

Faso Danse Théâtre & Brussels Jazz Orchestra

Serge Aimé Coulibaly



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Back to Kidal

**Performance with 7 dancers,
a guitarist, an actress and a jazz orchestra.**

Duration: ca. 75 minutes

Creation period: November 2025 – August 2026

World première: autumn 2026

Back to Kidal

Back to Kidal is a bold artistic project by Serge Aimé Coulibaly, in collaboration with Brussels Jazz Orchestra (BJO). This dance and music performance delves into the origins of blues and jazz, drawing inspiration from the musical culture of the region of Kidal in northern Mali, home of Afro-Blues. The piece explores the intersections of African, European, and American histories through the lens of the colonial past, civil rights movement and cultural exchanges.

The work connects African, European, and Afro-descendant cultures, focusing on the collective imagination formed over the last 100 years. It revisits the historical roots of jazz in African and Afro-American culture, emphasizing the struggles for emancipation and civil rights in Africa, Europe, and the U.S.

Music

The project features a unique collaboration between **Brussels Jazz Orchestra** and a Malian guitar virtuoso **Vieux Farka Touré**, the son and inheritor of the legendary Ali Farka Touré. **Odile Sankara**, a Burkinabe actress, writer and flagbearer of the struggle for emancipation and self-determination in Africa, will write and recite the text. Uniting the two historically related genres – West-African blues and jazz – in one spectacle will bear witness to the immense importance of African influences in modern Western music and to the cultural depth of jazz.

Choreography

In his newest creation, Coulibaly's thinking about dance remains deeply humanistic. His principal question is: How can I reach and touch the core of humanity in every person through simple yet original body presence? Finding the answer requires continuous research on what our essence is and how to evoke - through dance - an energy that will connect the performers with the deepest part in each spectator. Driven by this ambition, the artist engages in a constant evolution of his choreographic vocabulary rooted in urgency and necessity, as well as in the emergence of movement and countermovement. In *Back to Kidal*, Coulibaly sets the bar high and ventures to create a complex, detailed choreography executed with great precision.

Concept

Kidal is the capital of the eponymous region in northwestern Mali. This desert territory has a rich, centuries-old musical tradition that is the cradle of the genre known as Afro-Blues, popularised since the 1970s by its progenitor, Ali Farka Touré. The region's music belongs to the West African heritage transferred to the Americas due to the slave trade. Kidal is, therefore, a symbol representing countless cities, towns, and villages whose traditional sounds were forcedly transported across the ocean. On a different continent, in tragic circumstances, the music from many places like Kidal blended with other styles and evolved into blues and, subsequently, into jazz. In Coulibaly's spectacle, Kidal represents a commonplace, a lens through which various aspects of African, American and European histories and cultures focalise.

Taking jazz (played in the piece by BJO) as a starting point, Coulibaly explores the history of civil rights in the United States, Europe and Africa. African music has always been present in this history, either as a pedigree, an inspiration, or a reference. It also prominently features in *Back to Kidal* through the guitar accompaniment of Vieux Farka Touré. While firmly set in the music, the narrative is carried by choreography for a seven-person ensemble and complemented with spoken parts performed by Odile Sankara. With all these elements, the artist seeks to connect different styles, artistic disciplines, cultures, and continents. The Burkinabe choreographer once again takes up the challenge of holding up a mirror to the present-day world through dance, music and a strong narrative. In this renewed mutual mirror gaze lies the hope for bringing together people divided by a painful past.

A meditation on the complexity of the cultural, historical and political relations between Africa and the West has already been vital to Serge Aimé Coulibaly's other creations, most recently *Kirina* (2018) and *Kalakuta Republik* (2016). By inviting us *Back to Kidal*, the Belgo-Burkinabe choreographer reminds us that one of the most sublime contemporary musical genres has its roots in a culture that does not always receive the recognition it deserves. Moreover, this retrospective journey lays bare the inextricable tie between jazz and African and Afro-descendent people's struggle for liberation and emancipation. Yet, the route back to Kidal also leads through present-day Europe, where jazz is practised with great success and at a high level of artistry by musicians of non-African ancestry, who have a different connection to this music than those whose forbearers were subjected to slavery, oppression and racism.

Brussels Jazz Orchestra

Brussels Jazz Orchestra was founded in 1993 by Frank Vaganée, Serge Plume, Marc Godfroid and Bo Van der Werf and has enjoyed the recognition and support of the Flemish government since 1999. In 2023, BJO celebrated its 30th anniversary with several festive activities, including a collaboration with Aka Moon and a festive anniversary tour with a variety of musical guests, including Bert Joris, Tutu Puoane, Lynn Cassiers and Osama Abdulrasol.

