

| |
|--|
| Institution: SOAS |
| Unit of Assessment: 35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts |
| Title of case study: Bringing Malian Music to International Audiences (Lucy Duran) |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Lucy Duran's ethnomusicological research into the traditional musical forms, cultural practices and instruments of Mali has underpinned the studio production of two internationally acclaimed albums, <i>Segu Blue</i>, winner of two BBC Radio 3 Music Awards for Best World Music Album and Best African Artist in 2008, and <i>I Speak Fula</i>, a 2010 Grammy nominee for Best Traditional World Music Album. Both have raised awareness amongst musicians and global audiences of Bamana musical traditions, including the <i>ngoni</i>, the oldest of the West African lutes and, until <i>Segu Blue</i>, an instrument hardly known beyond West Africa.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Dr Lucy Duran has worked with musicians in Mali since the late 1980s, primarily as a researcher, but also as a music producer and broadcaster. Since 1992, Dr Duran has been Lecturer in African Music at SOAS, where she completed her PhD in 1999. Since 2000 she combined this role with presenting the World Routes programme on Radio 3 (1, below).</p> <p>Fundamentally, Duran's research examines how music encapsulates the core values of southern Malian identities and explores how traditional music and song participate in communicating those values. Duran considers her work as a producer in Mali to fall within the rubric practice-based research as such participation in the mediation of the creative process can provide unique insights into the aesthetics and dynamics of a musical culture. Much of Duran's research since 2000 was principally concerned with Maninka musical traditions and women singers. Her related studio production work, as exhibited in the albums <i>Kassi Kasse</i> and <i>New Ancient Strings</i>, has sought to reconcile the tensions between tradition and modernity in ways that encourage musicians to remain true to their traditions, whilst simultaneously enabling contemporary interpretation.</p> <p>In 2006, Duran shifted the focus of her enquiry to the little-researched and under-exposed music of the Bamana griots or <i>jeliw</i> of Mali's Middle Niger Valley. This was a direct consequence of research undertaken for "Ngaraya: Women and Musical Mastery in Mali": It was through understanding how Malians evaluate musical mastery that Duran recognised that the musicians who are most highly regarded from within the tradition are not those who have pursued commercial success. This led her to study Bamana music, regarded as one of the most traditional styles of Mande culture, and to work with Bassekou Kouyate, a respected Bamana griot or <i>jeli</i>. The primary instrument of the Bamana <i>jeliw</i> is the <i>ngoni</i>, dating from the 12th century or earlier, and likely ancestor of the banjo, though its connections with African American music remain under-studied.</p> <p>Research on Bamana musical traditions extant in 2006 focussed strictly on the texts of Bamana epics notable for their thematic emphases on warfare, slavery, honour and betrayal. Duran's work by contrast focussed on the distinctive sound and manner of playing the <i>ngoni</i> and uncovered the ritual significance of pieces such as "Poyi," played by <i>jeliw</i> during the era of the Bamana empire (1712-1861) to war captives to persuade them to choose death in honour, rather than slavery in shame.</p> <p>Duran is the first scholar to suggest that this combination of distinctive Bamana musical features, their sense of pathos and the historical context in which they were mobilised provides a more convincing source for the Blues of the southern United States than other West African musical traditions. To summarise, Duran's output as a music producer is the direct result of her research on core values in Mande culture. At the same time, her work in the studio constitutes practice-based research, providing new insights into Bamana music and, significantly, its transatlantic connections.</p> |

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. "Ngaraya: Women and Musical Mastery in Mali." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70/3 (2007): 569-602.
- b. *Kassi Kasse: Music from the Heart of Mali's Griot Tradition: Kasse Mady Diabate – Discos Corason*, EMI Hemisphere, 2003.
- c. "Women, Music, and the Mystique of Hunters in Mali." In *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, edited by Ingrid Monson, 137-86. New York: Garland, 2000.
- d. *New Ancient Strings: Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko*, Hannibal HNCD 1428, 1999.
- e. co-produced with Joe Boyd. *Kulanjan: Taj Mahal and Toumani Diabate*, Hannibal HNCD 1444, 1999.
- f. "Birds of Wasulu: Freedom of Expression and Expressions of Freedom in the Popular Music of Southern Mali." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 4 (1995): 101-34.

Outputs a, b and c were submitted to RAE 2008, as was the album *Segu Blue*.

Outputs d, e, and f were submitted to RAE 2001.

