Ian Gardiner

ELYNE ROAD
kora, acoustic guitar, balafon, ngoni, pumpkin & orchestra
arranged by Nico Muhly

KAIRA
kora, balafon & orchestra
arranged by Ian Gardiner

Toumani will also perform unaccompanied and with his band, including some of the songs from his collaborations with Ali Farka Touré and Taj Mahal.
Creating the orchestral arrangements
by Ian Gardiner

Two facets of Toumani's music are heard in the pieces with orchestra in this concert: the intimate and magical quality of his solo work, as heard on the album 'The Mandé Variations', from which three tunes have been transcribed and arranged by Nicu Mulyh; and the virtuosic and exuberant flourish in his collaborations with other musicians, as heard in the recordings of his own group the Symmetric Orchestra, and the album 'In the Heart of the Moon', a spellbinding dialogue (with a little help from Ry Cooder) between Toumani and the late Malian singer/guitarist Ali Farka Touré. Two tunes from this recording, adaptations of traditional songs 'Mamadou Boutiquier' and 'Kaira', form the basis of two of my arrangements for this concert. The third tune that I've adapted is based on a recording of an improvisation that Toumani played to tonight's conductor Clark Rudell backstage after a concert in Manchester. A lilting lullaby of a tune goes through a number of variations – an opportunity for some of the woodwind and the strings to sing.

Arranging such beautiful music for a small orchestra would seem to be quite a straightforward task, but two elements should ring a note of caution to the arranger. Firstly, by some extraordinary legedermann, great kora players like Toumani manage to play bass, rhythmic accompaniment, and rippling melodies simultaneously with just two hands, as well as using all kinds of playing techniques to get different sounds and colours – the kora is an orchestra itself. At times the orchestral arrangement just needs to highlight some of these parts – to play alongside and support. And second, this is often quite fragile music based around subtle embellishments of and improvisations on its main ideas – the arrangements need to leave plenty of space for this, and provide a variety of backings and colours behind Toumani's solo work... but the orchestra also needs to have its voice, so I've tried to create moments where backings become 'frontings', with richer treatments of the melodies touching on early 20th-century classical sonorities. Here the orchestral players also have to lock in to a particular type of Malian swing in the rhythm – light, tripping, a bit hip-wiggling.