Brussels Jazz Orchestra (BJO) strives to achieve the highest level by composing original music, creating unique arrangements and playing inventively as well as passionately. BJO plays jazz with a dynamic orchestral sound rooted in jazz tradition, where each musician is also a brilliant soloist. In the past 30 years, BJO created unique projects that didn't solely stick to standards but incorporated other musical genres and art forms.

The only professional large jazz ensemble in Belgium has a worldwide reputation, from Singapore and Abu Dhabi to New York and Johannesburg. In addition to BJO's own productions, the orchestra has worked with well-known musicians all over the world, like Toots Thielemans, Joe Lovano, Maria Schneider, Dave Liebman, Philip Catherine and countless others. In February 2020, Brussels Jazz Orchestra shared the stage of Bozar (Brussels, B) with the world-famous Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, led by Wynton Marsalis, for a grand big band celebration.

The recordings of BJO, 25 CDs to date, have received international recognition and have been awarded numerous prizes. In 2012, the orchestra was part of the Oscar triumph for the silent film 'The Artist', as co-performer of the soundtrack. The album 'Mama Africa' with Tutu Puoane received a South African Music Award for Best Traditional Jazz Album, 'Wild Beauty' featuring Joe Lovano (2013) scored two Grammy Award Nominations and in 2017, the album BREL with David Linx won an Edison Jazz/World Award (to name a few).

Faso Danse Théâtre/Serge Aimé Coulibaly

Faso Danse Théâtre was founded in 2002 by Serge Aimé Coulibaly, who lives and works in Brussels and in Bobo-Dioulasso. In all his creations with Faso Danse Théâtre, 13 to date, the Belgo-Burkinabe choreographer explores complex themes with the aim of bringing about a positive dynamic.

While the root of his inspiration lies in African culture, the artist is committed to inventing powerful contemporary choreographies anchored in emotion, but always bearing a reflection and hope. Coulibaly's style is marked by an intense expression, which makes his creations universal and resonating with audiences worldwide. The creation process of Faso Danse Théâtre's spectacles always takes place partially in Europe and partially in Africa, notably in International Cultural Institute ANKATA in Bobo- Dioulasso, founded by Serge Aimé Coulibaly in 2011.

Serge Aimé Coulibaly considers dance as a social commitment. He questions daily reality as well as broader social evolution and shares his observations with his audience through his dynamic yet deeply engaged art. Coulibaly examines the interaction between personality and involvement, the tension between what the individual experiences or wants to say on the one hand, and what the commitment to a better world imposes on that individual on the other hand. On the basis of his engagement, he developed a creative process that starts from the duality principle. Every movement executed by the body triggers an opposite movement. Every form of energy is responded to by a complementary form. This brings body and mind into a state in which intuition and urgency take control.

Musicians performing on stage with dancers have been an integral part of several of recent spectacles. For *Kirina* (2018), Coulibaly collaborated with Rokia Traoré as a composer and musical director, which resulted in a stunning spectacle with 9 dancers, 1 actor, 4 musicians, 2 singers and featuring 40 amateurs on stage. In *WAKATT* (2020), 10 dancers performed to live music played by Magic Malik Orchestra. The unique energy of the latest creation *C LA VIE* (2023) is due to a subtle blend of a powerful dance performance with Dobet Gnahoré's expressive vocals and Yvan Talbot's accompaniment on percussion and drums. The choice to work with a 16- piece jazz band and a guitarist in the next spectacle is, therefore, a continuation of an artistic vision according to which dance and live music form a continuous dialogue, blend, and implementation.

Cast and crew

For this creation, Coulibaly again opts for an artistic team close to him and his oeuvre. Sigué Sayouba is in charge of the choreographic assistance, while Sara Vanderieck, Faso Danse Théâtre's long-time associate, will work on dramaturgy. At this stage, the rest of the artistic team is still in the selection phase. Although the final decisions considering the cast are yet to be made, the ensemble's core will feature some of the principal dancers known from Coulibaly's previous pieces, namely Ida Faho, Jean-Robert (Robbi) Koudogbo-Kikki. The excellent interpreters of Coulibaly's choreographic language in *C LA VIE*: the Burkinabe Djibril Ouattara and Cameroonian Arsène Etaba will perform along these signature performers.