

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 15 March 2025  
7.30pm

## The African Concert Series

### Tunde Jegede & the African Classical Music Ensemble

Tunde Jegede kora  
Muhamadou Saho (aka Jali Hammay) kora, voice  
Yusupha Suso balafon  
Ansumana Suso guitar, bass

Tunde Jegede (b.1972)	Still Moment Fountain of a People's Hope
Traditional	Jula Jekere Sundiata
Tunde Jegede	Cycle of Reckoning
	<i>Interval</i>
Tunde Jegede	Kayra
Traditional	Sori Alla La Ké Momodou Bitiki
Tunde Jegede	There Was a Time
Traditional	Mali Sarjo
Tunde Jegede	Mineon Ba
Traditional	Jairaby Lé



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Tonight's event is the third programme in the fifth Wigmore Hall series of African Music concerts. It comprises music of ethnic origin, as well as new and recent original compositions from the distinguished composer and instrumentalist **Tunde Jegede**, who will be partnered by vocalist Muhamadou Saho (aka Jali Hammay) and the Balafon virtuoso Yusupha Suso. The Gambian-born musician Ansumana Suso will give additional support on acoustic guitar and bass.

Tunde Jegede specialises principally in music in the West African classical tradition, and is regarded as one of the leading players in the world of the Kora – a 21-stringed instrument, plucked by the fingers, which combines features of the European lute and harp. Tunde will play two Kora instruments – in B flat and in F – although his musical background and achievements range far beyond such traditional instruments.

Tunde Jegede was born in London in 1972 to a Nigerian father and English mother – his mother was of Irish background, descended from the painter and film-maker Galina Chester. Tunde was therefore raised in a multi-influenced cultural environment: his distinguished Nigerian-born artist father, Emmanuel Taiwo Jegede, was the artist-in-residence of Britain's first Black Arts Centre, the North London venue Keskidee. It was in that greatly significant venue – which was opened the year before Tunde was born – that the youth encountered not only the ethnic culture from which his father's own work derived, but also the wider vibrant life of African and Afro-Caribbean art and politics, black theatre and genuine multi-culturalism, including European and trans-Atlantic strains, which have added further layers of influence to his art.

As a cultural hub Keskidee attracted audiences from all races. Such a varied expressive cultural mix as he experienced there has naturally had a profound influence on Tunde's own creativity, which – when combined with his own gifts – has produced a unique musical art which points creatively and influentially to the future, and which speaks to audiences today unencumbered by national boundaries.

Tunde's gifts were fully encouraged by his parents from childhood, particularly when his aptitude for music became apparent. As a result, whilst still a child, he learned the art of the native kora stringed instrument in Africa, and is regarded as one of the leading kora players in the world. His appearance with his colleagues tonight affords a wholly exceptional opportunity for listeners to experience the haunting instrumental music of Gambia and of other regions from the great African continent.

It must additionally be pointed out that, as a boy, Tunde's musical experiences were broadened further on encountering the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, which his grandfather – a church organist – played regularly. Clearly, within such a universal musical background, it was natural that Tunde should be attracted to a European instrument, and it was as a result of his wish to play the cello that he completed a period of study at the Purcell School under Joan Dickson and Raphael Wallfisch. It may

come as no surprise therefore to learn that Tunde is an accomplished cellist, having absorbed much from the European classical tradition as a composer and instrumentalist, and thereby making him uniquely placed as a contemporary musician.

As a consequence of Tunde Jegede's wide-ranging experience and mastery of varied European and ethnically African native instruments, together with his original musicianship as composer, arranger, performer and producer, he is an artist who has successfully bridged a number of wide-ranging musical styles and genres, such as are fully demonstrated throughout tonight's programme.

Tunde's experience in European Classical, Jazz, Afro-Caribbean and African music – traditional and modern – has resulted in much new music from him of wholly exceptional range and expression, each piece arising from a network of musical culture to produce what must fairly be described as global in its relevance. Alongside his original creative music, Tunde remains an admired interpreter of the work of his contemporaries and of the ethnic legacies of his father's homeland.

Tonight's concert, which will be introduced from the platform by Tunde himself, will feature songs in a wide-ranging programme from the varied Gambian repertoire, and two Malian songs. It is interesting to note that most of the songs bear the name of what might be termed their 'owner' in their title, telling stories of such as a King, a trader, or a warrior. The title therefore often represents the individual's 'claim to fame', or their calling in life.

Before the Colonial period, songs of the Girot culture reflected the rule that the 'ownership' – as it were – of the music itself was personal; that each song ought not to be written down or shared (or performed) by other than the individual creator. It is not always possible to give a literal translation of the individual song titles – the intimacy of expression sometimes prevents simple titling. Such long-standing rules also meant, of course, that with the composer-performer's passing, their music would have left all human consciousness; but today, the over-riding 'classical' rule that such music deserves to speak to contemporary and future generations with the same emotional impact as it did when the creator was alive enables us to experience – certainly to Western ears – examples of a culture which has remained unknown for far too long, be it instrumental – a universal language of musical communication, or sung with Kora accompaniment.

Tunde Jegede will introduce each piece in that grouping from the stage, but such English translated titles as 'Still Moment', 'Fountain of a People's Hope' and 'Cycle of Reckoning' will direct the newcomer to this repertoire and give a sense of the emotional character of each piece. In the second half of the programme, the African Classical Music Ensemble will present a number of individual items under Tunde Jegede's direction.

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