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New Recording Exploring the Roots of African and American Music from Cheick Hamala Diabate and Bob Carlin – “From Mali to America”.

Two master music makers -- one from Mali in West Africa, the other from the United States -- join together in a cross-cultural program that creates a musical dialogue between two traditions.

WEST CHESTER, PA – 5-String Productions is pleased to announce the release of ***From Mali to America*** - 5-String Productions (5SP06004) by Cheick Hamala Diabate and Bob Carlin, with special guest, Solo Tounkara.

"Few Americans appreciate the deep ties between our string music traditions and those in West Africa. Pairing the American banjo and its ancestor, the Malian ngoni, Bob Carlin and Cheick Hamala Diabate make the connections palpably real, as well as sublimely musical. This is an inspired collaboration with profound implications, taking Old Time music all the way back to the 13th century Malian Empire!" -- Banning Eyre, Senior Editor www.afropop.org

"This is a deep and varied project which twines African and American roots in heretofore unexplored ways. Fresh sounds and textures immerse the ear in a compelling aura of mystery and unity. Kudos, kudos, kudos!" -- Tony Trischka, virtuoso banjoist

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From Mali to America blends the musical traditions of West Africa and America. Since the American banjo grew from Western African roots, this exploration should come as no surprise. What is surprising is that it has taken this long for the ngoni and banjo to join together to explore and illuminate this obscure corner of American musical history.

This collaboration by masters from two musical cultures features a dialogue that blends seamlessly and demonstrates the common roots of their music and instruments. Bob Carlin's masterful banjo playing is incorporated into the traditional Malian ensemble which provides the foundation for Cheick Hamala's improvisations.

Even on the two tunes from America, there is a strong West-African sensibility. While Carlin provides the lead for these pieces ("Jonny Boker" and "Cumberland Gap"), Cheick Hamala responds by expanding on these tunes in a West African style. This cross-cultural exploration of music provides a delightful view of how these two cultures inter-relate.

Well known as a researcher and author committed to exposing banjo history to a wider public, producer Bob Carlin's concept for this project was to demonstrate both the "roots and routes of the American 5-String banjo and the connections between West African and American music." Toward this end, Bob plays each of the following instruments: a gourd banjo made by Pete Ross/Jubilee Banjo; a minstrel banjo made by George Wunderlich/Wunder Banjo Company; and a Gold Tone BC-350 Bob Carlin model banjo. In addition to playing guitar and several ngoni, Cheick Hamala plays left-handed banjos made by Pete Ross and Gold Tone tuned like the Malian Griot lute. Carlin's hope is that this CD will join with his new early banjo history, *The Birth of the Banjo*, to provide a double edged promotion of the links between African, African-American and Anglo-American musical styles.

This monumental recording provides an insight into how these two musical cultures intermingle and produce captivating music together. By integrating both the Malian ngoni and the 5-string banjo, Bob Carlin and Cheick Hamala Diabate explore the roots of the instruments and how well they fit in both musical traditions.

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About Cheick Hamala Diabate

Cheick Hamala Diabate (pronounced shake haMAHla jaBAHtay) was born in Kita, Mali, and is recognized as one of the top ngoni (a stringed lute that is the ancestor of the American banjo) players living today. The Diabates are a Jali (Griot) family that traces their heritage back over eight hundred years. The Jeli are the historians of West Africa. Along with the playing of music, a Jali is called upon to recount the history of the people via the spoken and sung word. A Griot is anointed by genetics and is trained from birth by his family elders in all aspects of the Griot tradition.

Cheick Hamala quickly became a master of several traditional Jali instruments (he also plays the western guitar), but has focused his skill on the ngoni. From the age of twelve, Cheick Hamala studied at the National Institute of Arts in Bamako, Mali's capitol. After completing his studies, he began an international performing career, traveling throughout Africa, Europe, Asia and Canada. Among the well-known Malian stars with whom Diabate has appeared include Ami Koita, Kandia Kouyate, Salif Keita, Yayi Kanoute, Fanta Disco and Fadiala Diawara.

In 1995, Cheick Hamala Diabate migrated to the United States, where he continues performing within the Malian community for public and private celebrations. Cheick Hamala has also endeavored to bring his wonderful music to American audiences, appearing at the National Museum of African Art, the Smithsonian's Folklife Festival, at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and at colleges, universities and concerts throughout the country.

More information on Cheick Hamala Diabate can be found at: www.malimusic.net.

About Bob Carlin

Bob Carlin is probably the best-known clawhammer style banjoist performing today. Faithful to timeless Southern Traditions, Bob Carlin has taken the distinctive "clawhammer" banjo style to appreciative audiences worldwide. Bob has appeared at countless festivals, clubs, schools and museums. These have included the Philadelphia Folk Festival, Merle Fest, the Telluride Bluegrass Festival and Rockygrass. Various national radio appearances have included NPR's "Weekend Edition," "A Prairie Home Companion," "Mountain Stage" and "The Grand Ole Opry." As a member of the prestigious

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Virginia and North Carolina Visiting Artist Programs, Carlin presented southern traditional music and the banjo traditions of rural America to audiences in the schools and community. Banjoist Bob Carlin has been offering performances, lectures and conferences for over thirty years. Carlin had largely left the solo arena in the mid-1990s after an invitation to join the band of songwriter John Hartford. For six years, Bob Carlin toured throughout the United States and Canada with Hartford, even accompanying John on a ten-day Japanese sojourn. Since the death of John Hartford in 2001, Bob Carlin has returned to solo performing and appearances with other musicians. He has studied both in person and on transcriptions the work of master players from previous generations. Combined with archival research, the result has been over seventy-five different albums, primarily for Rounder Records, and countless magazine article and CD notes. Carlin has participated in three Grammy-nominated recordings.

This spring Bob Carlin's book *The Birth of the Banjo: Joel Walker Sweeney and Early Minstrelsy* was published by McFarland & Company.

More information can be found about Bob Carlin at: www.bobcarlinmusic.com.

About Solo Tounkara

Solo Tounkara is Cheick Hamala's uncle on his mother's side of the family. Solo is also the brother of one of the giants in Malian guitar, Djelimady Tounkara.

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About 5-String Productions

5-String Productions is an independent record label, established in 2004, specializing in acoustic music. 5-String first made its mark as a studio recording live concerts of classical, jazz, world, and folk music. In recent years, 5-String has been expanding its own catalog, which currently includes 15 recordings. The focus thus far has been on traditional American or "Old Time" music. 5-String has plans to release a wide variety of music from traditions around the world. Prior releases include:

- The Double Decker Stringband - "The Rest Is Yet to Come" (5SP04004)
- Hoover Uprights - "Known for their Reputation" (5SP05002)
- Matt Brown - "Lone Prairie" (5SP05007)
- Alice Gerrard, Gail Gillespie & Sharon Sandomirsky - "The Road to Agate Hill" (5SP06003)
- Paul Brown - "Red Clay Country" (5SP06002)

More about 5-String Productions can be found at: www.5-string.com

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