



Press release
The Hague, 13 February 2007

17 FEBRUARY SAHEL OPERA PREMIERE IN MALI MEMBERS OF THE DUTCH ROYAL FAMILY TO ATTEND

On 17 February, the world premiere of ‘Bintou Were, a Sahel Opera’ will take place in Bamako, Mali on a specially built open-air theatre on the banks of the River Niger. The opera is a co-production of the Republic of Mali, the Prince Claus Fund and the *Théâtre du Châtelet* in Paris. Their Royal Highnesses, Prince Constantijn, Princess Laurentien, Prince Friso and Princess Mabel of the Netherlands will attend. Prince Constantijn and Prince Friso are the Prince Claus Fund’s honorary chairmen.

Based on an idea of Prince Claus of the Netherlands

The idea for an opera that takes place in the heart of Africa was suggested many years ago by Prince Claus (1926-2002). The Fund is named after him and he was also its original honorary chairman. Prince Claus envisaged an opera that would highlight the talents of African musicians, actors and dancers. In addition, he wanted the theme of the opera to touch on the relation between Africa and Europe. His idea has now become reality.

‘Bintou Were, a Sahel Opera’ focuses on a group of Africans travelling to Europe in search of a better life where they can fulfil their dreams. The opera has been realised and produced by a team of people from various countries in the Sahel region.

Libretto

The libretto was written by Koulsy Lamko (Chad) and Wasis Diop (Senegal). The main character, Bintou Were, is travelling north with a group migrants hoping to get into Europe. She is pregnant and wants to bring her child into the world in the Spanish enclave of Melilla. All the men in the group are claiming to be the baby’s father, each hoping that a ‘right to asylum’ will be granted.

Artistic team

The Sahel Opera was composed by Zé Manel (Guinea Bissau). Wasis Diop (Senegal) is the artistic director. Jean-Pierre Leurs (Senegal) is responsible for the *mise en scène*, and Massambou Wele Diallo is the musical director. Oumou Sy (Senegal) designed the costumes, and the choreography is by Germaine Acogny (Senegal) and Flora Théfaine (Togo).

In 2006, castings were held for singers, dancers and musicians in the Sahel countries. An extraordinary aspect of this production is that all the singers sing in their own language. Djeneba Kone (Mali) is performing the main role of Bintou Were; she will sing in the Bambara language. Carlo D (Senegal) is Diallo; he will be singing in Wolof. Sarzan Ndiaye is played by Kemoko Conde (Guinea Conakry), who will sing in Malinke.

400 years of opera

The Sahel Opera's premiere on 17 February also marks the 400th anniversary of the first performance of a European opera. Monteverdi's 'Orfeo', performed in Mantua, was heralded as the start of a new musical form in Europe. 'Bintou Were' offers an African contribution to the development of modern opera.

European premiere

The Sahel Opera will receive its European premiere during the Holland Festival on 7, 8 and 9 June in *Het Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ* in Amsterdam. In October, the Opera will be performed at the *Théâtre du Châtelet* in Paris.

Prince Claus Fund

The Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development stimulates and initiates artistic and intellectual quality in the form of debates, creative processes and artistic productions. The Prince Claus Fund is a platform for intercultural exchange. Working with individuals and organisations primarily in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Fund organises activities and publications that contribute to the positive interaction between culture and development.

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