

MELBOURNE
FESTIVAL

11
- 27
Oct
2013



Eclipse

Amadou & Mariam (Mali)

23 - 25 Oct Melbourne Recital Centre, Elisabeth Murdoch Hall

ECLIPSE

AMADOU & MARIAM

PERFORMERS

Band Members

Guitar & Vocals Amadou Bagayoko

Vocals Mariam Doumbia

Bass Yao Dembele

Drums Yvo Abadi

Percussion Boubacar Dembele

Guest Performers

Kora Madou Diabate

Backing Vocals Mamani Keita

Keyboards Idrissa Soumaoro

Narrator Hamadoun Tandina

TECHNICAL CREDITS

Direction Marc Antoine Moreau

Sounds Jo Gunton & Marc Antoine Moreau

Technical Director Nicolas Champion

Sound Engineers Francois Xavier Vilaverde
& Francois Gouverneur

Technical Manager Julien Bahuau

Scent Engineer Jose Martin

Video Alessandro Principe

Scent Kate Williams

ECLIPSE

It's dark. Black as pitch. Your eyes are wide open, but you see nothing. In a sense, you have no eyes. You left them in the lobby with your coat, your bags, your smartphone, your daily concerns and your habitual ways of experiencing the world. You're led through the darkness to your seat by someone you cannot see, only touch – someone who is blind perhaps, blind as you have become. One fate has replaced another. You're the sightless one now and your other senses – touch, sound, smell – have become your eyes.

Once the audience has settled, the show starts. It's morning. The air feels light and fresh. A donkey brays in the distance. A moped whizzes by. You smell incense and the fragrances of the sun-warmed African earth. You hear the cockcrow and the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer. A voice sets the scene, an African voice, strong and characterful. He tells you that you're in Bamako, the capital of Mali, at the dawn of a new day. Two destinies are about to become entwined. And then the music begins.

Eclipse is unlike any show you have ever seen before. The entire performance, bar a final twist, takes place in total darkness. In fact, there's no 'showing' or 'seeing' at all. Only smelling, hearing, touching – senses made razor sharp by your temporary blindness. For a little over an hour and a half, you will live the life, the love and the music of Amadou & Mariam, the blind couple from Mali. You will experience their story in the same way as they have experienced it, blindly, but with all your other senses awake, ready to guide you through the darkness and grace you with new insight.

Amadou and Mariam lost their sight at the ages of fifteen and five respectively. They met at the Institute for Blind Youth in Bamako, fell in love and got married, despite the concerns of family and friends who never believed that a blind couple could fend for themselves in a country like Mali. Amadou was already an accomplished guitarist who had received the best education any Malian musician could hope for, as a member of one of the most important orchestras in the history of Malian music: Super Rail Band. At the Institute for Blind Youth, Amadou and Mariam formed another band with the keyboard player Idrissa Soumaoro and other sighted musicians. It was called *Eclipse*. The pair then went solo, became famous in Mali and West Africa and travelled to France where they caused a sensation. After the release of *Dimanche a Bamako*, the album produced by Manu Chao, in 2005, Amadou & Mariam became the most famous African group on the planet. *Eclipse* is their story.

"I asked myself what could form the basis of a new show," says Marc-Antoine Moreau, their manager and the man behind the *Eclipse* concept. "I didn't want to fall into any kind of sentimental miserabilism about their blindness. What's interesting are the acute senses they have developed as blind people: their touch, their smell, even their sense of presence. So we thought it would be interesting to play around with that. And we wanted a reversal of roles, without



any sense of judgment or criticism. It's the audience that's going to be handicapped, but that way they can discover new capacities and sensations they never knew they had."

Each of the songs in *Eclipse* marks an important chapter in the life of Amadou and Mariam: childhood, musical apprenticeship, love, marriage, parenthood, world travel, global fame etc. Before every song, a narrator will set the scene over a bed of ambient sounds. The climate in the theatre will adapt to each scenario, and special fragrances will waft over the audience to enhance their sensory journey. As Amadou and Mariam's romance evolves, as they travel to different countries, the sensual landscape changes and the audience travels with them, in darkness, riveted. "If you cannot see, your sense of sound becomes richer," Amadou says. "You appreciate the qualities of sound. That's one reason I wanted to have a series of concerts in the darkness. I wanted the audiences to try to hear the music just as Mariam and I hear it."

The narrative interludes have been written by the renowned Malian poet and storyteller Hamadou Tandina, a native of Timbuktu. "We'd like to bring this story of love alive," he tells me. "Amadou and Mariam have grown together in the dark, but despite that darkness they bring us joy, human warmth and good atmosphere. So why can't we, who 'live on the other side of the river', so to speak, cross over and join their world to experience their daily struggles."

Tandina considers sightlessness an advantage when it comes to absorbing music and poetry. "A story is like a dream," he explains. "And we can only dream with our eyes closed. Moreover, it's common to see musicians close their eyes in order to feel the power of their music more intensely. Poetry lends itself to an inner journey, and to take off on that journey, to leave yourself, you have to close your eyes. If your eyes stay open, you'll be too distracted."

