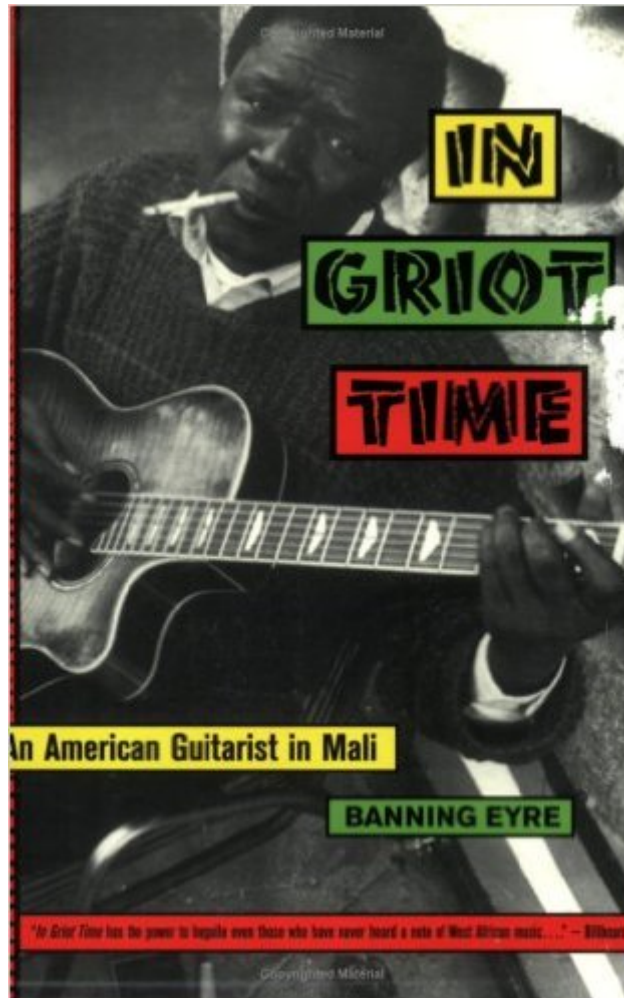


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In Griot Time



Synopsis

Djelimady Tounkara is only one of the memorable people you will meet in this dramatic narrative of life among the griot musicians of Mali. Born into families where music and the tradition of griot story-telling is a heritage and a privilege, Djelimady and his fellow griots -- both men and women -- live their lives at the intersection of ancient traditions and the modern entertainment industry. During the seven months he spent living and studying with Djelimady, Banning Eyre immersed himself in a world that will fascinate you as it did him. Eyre creates a range of unforgettable portraits. Some of the people who stride through his pages are internationally known, musicians like Salif Keita, Oumou Sangare, and Grammy winner Ali Farka Toure. But the lesser-known characters are equally fascinating: Adama Kouyate, Djelimady's dynamic wife; Moussa Kouyate, the Tounkara family's own griot; Yaya Kanoute, the flamboyant jelimuso (female griot) who failed to take America by storm; Foutanga Babani Sissoko, the mysterious millionaire who rebuilt an entire town and whose patronage is much sought after by the griots of Bamako. But the picture Eyre draws is not just a series of portraits. Out of their interactions comes a perceptive panorama of life in Mali in the late twentieth century. The narrative gives us a street-level view of the transformation of musical taste and social customs, the impact of technology and the pressures of poverty, at a crucial time in Mali's history. In individual after individual, family after family, we see the subtle conflicts of heritage and change. Even the complications of democracy -- with democracy, mango vendors think they can charge anything they want, Djelimady points out -- are woven into an unforgettable saga of one man, his family, his profession, and the world of Malian music.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Due to the low profile of African music in the States, this subject matter is so esoteric that any work on the subject would certainly be welcome. But thankfully, this is the work of a seasoned music journalist, whose charisma opens nearly every possible door to the life of Mali's great musicians. The book starts as Eyre shows up unannounced to meet Djelimady Tounkara, perhaps Mali's greatest living griot artists. As Eyre is taken under Djelimady's wing as an understudy, he finds opportunities to meet other great and colorful elements in Mali's music world, including a musician who shunned his royal upbringing to a humble music life (Salif Keita), and a mysterious millionaire patron of the arts who worked his way up from humble roots (Babani Sissoko). Throughout his study, Eyre remains humble, admitting that there is a whole host of young musicians in Mali half his age more advanced than he in this study. At one point he likens studying with Djelimady to "reaching into a rushing stream of water hoping to pull out a fish before it slithered away forever." Though Eyre is upfront about his preference to study music "stripped of its context," he doesn't skimp on highlighting the importance of politics, religion, and history surrounding the music. His approach to viewing Africa is refreshing; where international aid workers "looked around and saw sickness and suffering, good people held down by backwardness... I looked around and saw a cultural lodestone, musical diamonds and gold everywhere. I wanted the Malians to give me the hard lessons.

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