



F o n d s

Prince Claus Fund for  
Culture and Development

PRESS RELEASE

15 August 2017, Amsterdam

**Premiere of Sahel Opera Film and Book Launch at EYE Filmmuseum**

On **7 September 2017**, the film *An Opera of the World* by **Manthia Diawara**, and the book *Bintou Wéré, African Opera* by **Koulsy Lamko** will be launched at EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. Following the screening of the film, a conversation with Diawara and Lamko will be moderated by **Els van der Plas**, Founding Director of the Prince Claus Fund (1997-2010), producer of the original opera and current General Director of Dutch National Opera & Ballet. The original production of the Sahel Opera and the event on 7 September have been made possible through a collaboration between the Prince Claus Fund and the Dutch Postcode Lottery.

Ten years ago, *Bintou Wéré, a Sahel Opera* premiered in Bamako, Mali. It then sold out to enthusiastic audiences in Amsterdam and Paris. It had never been done before: an African story of the pull and torments of migration told in operatic form, composed, designed, choreographed and performed by Africans from 13 countries in the Sub-Saharan region. A decade later the story and its theme are more relevant than ever.

Now, in the film *An Opera of the World*, Malian-American filmmaker **Manthia Diawara** has produced a cinematic retelling of the opera that explores the African traditions it draws on and explores the contemporary relevance of its themes.

In his book *Bintou Wéré, African Opera*, Librettist **Koulsy Lamko** documents the making of the original, unique production.

Location: EYE Filmmuseum, IJpromenade 1, Amsterdam  
Date: 7 September 2017  
Doors Open: 19:00-19:30 Foyer  
Film & discussion: 19:30-21:00 Cinema I  
Entrance free: RSVP via [www.princeclausfund.org](http://www.princeclausfund.org)

The event comes on the day after the birthday of HRH Prince Claus and the anniversary of the Prince Claus Fund (6 September).

**About the Film**

In August 2007, New York based Malian-American art historian, author and cultural theorist Manthia Diawara, returned to his home town, Bamako. He was there to film rehearsals for an opera performed by an all-African cast on a stage specially erected on the banks of the Niger River.

His inspiration came from Édouard Glissant's concept of "Chaos-Opera": "To create relationships between *Bintou Wéré*, and all the human migrations that took place before it, after it, or at the same time. *An Opera of the World* is meant to be seen as a Chaos-Opera, an encounter between words, music and

*dance, which attempts to make sense of human movements and the new cultures that are born out of them.”*

The world premiere of the film took place at documenta 14 in April 2017. Coproduced by documenta 14, Maumaus / Lumiar Cité (Portugal, USA, Mali) and supported by the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development and 3sat.

**Film details:** *An Opera of the World* (2017), Digital video, color, sound, 70:22 min.

### **About the Book**

In his book ***Bintou Wéré, African Opera***, Koulsy Lamko, poet, novelist and librettist of the Sahel Opera traces the extraordinary collaborative process that created this production, along with its impact on those who took part. African traditions that permeate the operatic story receive poetic explanation. The forward and preface by HRH Prince Constantijn and HRH the late Prince Friso respectively, reflect the opera's inspiration and themes. The book, designed by Irma Boom, includes photos documenting the production, interviews with the makers, and the libretto itself.

### **About the Opera**

***Bintou Wéré, a Sahel Opera*** tells the story of young people in an African village facing a bleak future of drought and economic decline. Stirred up by Bintou, a brash young woman and former child soldier, and seduced by Diallo, a ruthless people smuggler, they risk their lives crossing the desert with hopes of finding work and better prospects in Europe.

The 'wild idea' for the Sahel Opera project originally came from HRH the late Prince Claus, who believed that combining African musical and storytelling traditions with classical European opera would yield a remarkable new artistic form that would electrify audiences on both continents. African artists responded to the challenge, with the organizational support of the Prince Claus Fund, the financial collaboration of the Dutch Postcode Lottery and the cooperation of Théâtre du Châtelet Paris and the government of Mali.

### **About the Prince Claus Fund**

The Prince Claus Fund recognises, supports and protects culture worldwide. It actively seeks cultural collaborations founded on equality and trust, with partners of excellence, in spaces where resources and opportunities for cultural expression, creative production and research are limited and cultural heritage is threatened.

### **Links:**

Prince Claus Fund event information:

<http://princeclausfund.org/en/activities/launch-of-film-and-book-on-the-sahel-opera-at-the-eye.html>

Dutch Postcode Lottery:

<https://www.postcodeloterij.nl/goede-doelen/bijzondere-projecten/sahel-opera>

Eye Filmmuseum:

<https://www.eyefilm.nl/en>

Manthia Diawara at documenta 14:

<http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/1940/manthia-diawara>

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### **Note for the Editors**

For more information, please contact:

Sarah Smith | Prince Claus Fund Communications | [s.smith@princeclausfund.nl](mailto:s.smith@princeclausfund.nl) | [+31\(0\)20 344 9169](tel:+31203449169)

Please note: The Prince Claus Fund will announce the 2017 Prince Claus Laureates on 6 September 2017.