



MIDDLEBURY
PERFORMING ARTS SERIES

P R E S E N T S

BALA BILA

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2024

7:30 PM ET

ROBISON HALL, MAHANEY ARTS CENTER



BALA BILA

Balla Kouyaté

Balafon, Calabash, Bass, Percussion, Voice

Matchume Zango

Timbila, Mbira, Xitende, Kakumba, Percussion, Voice

Program

Shepherds' Song

Hahani's Song

Tcha Bala Mbeleli (I'm a Musician)

Mazive (Pastor's Song)

Timibila Taku Tsamba (The Good Sound of Timbila)

Jarabi

Yiriba (Big Old Tree)

Mabikilo's Song

BALA BILA's program is a mix of original songs
by Balla Kouyaté and Matchume Zango,
and traditional songs with arrangements by the artists.

Note: the concert will be performed without intermission.



*This performance is made possible with generous support
from the Paul Nelson Performance Endowment and the Rothrock Family Residency Fund.*

*Please turn off all electronic devices prior to the performance, and refrain from texting.
Photography and the use of audio or video equipment are prohibited.*

The Instruments

Balafon

The balafon, an ancestor of the marimba and xylophone, is common among the Mande of West Africa and made of tuned wooden slats tied onto a frame. A gourd below each slat resonates when the slat is struck with a mallet. In the 1200s, the first balafon, known as the Sosso Bala, belonged to the great king Sumanguru Kanté, who found it or, some say, was given it by a djinn (genie). Later, the instrument was given to Sundiata Keita's djeli (oral historian/musician), Balla Faséké Kouyaté. Balla Faséké's descendants, the Dokkala Kouyaté family, have taken care of the Sosso Bala to this day. The instrument is kept in the town of Niagassola in eastern Guinea, less than 20 miles from the Malian border. Balla's father is the Sosso Balatigui, or guardian, of this ancient instrument. In 2001, UNESCO recognized it as one of the 19 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Calabash

West African "calabash" gourds are selected for their smooth, round shape. Once cut in half, scraped clean, and carefully dried, they are then struck by the artists' hands to create drumbeats. The calabash appears most often in music made in Saharan West Africa, especially among nomadic and semi-nomadic musicians in countries like Mali and Niger

Timbila

The timbila are finely manufactured and tuned wooden instruments made from the highly resonant wood of the slow-growing mwenje (sneezewort) tree. Under each wooden slat, a resonator made of calabashes is fastened, tightly sealed with beeswax, and tempered with the oil of the nkuso fruit, giving the timbila their rich nasal sound and characteristic vibrations. The timbila originates with the Chopi communities—who live mainly in the southern part of the Inhambane province in southern Mozambique—who are famous for their timbila orchestra music.

Mbira

Mbira (the name of both the instrument and the music) is mystical music that has been played for over a thousand years by certain tribes of the Shona people, a group forming most of the population of Zimbabwe and extending into Mozambique. The Mbira instrument consists of plucked metal keys on a [usually wooden] soundboard.

Xitende

The xitende is a braced-bow instrument with a gourd resonator. Its tone is loud and deep and is produced by striking the two distinct halves of the string with a light stick or reed. Bouncing the reed produces fast repeated tones. The resonator is moved on and off the chest to vary the tone color. This large instrument (five-six feet long) is played by wandering minstrels (xilombe) to accompany their singing.

Kakumba

The kakumba is a long, thin, bamboo reed instrument that originated in Tete, in Northern Mozambique. It is an instrument traditionally used by shepherds to herd animals.

Biographies

Balla Kouyaté

Virtuoso balafon player and oral historian of Mandé culture, Balla Kouyaté carries on the centuries-old role of a djeli. Kouyaté's lineage goes back more than 800 years to Balla Faséké—the first of an unbroken line of djelis (oral historians/musicians) in the Kouyaté clan.

Today, Kouyaté is ever present, performing at weddings, baptisms, naming ceremonies, and other domestic ceremonies within the West African immigrant communities of Boston, New York City, and beyond. He is equally motivated to share his music with the larger world through his work as a soloist, arranger, and bandleader. Often billed as fusion, his music explores jazz and other outside influences, while remaining consciously rooted in the Mandé tradition.

Kouyaté is featured on more than 25 albums, including Yo-Yo Ma's *Songs of Joy and Peace* and *Sing Me Home*. He has collaborated with artists such as Yo-Yo Ma, Angélique Kidjo, and Vusi Mahlasela. He is a frequent visiting lecturer/performer at colleges and museums throughout the United States. He is on the faculty at New England Conservatory and a member of the prestigious Silk Road Ensemble. In addition to being named an NEA Heritage Fellow in 2019, he was named a Brother Thomas Fellow in 2015, and a St. Botolph Distinguished Artist in Contemporary World Music in 2023.



Matchume Zango

Matchume Zango is a master timbila player, percussionist, composer, and producer from Maputo, Mozambique. He has a Masters Degree in Music Performance from the University of Cape Town where he has also been part of the faculty. Zango has received funding support for many projects—including his study of Mozambique's native cultural practices—from international donor agencies such as Pro Cultura, Pro Helvetia, Goethe Foundation, FUNDAC, and Music in Africa.

Zango recently completed a three-year project funded by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation entitled *Vasikate* (meaning “women” in the Chopi language), which involved residencies and performances with female artists from the Lusophone countries of Angola, Brazil, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique. He built NZango Artist Residency, a recording studio and artist residency where he collaborates with local and visiting artists, builds and repairs traditional instruments, and teaches this practice to others.



He is a founding member of Timbila Muzimba, one of the most important bands to come out of Mozambique. He has toured extensively throughout the world and collaborated with local and

international artists, including Balla Kouyaté, Aly Keita, Mandala Kunene, Jean Pierre Jozéfinn, Michael Kuttener, Miquel Bernat, Kate Griffin, and Walter Verdin. He has composed and performed music for international dance companies and choreographers such as Kublai Khan Investigations and Desire Davids.

Website: www.nzangoartistresidency.com | FB: [matchume.zango](https://www.facebook.com/matchume.zango) | IG: [matchumezango4](https://www.instagram.com/matchumezango4)

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*Middlebury College sits on land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Western Abenaki are the traditional caretakers of these Vermont lands and waters, which they call Ndaakinna, or "homeland."
We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure.
We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.*