Tandina's words paint myriad scenes, transporting you to the Institute in Bamako, the Buffet de la Gare where Super Rail Band would play every night during their heyday, a European festival stage in front of an audience of thousands, Amadou and Mariam's house or Bamako's great central market, where the city shops and senses run riot. And at every stop on the journey, there will be fragrances floating through the air.

Kate Williams of Sevenscent in Manchester has been immersing herself in the music of Amadou and Mariam in order to create the right scents for *Eclipse*. "When you create a fragrance," Williams explains, "the best analogy is putting a piece of music together. We have 'notes' for singular fragrances, like orange oil for example. But then you have 'chords', which are made up of different fragrance materials. So you put several notes and chords into a fragrance and then you bridge the different parts with other raw materials so it flows when you smell it, just like a piece of music. For *Eclipse*, I've been asked to recreate all kinds of smells: incense, a special traditional mosquito repellent, something quite earthy, that will remind you of being in Africa, and a special fragrance that will represent Amadou and Mariam. Their music is very complex, so I want to create a fragrance with lots of different layers, and rhythmical 'chords'."

"By losing something they take for granted, just for an hour or so, we want to offer people the chance of seeing beyond what they normally see, of getting out beyond themselves," Marc-Antoine Moreau explains. "And hopefully they'll experience sensations that they don't even suspect exist. I've been giving Amadou my arm, and guiding him everywhere in the world, across airports, down city sidewalks, for the past fifteen years, and I see his reactions, his sensations. I feel them. And I'd like to share them with other people."

The English writer Thomas Hardy once wrote: "There is a condition worse than blindness, and that is, seeing something that isn't there." Our eyes deceive us more than we think. We see black, white, rich, poor, old, young, ugly and beautiful, when we are merely looking at humans like us. For a brief time only, *Eclipse* will take away your sight and, in return, give you a chance to 'see' the world again - a world that will be new, startling, rich and unforgettable.

This Melbourne Festival show will be the first time *Eclipse* is performed outside of Europe.

- **Andy Morgan**

AMADOU & MARIAM

To expand your horizons while remaining true to your roots is a challenge that Amadou & Mariam have risen to – and consistently met – throughout their career.

Each new album has found the husband-and-wife duo from Mali boldly moving forward and breaking fresh ground, while at the same time preserving their instantly recognisable trademarks: the exquisite song craft, Amadou's thrilling electric blues guitar and the magical interplay of their two voices, which first brought them popularity.

The couple met in 1977 while attending the Institute for Young Blind in Bamako (where they continue to play an annual benefit concert). Influenced by the records of Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Pink Floyd as well as traditional African music, the couple began working as a duo in 1983 and their early recordings have since been remastered and reissued by Because Music as a box set, 1990–1995: *The Best of the African Years*.

Sou Ni Tile, their first album recorded outside Africa, appeared in 1998, and went on to sell 100,000. It was followed by two further albums, *Tje ni Mousoo* (1999) and *Wati* (2002).

Their transition from world music stages to rock festival headliners came with 2005's Manu Chao-produced *Dimanche à Bamako*, one of the best-selling African albums of all time, which won a prestigious Les Victoires de la Musique award (the French equivalent of the Grammys) and two BBC Radio 3 Awards for World Music. Their *Welcome to Mali* album was one of the most acclaimed recordings of 2009, and featured contributions from Damon Albarn, K'Naan and Keziah Jones. In 2011 Amadou & Mariam performed the first of their unique *Eclipse* shows at the Manchester International Festival. The concerts, staged entirely in the dark, chronicle the duo's life and work together, featuring songs from across their career.

In recent years, Amadou & Mariam have toured with Coldplay and U2 and jammed with musical heroes David Gilmour and Johnny Marr. They've performed at a Nobel Peace Prize concert in honour of Barack Obama, and played at the opening ceremonies of the last two FIFA world cups. Manu Chao and Damon Albarn have lent their production skills to their records and they have worked with some of the most innovative names in contemporary rock music via Albarn's 'Africa Express' and other cross-cultural projects, such as 'L'Afrik C'est Chic'.

In 2012 Amadou & Mariam released *Folila*, an album of songs recorded both in New York and in their hometown of Bamako that features contributions from Santigold, Nick Zinner, Jake Shears, Theophilus London, Bertrand Cantat and members of TV on the Radio.

MELBOURNE FESTIVAL

Melbourne Festival is one of the world's leading arts festivals, and Australia's premier celebration of art and culture from around the world. Each year during October, the Festival brings an unparalleled feast of theatre, dance, music, film and visual art events to Melbourne.

Melbourne Festival exclusively debuts and premieres the finest local, national and international events, ensuring that Melbourne is the only place in Australia that many of them are seen. This year it features 129 events taking place over the 17 days of the Festival, including 19 world premieres and 13 Australian premieres.

Through excellence, diversity and accessibility, the Festival presents the best possible experience to as many people as possible, making use of a wide variety of venues across Melbourne. The Festival is proud to offer a spectrum of ticket prices to suit patrons from all walks of life, along with plenty of free events. There truly is something for everyone at Melbourne Festival.

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