



JOE DRISCOLL  
— & —  
SEKOU KOUYATE  
*faya*

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 hyper-sonic 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.

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. Now living in Bristol, England, 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 and 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.”

The songs on *Faya* address burning social issues, commenting on poverty, borders, immigration and inequality. According to Driscoll, “ We wrote about things that we knew and experienced, things that were important to us. We’ve both travelled the world extensively, so dealing with these issues was a very important part of the experience. We had things we wanted to say about them. The message is the seed. Some people just enjoy the fruit, but we try to spread the seeds with a positive vibe.” Kouyate sings in French and his native Susu language and Driscoll expounds in lightning fast bursts of cunningly crafted English.

“One day in Africa, there will be no borders,” declares Kouyate in French at the beginning of the album’s opening track “Tanama”, establishing a consistent theme about the fallacy of the imaginary lines that separate the people of the world. On the second song “Passport,” Driscoll responds to Kouyate’s chorus “Music is my passport,” by singing “Because its only you, you see / Who has made a boundary.”The scorching third track “Faya”, a tribute to fire in its literal and metaphorical sense, highlights Sekou’s *kora* wizardry, Driscoll’s vocal dexterity and the unstoppable grooves they create together. It’s a remarkable first third of an accomplished debut album, and the balance of the album is equally compelling.

With plans already in the works to record a follow-up album, Joe Driscoll and Sekou Kouyate have discovered that music speaks louder than words.



## "Passport"

*Sekou Kouyate (In Susu):*

It's been long time  
Since I've been singing  
It's been a long time  
Since I've been playing  
Its been a long time  
Since I've been playing  
I love music

Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport  
Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport

It's what helps me move ahead  
You see this is the reason that I love  
It's what inspires me  
You see this is the reason that I love  
It has given me work  
It has introduced me  
To each and every thing

Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport  
Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport

*Joe Driscoll:*

We're going off to Conakry  
We play a bar New York City  
We play cafes in sweet Paris  
We play the beach of Mozambique

But when we reach the border patrol  
Man take my paper under control  
But when reach the border patrol

I didn't bring no visa  
I got a stick of reefa  
Maybe you should toke it  
See just why I'm joking

Because its only you, you see  
Who has made the boundary  
You know its only you, you see  
Who has made the boundary  
You know its only you, you see  
Who has made the boundary  
You know its only you, you see

*Sekou Kouyate:*

It's what helps me move ahead  
You see this is the reason that I love  
It's what inspires me  
You see this is the reason that I love  
It has given me work  
It has introduced me  
To each and every thing

Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport  
Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport

I play music  
You see, music comes if you go music  
If you love me, music  
If you don't love me, music

Music is my passport  
I say, music is my passport  
Music is my good luck charm  
I say music

*Joe Driscoll:*

Because its only you, you see  
Who has made the boundary  
You know its only you, you see  
Who has made the boundary  
You know its only you, you see  
Who has made the boundary  
You know its only you, you see

## “Faya” (Fire)

*Sekou Kouyate (in Susu):*

Give me some fire, to play with  
That thing with heat  
If I walk with fire  
I feel no fear

Fire, get inside me  
I'm going to town  
Me and fire, we have a daughter  
She's called Faya Laite  
The other one's called Fire Light, oh

*Joe Driscoll:*

Let the fire flow from within me  
Grab the microphone and mc  
Inspire higher brush fires  
Because I'm known to flow free  
See there ain't nothing like when a crowds getting hype  
And the words that you write just burn in the night  
And the verbs you recite, like a bird taking flight  
Unite and ignite the herds, alright

You need some petrol?  
Y'all already tried that  
My words are like the flames tongue  
Licking upon the dry grass  
Stoking hope for the folks that's close  
In this collective unconscious  
Firelight shine bright, and brings a light  
For anyone who wants it  
Rebel of the spirit, hear it  
Know that I'm true to it  
Please just give me the fire, man  
I know what to do with it  
Got guns on the run, with your weak hearts  
We're never scared of ya  
Give me fire to play with

*Sekou Kouyate:*

You see, when I woke up this morning  
To go to town  
I didn't forget the children of Kaloume  
When I went to the city of Ratoma  
From the city of Taouya  
Look, I left from there  
And return when I want  
To the city Kaloume from Taouya  
I won't forget the ghetto kids  
I won't forget  
Give me my fire  
To give me power

*Joe Driscoll:*

Ain't nothing like when a crowds getting hype  
And the words that you write just burn in the night  
And the verbs you recite, like a bird taking flight  
Unite and ignite the herds  
Alright



## “Lady”

*Joe Driscoll:*

Hey Lady, I've got you on my mind, mind, mind, yeah  
Hey Lady, I've got you on my mind, mind, mind, yeah

