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# FATOUMATA DIAWARA

*“the most beguiling talent to hit  
the world music scene in some time”*  
– Telegraph



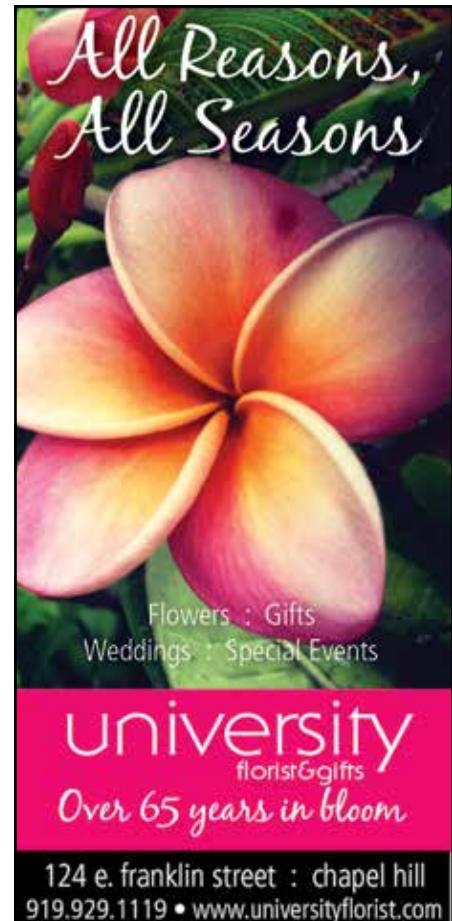
This performance by Fatoumata Diawara is made possible, in part,  
by performance benefactor NOALIVING

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Program to be announced from the stage.

**Fatoumata Diawara, vocals**

This tour is supported in part by the globalFEST Touring Fund: [globalFEST.org](http://globalFEST.org)  
**globalFEST**



## BIOGRAPHY

### Fatoumata Diawara, vocals

Perpetuating Mali's rich musical tradition, Fatoumata Diawara presents a joyous mix of the vibrant and understated, combining songs about love, politics and empowerment with arresting melodies soaring over intricate guitar and drum arrangements. Inspired by Wassoulou tradition, jazz and blues, she has created her own unique contemporary folk sound with a distinctly African spin on the concept of the female singer-songwriter.

At the center of the music is Diawara's warm, affecting voice, spare, rhythmical guitar playing and gorgeously melodic songs that

draw powerfully on her own often troubled experience. Born in Côte d'Ivoire, raised in Mali and now based in Paris, Diawara's life covers the gamut of contemporary African experience, fighting parental opposition to her artistic ambitions and the cultural prejudice faced by women throughout Africa, winning success as an actress in film and theater, and landing in the medium she was always destined to make her own: music.

Damon Albarn, Toumani Diabaté, Herbie Hancock and Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones are just a few of the major players who have fallen for Diawara's effortless musical charm. Her presence has illuminated shows in Europe by Africa Express, AfroCubism and Hancock's

Imagine project. Her 2012 Nonesuch debut *Fatou* is almost entirely her own work: compositions and arrangements, backing vocals and percussion. It breathes with the natural warmth, confidence and spontaneity that are the essence of Diawara herself. ◊

### EMILY BURRILL on Fatoumata Diawara



Fatoumata Diawara is at once a maverick and a traditionalist. She is a traditionalist in that she identifies strongly with her heritage as a *Wassalunke*, or a person of Wassalou, the southwestern region of Mali. Wassalou is known for its musical sound, a musical style based on a blending of modern musical form and traditional musical elements, with strong female front vocals. Indeed, Fatoumata Diawara is very much an emissary of the Wassalou

Sound, made famous by singers such as Oumou Sangare and Nahawa Doumbia. However, Diawara's mastery of the guitar – an instrument rarely taken up by Malian women – sets her apart from many of her Malian contemporaries. Further, Diawara speaks openly about the fact that she ran away from home in Bamako to pursue her dreams of being

an actor in Europe, a decision that resulted in familial estrangement. This risk-taking inclination of Diawara's also makes her a leader. A March 2012 *coup d'état* in Mali contributed to increased instability in the northern part of the country, which culminated in an Islamic militant takeover of the north in the late summer of 2012. This takeover included the imposition of a restrictive interpretation of sharia law. Music was banned in northern cities of Kidal, Timbuktu, and Gao, musicians fled, seeking exile outside of Mali or shelter in the southern part of the country. In response, Fatoumata Diawara organized many of Mali's most celebrated musicians under the umbrella of Voices United for Mali. Today, because of her musical successes and her leadership in Voices United for Mali, Diawara is probably Mali's hottest pop star, which says a lot when we are talking about a country known for its vibrant musical tradition. Though Diawara has accomplished quite a lot already as a performing artist – in film and in music – Diawara's global success as a musical star has just begun.

*Emily Burrill is an assistant professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and a historian of Mali.*