Further research that supported the production of *I Speak Fula* was funded by the AHRC large grant, BEYOND TEXT "Growing into Music: A Multicultural Study of Musical Enculturation in Oral Traditions" (Start date: 01/01/2009. End Date: 31/03/2012. Total amount awarded: £496,872).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Senior Producer at BBC Radio 3, James Parkin, notes: "[Dr Duran's] research has taken her far beyond the commercial market of Mali's world music success stories." (3, 4) Such was the case in her championship of the Bamana *jeli* and virtuoso of the *ngoni*, Bassekou Kouyate. Though an accomplished musician supporting Ali Farka Touré, Toumani Diabaté and Youssou N'Dour, Kouyate and his then more marginal Bamana style were relegated to the background of the thriving Malian music scene of the 1990s and 2000s. It was during the making of the 1999 album *Kulanjan*, intended in part to confirm the West African roots of the Blues, that Duran realised that there was actually far more musical common ground between Blues great Taj Mahal and the backing Bamana musician Kouyate than with the headline Maninka *kora* player Toumani Diabaté. In contrast to Maninka music, traditional Bamana *jeli* music is largely pentatonic and slow in tempo and – unlike the more popular west African *kora* – the *ngoni* is capable of elaborate microtonal variations on pitch, made possible by sliding and bending the strings on the *ngoni*'s neck in ways echoed in the Blues.

This realisation inspired Duran to work directly with Kouyate to record an experimental acoustic album that showcased the distinctive features of traditional Bamana *ngoni* music and explore potential transatlantic links between Bamana and the Blues. As producer, Duran strongly encouraged Kouyate to remain true to his familial *jeli* traditions. The result was the 2007 album *Segu Blue* featuring four *ngonis*. Kouyate has referred to *Segu Blue* as a "listening album," intended to introduce people outside West Africa to the *ngoni* for the first time.

Segu Blue's critical and popular reception surpassed all expectation, as it quickly reached number three in the World Music Charts Europe in 2007 and had accolades and positive reviews hailing the album's authenticity and purity from publications and outlets such as *Songlines* (where it was listed as one of the 10 best albums of the year), *The Guardian*, *Independent*, *iTunes* and *All About Jazz* amongst many others. In 2008 the album won two BBC Radio 3 Music Awards for Best Album and Best African Artist (5) and the stage shows of the international tour that year (also championed by Duran) were equally well received: *The Guardian*, for example, gave Ngoni Ba's

Impact case study (REF3b)

performance at the Malian *Festival au Desert* of January 2008 a review of 9.5/10 stars. Sales figures were and remain strong for a world music title, exceeding 30,000 to date (2). As of the 1 March 2013 the album was illegally downloadable from file sharing site Pirate Bay. This is significant because in World Music generally and African music in particular the vast majority of distribution happens through pirating/illegal copying.

Through the course of touring in 2008-09, Kouyate and his fellow musicians further developed the songs of *Segu Blue* with more up tempo and dynamic arrangements. A second album, *I Speak Fula* of 2009 reflects these developments and includes the contributions of special guests.

I Speak Fula too received fantastic popular and critical acclaim: It reached number five in the Billboard Music Chart in February 2010 (7) and was ranked tenth on the World Music Charts Europe for the year, having reached number five in March 2010. Together with *Segu Blue*, the two albums have more than 160,000 plays and 24,000 unique listeners on online radio station Last FM as of 1 March 2013. Despite fewer sales with c. 10,000 to date (2), a raft of awards and accolades followed the album's release culminating in a Grammy nomination for Best Traditional World Music Album of 2010 (8). *I Speak Fula* was also voted by *The Independent* one of the Top Ten Best World Music Albums, and Kouyate won in the Best Artist category at the 2010 Songlines Music Awards. Reviewers applauded both the album and the stage shows with positive reviews appearing, for example, in *The Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Afropop*, *All About Jazz*, *Time Out New York* and *American National Public Radio*. Indeed, NPR hosts a permanent artist's page on its website "Hear the Music" featuring interviews, sound files and a filmed recorded session with Kouyate (6).

Not only has Duran's championship and sensitive production of this artist and traditional *jeli* music of a remote swathe of the Niger introduced to global audiences a new type and sound of Malian music with potential historical and stylistic connections to the development of the Blues in the southern United States, she has contributed to changing the fortunes of Kouyate, his family and the local community in his native Segou and beyond. The success of the albums she produced has reinvigorated interest in the *ngoni* in Mali (as well as in the musics of Mali beyond the more dominant Maninka tradition). Kouyate has used the proceeds of his success to found a music school in Bamako (2) and is exporting *ngoni* internationally to satisfy newly-found, global, demand.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. World Route's programme: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tnmp> [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].
2. Mr Jay Rutledge, Out | here Records (also corroborator of sales figures and Kouyate's music school in Bamako)
3. Mr James Parkin, Senior Producer BBC Radio 3
4. Mr Peter Meanwell, Producer, BBC Radio 3
5. BBC World Music Award 2008: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/worldmusic/a4wm2008/winners.shtml> [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].
6. Artist's page on American National Public Radio Website: NPR <http://www.npr.org/artists/17249973/bassekou-kouyate> [Most recently accessed 18.11.13].
7. Billboard chart position: <http://www.billboard.com/charts#/charts/world-albums?chartDate=2010-02-20> [Most recently accessed 14.06.12].
8. Grammy nomination:

http://www.seattleweekly.com/reverb/2010/12/yeah_the_grammys_love_grunge_b.php

[Most recently accessed 18.11.13].