



**From Mali to Michigan:  
A Musical Bridge**  
by Louise Bourgault

Third World Newsreel  
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# From Mali to Michigan: A Musical Bridge

Louise Bourgault, 2006, 28 minutes, English, United States

## SYNOPSIS

A documentary about musical collaboration in the global age, *From Mali to Michigan* follows African World Music pop diva and griotte (traditional female bard) Naïny Diabaté during her 2005 visit to the Northern Michigan University. The film traces the musical history of Mali, including the development of pop music in the country. Shot on location in Mali and Michigan, the documentary highlights the rich cultural and performative heritage of Ms. Diabaté's native Mali and features the star's lively collaborations with musical artists from Michigan and with students from Northern Michigan University.

## AWARDS & SCREENINGS

Best Arts and Cultural Production, Michigan Association of Broadcasters, 2007

Best Television Program, Good News Award, Roman Catholic Diocese of Marquette, 2007

## THE BEGINNING

This documentary grew out of a research project undertaken by NMU Communications Professor and African Specialist Dr. Louise Bourgault. In 2003, she traveled to Mali, West Africa on a Fulbright Research Grant that studied the use of the performing arts in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. In the course of her fieldwork she met a remarkable musician, pop diva Naïny Diabaté who had released an AIDS song entitled *SIDA* in 2001. Ms. Diabaté, a member of the renowned *jalia* professional caste of musicians, had been singing traditional songs since the age of six. But like many members of this group, she also has a thriving career in pop and world music, one that takes her around West Africa, North Africa and Europe on tour. Bourgault and Diabaté struck up a friendship.

The pop diva was eager to develop some new sounds and work with some new musicians. In 2006, Bourgault arranged for Ms. Diabaté to visit Northern Michigan University and to jam with Marquette performers. WNMU-TV producer Bob Thomson and his staff documented a good deal of this visit, interviewing the star and the group that backed up her singing in Marquette. "From Mali to Michigan: A Musical Bridge" highlights the extraordinary musical collaboration of Naïny Diabaté with local talent. The video also draws from Bourgault's footage of Mali, providing a glimpse at the social, musical and performative world of West Africa that nurtured Naïny Diabaté and her singing career.



# BIOS

**Naïny Diabaté** was born in Bamako, the capital of the West African nation of Mali, in 1963. A member of the jalia or griot occupational caste, she began singing in kindergarten at the age of five. During her primary school years she often accompanied her mother who sang traditional Mandingue music at weddings and other cultural festivals. By 1976 it was clear that Naïny would follow in the footsteps of her fore bearers and pursue a musical career. She left school to pursue full-time performance and within a year had won first prize as a soloist in an inter neighborhood competition in her home city of Bamako.

In 1979, Naïny joined the renowned Mali Rail Band, the group that also launched such renowned Malian Superstars as Salif Keita and Mory Kanté. The early 1980s found the star in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire, where she awed the Ivorian public with her golden voice. From there she began touring the West African Region. Back in Mali in 1983 she performed on the newly inaugurated Malian National Television Service reestablishing her musical presence in her native Mali. With her success came the development of her style. By the late 1980s, her arrangements had added a good deal of modern instrumentation to the traditional Mandingue sound.

Naïny performed her first European concert in Avignon, France in 1986, and since then has performed regularly at festivals in France, Spain, Switzerland, and Morocco. Naïny is considered one of the great female superstars in Mali, nation enamored with the belting throaty sounds of the female songstress. Between 1987 and 2008, Ms. Diabaté has released eight albums. Her latest production, a double album named "Fantanya" and "Dansa" emerged in late December 2007.

Naïny Diabaté is married to the guitarist and producer Cheik Oumar Diabaté and has one teenaged son, Gaoussou Diabaté who plays the drums in a youth ensemble.

**Dr. Louise M. Bourgault** has taught Media Studies for nearly 30 years. A specialist in African Media and Popular Culture, she is the author of two books and numerous articles and presentations on the subjects of African mass communication and African performance arts. She has served as a visiting scholar in residence in Africa, in Asia, and in Europe. Her recent research and activism has focused on the use of popular performance and media in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Dr. Bourgault has won numerous awards for her work, including a Choice Book Award in 1996 for *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 2000 Distinguished Faculty Award, and a 2003 Fulbright Award for AIDS-Related Research in Africa.

**Mr. Robert Thomson** has worked in production for the last 20 years at WNMU-TV, Public TV 13 in Marquette, Michigan, located on the campus of Northern Michigan University. For the last ten years, Mr. Thomson has served the station producing and directing the majority of Public TV 13's local programs. He has won several awards for his work in broadcasting, most notably a 2003 Michigan Emmy Award as producer-director for the live broadcast, "An Evening with the Governor." Mr. Thomson also acts as advisor to the award winning student produced daily newscast, *The Public Eye News*. An avid piano player and talented guitarist, Bob is fan of all forms of Black Music.

# CREDITS

Producers: Louise Bourgault and Robert Thomson

Editors: Robert Thomson and Louise Bourgault

Script: Louise Bourgault

Camera (Mali): Louise Bourgault

Camera: (Michigan) Robert Thomson, Michael Lakenen, and Joseph Heath

Graphics: Melinda Stamp

Narration: Michala Hansen

Post Production: Michael Lakenen

Assistants: Jacques Keita, Monsieur Maïga, Mountaga Ly, Neil Cumberlidge (Mali); Cathryn Smith, Brandon Thomas; Nicole Weber, Heather Sawaski, Neil Cumberlidge (Michigan)

Ms. Diabaté's accompanists: Marcy Volcy-Keyboards, Mady Kouyaté-Kora, Brin Jungwirth-Djembe, Dave Ziegner-Base Guitar

Special Thanks to Jason Balas (for SIDA Music Video segments); "Standing O," NMU student-produced musical TV program; Charles Ganzert, Sound Recording Consultant; Cathryn Smith-Interpreter & Personal Assistant to Ms. Diabaté; Neil Cumberlidge, Spouse/companion to Dr. Bourgault

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