

JOE DRISCOLL & SEKOU KOUYATE

BIOGRAPHY

The well-worn and often overblown expression "music is a common language" has never been more apropos in the case of **Joe Driscoll & Sekou Kouyate**. US-born, England-based Driscoll speaks no French and Kouyate, who hails from the West African country of Guinea, little English. When they were brought together at the Nuit Metis (Mixed Night) festival in Marseille, France in 2010 and given a week to produce a concert, music was the only way they could communicate.

It turns out, they had a lot to "talk" about, and their first meeting sparked a collaboration that led to the formation of a band, the recording of an album, over 120 concert dates across Europe and rave reviews. Driscoll contributes the rapping, looping, beatboxing and songwriting talents he developed growing up in Syracuse, New York and during his own successful recording career. Kouyate, already a phenomenon in African music circles, has blown minds and ears with his hypersonic electrified riffs on the *kora*, bringing the exalted West African harp into the 21st Century with use of distortion peddles, effects and previously-unimagined technical prowess. Together, Driscoll and Kouyate blend hip-hop, spoken word, funk, and soulful, accessible rock with Afrobeat, reggae and irrepressible African grooves.

Released by Cumbancha in 2014, their debut album *Faya* reached the number 2 spot on the prestigious World Music Charts Europe, a survey of top international music DJs across the continent. Their album earned Joe & Sekou a nomination for Best Cross-Cultural Collaboration from *Songlines*, the UK's definitive global music magazine.

Joe Driscoll & Sekou Kouyate's electrifying second album, ***Monistic Theory***, derives its title from the concept that reality is a unified whole and that all existing things can be ascribed to or described by a single concept or system. It's an apt philosophy for this boundary-crossing collaboration, one that brings together two musicians from vastly different backgrounds in search of the commonalities that are uniquely revealed by artistic expression.

Sekou Kouyate was raised in a respected and accomplished musical family in Conakry, Guinea. Trained in the ancient traditions of his instrument, it is his ability to transcend and build upon those traditions that has set him apart. In France, he is known as the 'Jimi Hendrix of the kora' because of his unique style of playing with various effects, in a variety of genres, and with an extreme intensity. Kouyate has toured the world over as a member of the **Ba Cissoko** band, comprised of his cousin and brothers.

Joe Driscoll, whom Cee-Lo Green labelled "the gangsta with an iron lung," has been touring steadily for years, spreading his unique fusion of folk and hip-hop. The modern day take on the one man band, he uses live looping to create soundscapes full of beatbox, guitar, harmonica, percussion, harmonica, and just about anything else he can make use of. Driscoll has performed his ground breaking solo show at the famed Glastonbury Festival, Electric Picnic in Ireland, and hundreds of major stages worldwide.

By teaming up, Driscoll and Kouyate have created a sum that exceeds even the large whole of its individual parts. According to Driscoll, "We've been raised in very different cultures in so many ways, but we share a lot of the same interests musically. Sekou was raised in the African rhythm and traditions, yet has always had a passion for reggae, hip-hop. I'm kind of the other way around. At the heart of it, we both just make the noises we love; we listen to each other, and try to flow in harmony. I think we just bounced off each other in so many ways: rhythmically, melodically, with craftsmanship. Through this, we found we had a language between us and that philosophically we were on a lot of the same pages as well."

It hasn't always been an easy ride. Music may be their common language, but that doesn't help much with the day-to-day communication needed for touring, recording and promotion. Visa issues have provided a harsh reality check to their utopian vision more than once. Add to that the fact that Sekou's homeland was a victim of the Ebola crisis for over two years, making anyone traveling with a Guinean passport a target of excessive scrutiny. Once, when driving across the border from Canada into the US, the band was detained by border agents in HAZMAT suits, refusing to let them enter the country until they were cleared by medical personnel. A group of spirited, creative people stuck together in a small van for long stretches of hard touring will do more than anything to put the unifying power of music to the test.

Yet no matter what happens behind the scenes, the minute Joe & Sekou get on stage or in the studio, all of the travails of daily life in the music industry fall away and magic erupts. While their personal histories and personalities are quite different, there is an undeniable music-umbilical connection that connects these two brothers from another mother. When Joe & Sekou make music together, there is a chemical reaction that is impossible to explain and even more difficult to restrain.

There's been a lot of water under the bridge for Joe & Sekou after over five years of collaboration, and neither of them could have predicted that night they met in Marseille that they'd still be making music together this far downstream. "I met Sekou, and I said, 'Hey, man, let's work on this for a while.' It was one of those 'follow the river' things, and I went with it," Driscoll recalls. With *Monistic Theory*, Joe & Sekou reveal that their odyssey is far from over, and if their fans around the world have anything to say about it, it's a voyage that will continue for years to come.