

AN ARTS-LED SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB

THE CENTRE FOR

**SOUND
COMMUNITIES**

sound • movement • performance

The Centre for Sound Communities Announces *Bala* CD Launch & Virtual Concert March 13 ~ Public Zoom with the Artist & Producers to follow

SYDNEY, NOVA SCOTIA — March 13, 2021 will see the virtual launch of *Bala*, a unique CD recorded at The Centre for Sound Communities (CSC) featuring the internationally acclaimed virtuoso balafón musician Fodé Lassana Diabaté.

Known globally for his exceptional skill in musical performance, composition and collaboration, Lassana Diabaté, based in Mali, came to Cape Breton in 2019 to create this unique album, recorded and produced at The Centre for Sound Communities. Its launch was delayed by a year due to the pandemic, but *Bala* will finally débüt March 13, with a virtual concert via YouTube, followed by public Zoom interaction with the artist.

The album's featured instrument, the balafón (22-key xylophone), resonates its ancient West African history through Diabaté's cutting-edge contemporary energy ~ expressive, lyrical and richly sonic. "The album is purely traditional and it's unique in the Mandingo world," says Diabaté. "It shows the world that the balafón is also a classical instrument. The balafón was known only to make people dance."

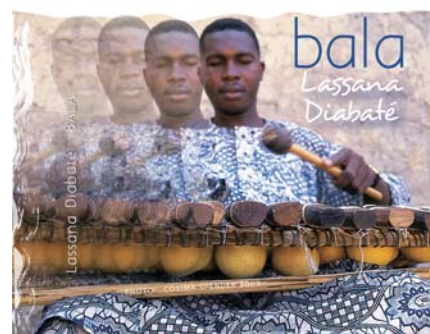
Recorded and produced at The Centre for Sound Communities in collaboration with Cape Breton University's Centre for Cape Breton Studies in Sydney, Nova Scotia, *Bala* is also unique in that it symbolizes an important shift in Canadian music production, representing an important bridge between two continents with so much of their history intertwined.

The first African settlers in Nova Scotia can be traced to the 1700s, over time forming communities that today contribute to the cultural diversity of an area that is an ocean away from their antecedents. When Lassana Diabaté first came to Cape Breton in 2014 to participate in the Singing Storytellers Symposium, he performed, gave school workshops and met with various communities as part of a multi-faceted public outreach project bringing scholars and performers from a variety of disciplines and countries together with local residents. His return visits solidify the link between countries and cultural heritage and represent optimism and appreciation across a geographic divide.

Diabaté's collaboration with CSC director Dr. Marcia Ostashevski to produce *Bala* is part of a broader project focusing on Black and Indigenous lives and musics to develop a new model for global music education in the time of the current pandemic; it is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Partnership Engage COVID-19 Special Initiative, intended to develop strategies to manage recovery efforts, address systemic societal inequities and strengthen to handle the later waves of the pandemic and other emergencies.

Diabaté has collaborated with musicians around the world and across many genres ~ jazz, blues and Latin music ~ and has been a key contributor in several Grammy-nominated albums. In 2016, he widened his sphere of influence to establish the Association Foli-Lakana to foster the vitality and sustainability of local musics, youth and communities in Mali; his music education endeavour now stands to build resilience through a new operating model to be developed out of the CSC's partnership project.

"We are thrilled ~ and so proud! ~ to have The Centre for Sound Communities contribute to this musical milestone for Lassana Diabaté," says Dr. Ostashevski, "as well as to the local communities that will grow through the sounds, songs and stories that he shares. The launch of the album will be celebrated with community groups in the coming months, building cultural appreciation and connections."



.../2

The Centre for Sound Communities Announces *Bala* CD Launch & Virtual Concert March 13 ~ Public Zoom with the Artist & Producers to follow

...Continued from page 1

March 13 *Bala* Album Release Virtual Concert from Mali; CD Available for Purchase

Bala will launch on March 13, 2021, along with an album release virtual concert in which Diabaté will perform the album tracks live, for the first time, accompanied by local musicians in Mali, West Africa.

+ *Bala* album release concert on YouTube.

Channel — <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7xTJ3q4t92oOfKJRKeNa-A>

+ Pre-save on Spotify at <https://show.co/c9V5I6d>. Click on the link & you'll be able to save the album in your Spotify account, then listen as soon as it launches.

+ Listen to the song 'Cape Breton', featured in 'Bala' — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyWxjccUPDM>

+ Find out more about Lassana Diabaté and 'Bala' — <https://balafondiabate.ca>

+ Physical and digital copies of *Bala* will be for sale through <https://balafondiabate.ca/shop>

After the release concert, Lassana Diabaté, CSC Director Dr. Marcia Ostashewski and MC Jon Kertzner will engage in a lively discussion about the concert and present next steps of the project and its cultural relevance for the field of ethnomusicology and Nova Scotian communities. Everyone is welcome to attend, ask questions and join the discussion. Please confirm your participation in the Zoom meeting by sending an email to: etaylorgomes@mun.ca



PHOTO: ANDREAS KUHRT

Lassana Diabaté, Musician/Composer/Culture-Bearer/Balafón-maker: Creator of *Bala*

Internationally acclaimed virtuoso balafón musician Fodé Lassana Diabaté — better known as Lassana Diabaté — exhibits a highly dexterous and contrapuntal style of playing the balafón, with extraordinary independence of left and right hands, a great range of expressive tone and lyrical melodies, and rich sonic resonance. Diabaté has developed a unique practice of playing two balafóns that are tuned a semitone apart, enabling him to perform chromatic scales and to accompany Western instruments and ensembles such as the innovative and eclectic Kronos Quartet. He has appeared centre stage at Carnegie Hall, participated in several Grammy-nominated albums and collaborated with musicians around the world and across many genres.

According to Banning Eyre (*Afropop Worldwide*): "You can instantly spot him as a master — brilliantly engaged and spontaneous, technically impeccable, simply a thrill to behold."

Project Support: This program of community engagement (overarching the CD production) is supported through community partnerships and by Mitacs, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Nova Scotia Research and Innovation Trust (NSRIT), Canada Foundation for Innovation, Cape Breton University (CBU), Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage - African Nova Scotian Affairs. The project is also supported by Cultures of Sound Network (CSN), an organization comprising Sound Studies Institute (University of Alberta), The Research Centre for Music, Media and Place (MMaP, Memorial University of Newfoundland), The Centre for Sound Communities (CBU), the Canadian Museum of History, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings whose mandate is to support initiatives for creation, preservation and dissemination of music knowledge.

Contact: Project Manager Eric Escudero, e-mail: etaylorgomes@mun.ca + cell (709) 730-5435

+ balafondiabate.ca + <https://soundcommunities.org> + facebook.com/soundcommunities

— 30 —