

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 19 July 2025
11.30am

The African Concert Series Moon Waters

Tunde Jegede kora
Jan Hendrickse flute
Vincent Ademola Haastrup violin

Tunde Jegede (b.1972)

Still Moment
Layline Ripples
Reflections/By The Will
Shuna
Moon Waters
*Reminiscence • Reflections • Shuna •
Moon Water • Breath of Kin • By the Will*
All Our Yesterdays
Songs of the Eternal
3 Mandé Songs
The Elements
I. Earth • II. Water • III. Air • IV. Fire



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The opening programme – the first of three – which begins the sixth Wigmore Hall series of African Music Concerts comprises a collection of new and recent original compositions written and performed by cellist and kora instrumentalist Tunde Jegede, with flautist Jan Hendrickse and violinist Ademola Haastrup.

The title *Moon Waters* refers to one of the longest pieces in the recital, the seminal work that gives its name to the programme, reflecting the character of an Impressionistic nocturnal meditative morning collection. This individual audio-visual contemplation, for solo kora, is heard as the penultimate summation of the essential character of lyrical Impressionism which runs throughout as a linking thread, the other pieces comprising studies, or 'reflections', upon the emotional natures arising from such contemplation.

The programme includes three seminal African-inspired compositions for solo cello – *Songs of the Eternal*, *3 Mandé Songs* and *The Elements*. The expressive rise and fall of the wider emotional nature of the sequential pieces implies a broad panoramic journey, reflecting an effect not unlike reaching the destination towards which all the preceding music has travelled, the expressive heart of the programme – *Moon Waters* – finally being revealed before the three instrumentalists combine, for the one and only time, to contemplate collectively their individual journeys united in the reflective summation of *All Our Yesterdays*.

The commandingly original musical direction and interpretative performances by the remarkable and dedicated musician Tunde Jegede have, in recent years, seen him being established as arguably the most significant composer and performer of folk and original concert music from, and consistently inspired by, the rich legacies of what might broadly be termed the musical traditions of West Africa. The result has produced a widely-based yet ethnically identifiable musical language wherein Tunde Jegede has additionally drawn upon strands from the European classical tradition. His wide-ranging list of compositions include commissions from the Royal Philharmonic and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras, The National Orchestra of Belgium amongst other distinguished ensembles. He has also composed three operas.

It must be stressed that Tunde Jegede's original compositions are not solely founded upon an inherent cross-fertilisation of two very differing musical strands – of the West African native and the European classical traditions. Although each has evolved and developed, broadly speaking, over the last millennium in quite different ways – in particular, the European notation of music founded upon tonal principles, and the North African legacy of what might be termed continuous-variation in instrumental music juxtaposed with extended vocalises that rarely move far from the endemic ideas – in the compositions of Tunde Jegede the over-riding inherent nature of music as sound, existing in time, has appealed through his directness of utterance to an ever-growing international audience. Today's programme affords us with an opportunity to experience the haunting natural pulses of his profoundly Impressionistic music.

Tunde Jegede specialises also in music founded upon the West African classical tradition; he is regarded as one of the leading players in the world of the Kora. This 21-stringed instrument, extensively found and played in the regions of West Africa, is plucked by the fingers, thereby combining several features akin to those of the European lute and harp. Tunde Jegede will also play the cello, which he studied at the Purcell School under Joan Dickson and Raphael Wallfisch, where he absorbed much from the European classical tradition – both as a composer and instrumentalist – making him uniquely placed amongst contemporary musicians.

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, for 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 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 were to add further layers of influence to his art. Tunde's grandfather was a church organist, and early on introduced the boy to a life-long love of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Within such a profound musical environment, Tunde's gifts were fully encouraged by his parents from childhood, particularly when his aptitude for music became apparent. 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. Quite clearly, Tunde's natural absorption of the profound musical strains from the wide-ranging diaspora from the north-western region of the African continent, together with the varied expressive cultural mix as he experienced, which, when combined with his own natural gifts has produced a unique musical art that speaks directly to audiences today unencumbered by national boundaries.

It is Tunde Jegede's uniquely natural, wholly unforced background and musical training which has enabled him to become a musician naturally embracing very differing worlds, united by a profoundly human expressive character that speaks to all, of whatever ethnicity.

As the titles of each of Tunde Jegede's compositions in this programme reveal, the resultant 21st-century Impressionism of his music draws upon, inhabits, reflects and speaks directly to an attentive audience – today's music heard either with or without natural Kora or other European instrumental accompaniment – through combining and thereby demonstrating, as in all worthwhile art, the essence of man's instinctive musical inspiration being at all times curbed and directed by his evolved creative intelligence.

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