I saw her from stage I was playing a show  
She stuck around later, just to say hello  
You know how Sekou do, when he's ripping with soul  
Me, I'm controlling mics, just kicking the flow  
She loved the show: "It was very clever"  
Found a little time for us to spend together  
I ain't rock no rhymes, or drop no lines  
I got a lady so fine, I just take my time  
It ain't about what time it took  
Honey could read a book, plus she got the look  
I'm gone so long, but the vibe stays strong  
She's in my mind like a well played song  
Her love is more than a memory  
In my mind like a well played melody  
Good love is more than a memory  
In my mind

Hey Lady, I've got you on my mind, mind, mind, yeah  
Hey Lady, I've got you on my mind, mind, mind, yeah

*Sekou Kouyate (In Susu):*

Every day, every day, I leave  
Every day, every day, I arrive  
But every day, every day, I don't know  
Every day, every day, I can't  
If you go there, don't forget who loves you  
If you go there, try to see if the sun is shining  
Before you go out  
If you go there, don't forget who loves you  
If you go there, try to see if the sun is shining  
Before you go out  
You don't know, but I can't sleep  
If it's about to rain, or the sun is coming out  
You don't know, but I can't sleep

*Joe Driscoll:*

Hey Lady, I've got you on my mind, mind, mind, yeah  
Hey Lady, I've got you on my mind, mind, mind, yeah

## "Ghetto Many"

*Sekou Kouyate (in French and Susu):*

Ghetto many, vampires many, ah  
Ghetto many, vampires many, ah

Going out tonight

Look, I'm going to the ghetto

If you don't have anything

Don't come after me, young son

The vampires scare me, I say, there are vampires in the ghetto

If I go out in the morning, the vampires abuse me

You see, if I go out in the evening, I go to the ghetto

*Joe Driscoll:*

Fed up with the rundown, ghettos and slumtowns,  
Can't get by, thought we try  
So we get high, and come down  
They inflate man and state with an interest rate  
Which means you borrowed one, you gotta pay back eight  
A strange slaughter, sons and daughters  
On the seas of rough waters  
Like the boats that set sail for the rock of Gibraltar, hey  
You never know when the reaper comes  
So ghetto speakers, cheap rum, to the moonlight drums  
But we keep that on the sneak from the vampire  
Light your heart to tell a story like a campfire  
Though I came to tell a story, paint a picture so vivid  
You'll never know a man's life, until you done lived it  
Thought I came to tell a story, paint a picture so vivid  
You'll never know a man's life  
Yet, I see the struggling youth  
I want to tell them the truth  
I see the struggling youth  
I want to tell them the truth now

*Sekou Kouyate (in French and Susu):*

Ghetto Many, Vampires Many, ah  
Ghetto Many, Vampires Many, ah

Don't abuse me, kid

Girl, if you can't do anything, don't make trouble for me

Kids, don't make trouble, if you can't do anything good

Don't make trouble behind my back

Look, my spirit is the spirit of the ghetto

All of my things, all my stuff

Is in the ghetto

I tell you, there are vampires in the ghetto

Now you've entered the ghetto, and you've changed

If you can't do anything good, don't go there

In the ghetto, I make light of everything

You see, all the problems can change your spirit

If you can do something, come here, I'll show you things

But I tell you, in the ghetto, there are vampires

Don't get hurt there

If you can't do something good, don't hurt the people

I kid around, in the ghetto

A young man with a beard, wearing a dark cap and a light-colored hoodie, is walking on a city street. He has a black backpack on his back and is looking off to the side. The background shows a multi-story building and trees, with a warm, golden light suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

## “Birnakely” (We All Stand Together)

*Sekou Kouyate (in Peul and Susu)*

We all stand together, we won't accept a war  
We all stand together, we won't accept a war, ay ay ay

You will see, Malinké is married with Susu  
You will see, Susu is married with Malinké  
You will see, Malinké is married with Fula

All this shows, we all come from the same place  
We don't want times of conflict with our brothers  
All this shows, we all come from the same place

We won't accept, we don't want, times of conflict  
We won't accept, we don't want, times of war  
We all stand together, we won't accept a war

*Joe Driscoll:*

Some gangsters talk loud, some gangsters don't speak  
Some of them wear uniforms and run your street  
Some gangsters talk loud, some gangsters don't speak  
Some of them wear uniforms and run your street  
Block for block, shot for shot  
Whether it's cop or not  
A villain is defined by the bodies he drops  
Where the bullet comes from, is a legitimate gun  
Mom sees a chalk outline, where she once saw her son  
This war on drugs is a bust, it's just a war upon us  
Don't try to tell me what's up, I know who to trust  
When they drive around the hood, smack our heads on the curbs  
When there's just as many drugs, when you roll in suburbs  
This Babylon system, is pollution  
See violence is violence, wherever it's done  
We need a solution, if you ain't looking for one  
Then all I can see is a man with a gun

*Sekou Kouyate:*

We all stand together, we won't accept a war  
We all stand together, we won't accept a war, ay ay ay



# “Wonamati” (It’s Got to Stop)

*Sekou Kouyate (In Susu)*

Bad people, no good

It’s got to stop

Look, I’m scared of those people

It’s got to stop

Bad people, don’t want anything good

Bad people, only think about themselves

Bad people, don’t want other people to be happy

It’s got to stop

*Joe Driscoll:*

Wonamati - meaning ‘it’s got to stop’

From the big politricks to small town cops

No friend to me, what you said to me

Ain’t heard a word since they shot both the Kennedys

The story’s the same no matter who’s in power

Question 9/11, who took down the towers?

