

# Mp3 Jayme Stone & Mansa Sissoko - Africa To Appalachia

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Juno Award winning banjoist Jayme Stone and Malian singer and kora player, Mansa Sissoko, build a boundary-crossing musical bridge from Africa to Appalachia on their groundbreaking new album. 13 MP3 Songs in this album (62:41) ! Related styles: WORLD: African, FOLK: Modern Folk People who are interested in Ry Cooder Bla Fleck Toumani Diabat should consider this download. Details: In Search of the African Banjo: A Polyrhythmic Journey to Mali and Back Again Jayme Stone and Mansa Sissoko Reconnect Africa and North America: Or is it the Other Way Around? While on his musical mecca to Africa, Jayme Stone rarely let locals know of his accolades and burgeoning recording career in North America. He went to immerse himself in the high-spirited soundscapes, the daily life and lore of Africa. What he came home with was knowledge of two banjo ancestors never revealed before in the West, aspects of African music that eluded its American counterparts, and musical friendships that reach across continents. I played very little occidental music, Stone recalls about his seven-week Malian adventure, and was more intent on learning their craft. They thought I was some curious traveler with an ngoni that had gone through the industrial revolution. I ate with my hands out of communal bowls, braved the local transportation, and learned music on their terms. Though he began searching for the banjos surviving ancestors, the Canadian virtuoso became curious about what aspects of African music did not make it across the ocean with slavery. The culture of slavery in North America, which nobody likes to talk about, was clearly not the best context for an authentic and meaningful cultural transmission of music, Stone explains. I wanted to find out how music is made on their turf. This project was a long time in the making. An auspicious four years before setting foot on Malian soil, Stone met Mansa Sissoko, a griot singer and a unique voice on the kora (a 21 string African harp). Stone soon realized that Sissoko was a walking encyclopedia of Malian songs, many of them learned from his mother, a griot singer from the town of Baleya. The griot is someone who is there to play the role of blood in the society, for the society to live, says Sissoko. He gives life to the society, musically, using carefully chosen words. With little common language between us, we turned to music for communication, Stone recalls of his first meeting with Sissoko. This tangible heart-to-heart connection was there immediately and I knew that he was the

perfect collaborator for the project. African music is not designed to be analyzed. It is learned by doing, by immersing yourself in the sound, rhythm and story. It is participatory. This quality has deeply affected my own relationship to music, compositional philosophy, teaching and audiences. I've become more attuned to the communal aspect of making music, particularly the powerful effect it has on our daily lives, emotional experience, sense of ritual and feeling of belonging. Through this deep engagement, Stone picked up other life lessons along the way. On one recent visit, Sissoko shared something his mother had instilled in him. When you make music, you grow a light inside your body. Other people will be attracted to you, but it's not you they seek but this light. Don't mistake the two or the light will be put out. Stone also spent time with Mali's premiere ngoni pioneer, Bassekou Kouyate, learning court music that dates back to the 12th century. One such song, Bamaneyake, sings the praises of Ndji Diarra, the once-king of Bamougou who ordered a canal to be dug from the Niger River to his village because his wife wanted to see hippos in her home town. In keeping with tradition, Sissoko chants the lineage of the king, the king's father, and his grandfather. But he adds his own egalitarian refrain: Ndji! You indeed are mighty, but let's not forget that all of your friends have helped you. Praises for everyone! There are all kinds of things that never got imparted to the Americas, says Stone. Like these perpetual polyrhythms and supersonic melodies. There are hints of it in old-time music, but things got repurposed, recycled into English ballads, Irish fiddle tunes, and African-American blues. Malian music is very inviting, and you can jam along quite easily, as many people have. But once you start digging deeper and learning things note-for-note, you realize there is so much more going on. When not absorbing everything he could from elder musicians in Bamako, Stone could be found traveling rural Mali. Unlike most outsiders sealed safely in their Land Rovers, Stone and his guide Hamadi Traore lit out from Bamako on the overheated, overcrowded poky public bus. Snapshot: fifty travelers, forty seats, babies in aisles, and occasional stops for prayer and raw yams. They wended their way through Dogon Country, a millennia-old natural escarpment considered to be one of the geologic and anthropologic wonders of the world. I was curious to go somewhere where I had never heard recorded music from, Stone muses. Every time we got to a village, I would ask if there were any musicians. Aside from a burgeoning tourism industry, this collection of electricity-less villages remains largely untouched by the modern world. They walked from village to village, sleeping on roofs, perusing local markets, and looking for music. And they found it, in an artisan village known as Ende, where the people made and played an instrument called a konou, a rudimentary two-string banjo-like

contraption made of carved wood and goat skin. I was told that a generation ago, fifty people in the village might have played the konou, says Stone, and now there was only one person left: Seydou Gindou. A sharp and cultivated young man, Seydou played music, excelled in dramatics, and headed up a coalition to preserve his local culture as it had become threatened by the lure of tourist dollars. He had never listened to a radio nor left his village. The incessantly rhythmic music of the konou, Stone learned, is used to cue elaborate story-songs that tell time-honored tales that border on the mythic. There was one about a boy who, upon seeing the sky hanging low, reached up to grab a star to bring light to the village. The villagers all know to listen for a change in the konous rhythm to move to the next segment of the story. The startling discovery for me was Seydous playing technique, says Stone. It was identical to the old-time banjo technique known as clawhammer, made famous by Pete Seeger during the folk revival. There we were, halfway across the world, seeing first-hand the unquestionable link between Africa and the banjo as we know it. Stone was struck by the importance of local knowledge in Mali. There are no maps or even street signs. There are no books and you cant Google what is happening in a small village, explains Stone. You have to connect with local people on the ground. Communication is all person-to-person, very human, very local. Discoveries are down to earth and full of happenstance. That konou sure was an amazing find! And it never would have been found without the direct experience of being there. Ironically, Stone made a similar urban discovery in Bamako. I started hearing about the existence of a very old, one-string predecessor of the ngoni, called a juru keleni, remembers Stone. I first heard about it from Cheick Oumar Mara, history professor at the National Institute of the Arts. Even a cab driver mentioned it to me, saying there might be one in the National Museums private collection. Stone visited the Museum several times, each time meeting a different obstacle. The museum was unexpectedly closed. The gatekeeper for that department was absent. The key was inexplicably missing. Finally, on the day he was set to leave Mali, he tried one last time. I was determined to see it, says Stone. The man in charge of the archives said they dont usually let people into the vaults. I got all official, and pulled out a letter from the Ontario Arts Council, who funded my research through a Chalmers Arts Fellowship. He looked at me sideways and retorted, If this is so important, why did you wait until your last day to find me? But then he laughed teasingly, Right this way. Ive got some instruments to show you. Coming across two banjo ancestors unheard of in North America was a profound metaphor for the depth of African music still unexplored by Westerners. But the countless hours Stone spent with musicians was where much of the

real work lay. A tireless practitioner, Stone became lost in the swirling, overlapping rhythms of ancient melodies, with each revolution getting one step closer to the source. Produced by David Travers-Smith (Wailin' Jennys), Africa to Appalachia features guest appearances by bluegrass fiddle ace Casey Driessen, celebrated ngoni master Bassekou Kouyate, and haunting vocals by Torontos Snow Griot Katenen 'Cheka' Dioubate. On Africa to Appalachia, Stone and Sissoko blur the lines of time and location. West Africa and North America come closer together with the banjo being the bridge. The unshackled American banjo has gone back to Africa and returned with many stories left to tell.

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