



"Mama Sissoko is a legend in Mali, and Soleil de Minuit gives Americans a chance to discover his masterful guitar work and sweet song craft. As a Manding griot—a musical historian by birth—Sissoko delivers elegant interpretations of songs from an old repertoire of classics. But he does more as well, cranking out Manding rock, exploring the bluesy Bambara music of the Segou region, and presenting Mali's unique take on Afro-Cuban music, which was tremendously influential during his formative years. In all, a great introduction to a great artist, and a giant of West African guitar music."

- Eyre Banning

All Things Considered

Afro-pop Worldwide

1 JARABI MUSO

2 BOMA MA

3 SAFATOU

4 MANSSEANE Cisse

5 SOLEIL DE MINUIT

6 IRI

7 FESTIVALE

8 NAMISSA

9 COMMISSARIAT

10 HOMMAGE À R



Mama Sissoko soleil de minuit

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1949 in Nioro of the Sahel region – later to become a part of independent Mali – Mama Sissoko is a musical heir to the variety of great guitar and vocal traditions that Mali has produced. His music is born of the soaring vocal griot traditions of the Manding people, the bluesy guitarman'ship and stark, slow melodies of the Bambara, and the rhythms of the Bobo, Sarakole, Fulani, and Songhai people.

Mama Sissoko was born to a family of musicians, and an environment that allowed him to embrace both traditional and popular genres. His uncle, a saxophonist in a local entertainment band, taught him how to play the drums. Mama's father was the griot of one of the two important imams of the village as well as a famous n'goni player (the n'goni is a small West African lute), and Mama Sissoko began playing traditional music with his father's ensemble at an early age as a percussionist. Early on, he tired of his role in the rhythm section and picked up the guitar. One of his great inspirations was Boubacar Traoré (aka Kar Kar) – one of the great bluesmen of Mali, who at the time was contracted to play with the Nioro orchestra. Mama Sissoko started with an acoustic guitar, and shortly after, he convinced the mayor of his hometown to buy him an electric guitar.

Following independence (1961), Mali elected to have an army that would be completely free of the presence of the French military. The draft was instituted, and it was up to each village to select those who would serve. Mama was one of those selected by the elders of his village for the six-year stint. However, if the military may seem to be the worst place for a musician to develop, it was not so for Mama. Early in his service his commander, who was greatly inspired by his playing, asked him to form a band. The musicians of Les Genie Stars were given great conditions to develop, including instruments, equipment, ample rehearsal time, and government sponsored concerts. Later in his military career he was also asked to play with the famous Orchestre National de Bamako. It was a period of great hope and political excitement in Africa, and Mama had the honor of playing for the likes of Haile Selassie and Ché Guevara.

In 1970 Mama was released from the army and in the following years he played with a variety of orchestras around the country. This period was incredibly formative; Mama lived in many different corners of Mali, learning and absorbing into his own style the local musical rhythms, songs, and traditions. In 1974 he joined the mythical Super Biton de Ségou as singer and soloist. Super Biton de Ségou was an orchestra that in the early '70s spearheaded a trend in popular music that sought to incorporate traditional idioms in their music, rather than performing imitation Cuban music, greatly popular at the time. Les Super Biton incorporated repertoire from the Bobo, Bambara, Bozo, Sarakole, Songhai and Manding people, and won first prize year after year at the government-sponsored biennale. For the next ten years, Mama Sissoko toured with Super Biton, in Africa and in Europe, and Paris became his part-time home in the eighties. Due to the change of regimes in Mali, and the total lack of government support and funding for music in the days of Mousa Traoré, Super Biton dispersed in 1989.

In the late 80's, Mama began performing as a solo artist, and in 1991 he recorded his first cassette – Narena. The next recording, Jarabi came in 1997.

Mama Sissoko is not a prolific artist. For each song that Mama incorporates into his repertoire, he goes to Mali to find the particular elder and village from which song or melody came, to ask their permission to use the material. Only then Mama begins to work on the song and adapt it to his own repertoire. But while the process is long and laborious, each of his recordings is a rare and well-awaited gem.

Soleil de Minuit – released in '2000 in France and his first recording to be released domestically in the US, is a true testament to Sissoko's talents as singer, guitarist, composer and lyricist. The album is an acoustic tapestry of haunting melodies, resonant vocals, and effervescent guitar work, which often reflects the syncopated sonorities of the kora. The title track, Soleil de Minuit, is a lovely Africanized Cuban son, a Bambara-Spanish duet with the Paris-based Panamanian sonero Azuquita, complemented by shimmering guitar solos and the virtuosic playing of Toumani Diakité on the dozo n'goni. The album is dedicated to Mama Sissoko's late sister and Namissa is a moving lament and homage to her.

A review in L'Affiche describes Soleil de Minuit as "dignified and classic, an album of great melodies revisited and original compositions of the same caliber. The production is discreet and tasteful, the musicians unmatched – as is Mama himself – with whom the play between balance and fluidity is the essential goal of the game."

For Mama, releasing an album in the US is tremendously important. He wants Americans to understand the source of the music. "In the news, people always see stories about the terrible economies and about the bad side of Africa. But the culture and the music – they are so rich and beautiful. They are the good side of Africa. I want to show this to the world."



MAMA SISSOKO

SOLEIL DE MINUIT