Now that’s the deepest threat

But you won’t see me fret

I’m glued to the truth like a TV set

Cos once we get them off the couches and the porches

Your own children are carrying the torches

Once we get them off the couches and the porches

Your own children

When you gonna learn now?

Babylon you’re gonna burn now

When you gonna learn now?

Babylon you’re gonna burn now

*Sekou Kouyate:*

War has eaten all the money of the world

You’ve forgotten that tomorrow will come

Tomorrow will come, tomorrow will come

War’s all over, you forgot that tomorrow will arrive

Now you have forgotten, you have forgotten

That someone else is crying

Bad people, no good

It’s got to stop

Those people are scaring me

It’s got to stop

Look, I don’t want bad people

We were trusting

Now the people are crying

Now Africa is crying

The young people are emigrating

Africa is crying

Africa is going backwards

Now you’re sweet talking

I’m scared of those people

Now you’re smiling

Then you’ll stab me in the back

I’m scared of those kind of people

It’s got to stop



## “New York”

A state full of energetic changes, they fill the pages  
I'm singing my song on stages, or dark back rooms  
Afternoons and midnight evenings, only put the seeds in  
Then tell me what you're reaping when it's time for receiving  
I've been sown, grown, and now I'm speaking  
I'm ripping the flows, my lover, on tight party weekends  
You've been wine, stop trying to be a grape  
I'm making a mix tape, now I can't wait to state  
That my plate could be empty, but your devil won't tempt me  
If you act mad greedy? Don't expect me to look friendly  
Just my facial expression; you ain't welcome in the session  
So you had to get to stepping,  
    when you couldn't learn the lesson, yes and  
Feel the blessing as you step into the sun  
Just ask him how to shine, he'll show you how it's done in

New York, I shine in  
New York, I shine in  
New York, I shine in  
New York, I shine  
For New York

I went driving with my baby, way out west  
Listening to Buju Banton 'The East is the Best'  
I went driving with my lover, way out west  
Listening to Buju Banton  
Yo, California has the ocean and the redwood trees  
But New York's the home, of the first emcee  
Cali's got the ocean and redwood trees  
But New York's my home  
My heart beats to the rhythm found in the eastern seas  
In this city you'll see, what they tell you's unseen  
So just nod your head, to both the Atlantic and the Pacific  
I'll get frantic yet specific, I don't demand that you get with it  
I just feel like if you're gifted, you should let love shine  
They try to punch my face, think I got too much pride  
I'm keeping track of facts: we are all divine  
You feel me in Marseille? Then let your love light shine  
To New York  
I shine to New York  
I shine to New York

New York, New York

## "Zion"

*Sekou Kouyate (In Susu)*

Zion, big up

I say Zion, everything comes from there

Look, when I get up in the morning

I sit and think of all the wicked people

Zion my everything is in Zion

If you can, come in

You can't ruin me

You can't destroy me

Zion, Zion

I'm the one they call Zion

Come back there

I'll go there

Zion oh oh

Life is like this

*Joe Driscoll:*

Kicking it upon the stoop as a youth, just wishing I was a grown man

You could have filled a million books with the things I didn't know man

But just like Jimmy on his white cliffs of Dover

Know I'll get rest when my work is over

Music will guide, life will provide

The words from survivors, gives a man insights

Like in Zion

Hey, my grandpa'd be there, 315th'll be there

People'd get justice and life would be fair

Grandpa'd be there, 315th'll be there

People'd get justice and life would be fair

Remember Zion

*Sekou Kouyate:*

Look, when I wake up in the morning

I sit and think of all the wicked people

They are growing in numbers

Every day there are more, you see

I have been there

I went there, and saw for myself

And I will go to Zion

I'll go back there

And I will laugh with Zion, yes

Zion eh eh ya

And life is like this





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A banner for the Rift Valley Festival at Fishermans Camp, L. Naivasha Kenya, set against a background of trees. The banner is white with black text and features a circular logo in the center. The background is a dense forest of trees with a warm, golden-brown color palette.

Rift Valley Festival  
Fishermans Camp L. Naivasha Kenya



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Photos by Ben Dowden and Alex Munro

1. *Tanama* 3:29

2. *Passport* 3:47

3. *Faya* 3:37

4. *Lady* 3:38

5. *Ghetto Many* 4:10

6. *Birnakely* 3:18

7. *Wonamati* 3:11

8. *New York* 3:25

9. *Zion* 3:30

Bonus Track:

10. *Faya (Gentleman's Dub Club Remix)* 3:50

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