

## 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 band.  
(also version with recorded music available)**

**Duration: ca. 75 minutes**

**Creation period: November 2025 – May 2026**

**World premiere: May 2026**

## ***Back to Kidal* – in short**

In his most recent creation *Back to Kidal*, Serge Aimé Coulibaly and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra go back to the origins of blues and jazz and the hometown of Afro-Blues legend Ali Farka Touré in the northern region of Mali, where rebel armies rule today. As usually, Coulibaly seeks to connect not only across disciplines, cultures and continents but also throughout history.

*Back to Kidal* fits within Serge Aimé Coulibaly's oeuvre along the line that he introduced with *Kirina* (2019), a spectacle created in response to a devaluation of non-European traditional cultures in the European mainstream culture, media in particular.

*Back to Kidal* is a choreographic exploration of our collective imagination, through our shared history of the last 100 years. Starting from the great jazz classics, Coulibaly questions the history of civil rights in the United States, Europe and Africa.

For *Back to Kidal*, Coulibaly once again takes up the challenge of holding up a mirror to Western, African and Afro-descendant cultures through music and by bringing them closer together by means of that renewed gaze. The starting point for the collaboration with the BJO is Jazz- via Afro-blues, the musical discipline par excellence that has its origins in African and Afro-American culture. The artist laid the basis for his new choreography by uniting an orchestra consisting of seventeen white Europeans with a seven-member mixed European-African dance ensemble, one African actress and one African guitarist around a selection of the great Jazz standards.

*Back to Kidal*, like all Serge Aimé Coulibaly's other performances, is created partly on the African continent (in ANKATA) and partly in Europe with an international cast and crew. This working method is essential to the philosophy and practice of Serge Aimé Coulibaly and FDT and contributes to the unique artistic quality of the creations.

## *Back to Kidal*

Kidal is located in northern Mali. The city and the surrounding region have a rich, centuries-old musical tradition that is the cradle of the genre known as Afro-Blues, popularized since the 1970s by its progenitor, Ali Faraka Touré. In a broader cultural and historical context, the music of Kidal belongs to a greater West African heritage that was transferred across the Atlantic as a consequence of the slave trade and laid the basis of what later became jazz.

While Afro-Blues musicians hypnotize audiences with their trans-infesting vocals and virtuoso guitar and kora chords, their home region appears in the (western) media almost uniquely in the context of the Tuareg rebellion. Since the insurgents made Kidal their stronghold in 2012, the area has become a battlefield for land, resources and political influence between the Malians, the French and the rebels. Its ancient, colonial and post-colonial history, as well as its significant yet underappreciated contribution to the world culture, make Kidal an African topos, a commonplace, a lens through which various mutual aspects of African and Western histories and cultures are focalized.

By inviting us *Back to Kidal*, Serge Aimé Coulibaly continues an artistic meditation on several topics that constitute a common thread throughout his recent creations. In *Kirina* (2018), he scrutinized the Western disdain for the history and culture of people with a non-Western migration background. *Back to Kidal* touches on a paradox inherent in jazz that is related to this subject. While the genre is highly appreciated for its sophistication, the culture where jazz has its roots doesn't get due recognition. Yet, there would be no sublime jazz compositions loved by cultivated audiences today if enslaved West Africans hadn't brought and preserved the centuries-old rhythms and melodies of many Kidals they were forced to leave.

*Kalakuta Republik* (2016) dealt with music as a means of resistance, with Fela Kuti – the ultimate charismatic engaged artist – as the central figure. *Back to Kidal* aims to remind us about the vital aspect in the pedigree of jazz: its inextricable tie to the struggle for emancipation and liberation by African and Afro-descendent people. Even though not every black jazz artist was as pronounced about the fight for freedom as Fela Kuti, there is barely any note played or sung by them that did not bear pain, resistance and hope. At its core, jazz goes beyond the aesthetics and beyond the artistic sublime. It is transcendent: it has the quality of linking the common experiences of a dramatic past to the hopeful present and a vision of a brighter future.

Serge Aimé Coulibaly wouldn't have been himself if he hadn't added yet another layer of complexity to his creation, notably the fact that jazz is also practiced with great success and at a high level of artistry by musicians of non-African ancestry, who may have a different emotional connection to this music than people whose forbearers were subjected to slavery, colonial oppression and racism.

The axe of the spectacle is formed by Coulibaly's hand-picked selection of jazz classics. These works will be re-arranged by Brussels Jazz Orchestra, a band consisting exclusively of Belgian-European musicians. Taking the great jazz compositions as a starting point, Coulibaly questions the history of civil rights in the United States, Europe and Africa. This history is closely intertwined with jazz, yet African music- both traditional and contemporary – has always been present in it either as a pedigree, an inspiration or a point of reference. And so it also prominently features in *Back to Kidal* through the accompaniment of a West African guitarist.<sup>1</sup> While firmly set in the accompanying music, the narrative is carried by choreography for a seven-person mixed European-African ensemble and complemented with spoken parts performed by a Burkinabe actress Odile Sankara.

Afro blues, a West African guitarist, a Belgian jazz orchestra, a Burkinabe actress-storyteller, and a mixed African-European dance ensemble united in a choreographic and musical exploration of our collective imagination through our shared African, European, and American history – that's Serge Aimé Coulibaly at his best. 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 Western, African and Afro-descendant cultures through dance, music and a strong theatrical narrative. In this renewed mutual mirror gaze lies the potential for bringing together people divided by a painful past.

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<sup>1</sup> Name will be announced soon.

## Faso Danse Théâtre/Serge Aimé Coulibaly



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Faso Danse Théâtre was founded in 2002 by Serge Aimé Coulibaly, who lives and works in Brussels and Bobo-Dioulasso. In all his creations with Faso Danse Théâtre, 12 to date, the Belgian-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 creating powerful contemporary choreographies anchored in emotion but always bearing a reflection and hope. The intense expression inherent in his style makes Coulibaly's creations universal and resonate with audiences all over

the world. The creation process of Faso Danse Théâtre's spectacles always takes place partially in Europe and partially in Africa, notably in Ankata – International Laboratory for Research, Creation and Dissemination of Performing Arts in Bobo-Dioulasso funded by Serge Aimé Coulibaly in 2011. The cast, crew and coordination-administration team of the company are international, multilingual and multiethnic. This is essential to the philosophy and practice of Serge Aimé Coulibaly and constitutes the unique quality of Faso Danse Théâtre.

Serge Aimé Coulibaly considers dance as a social commitment. He questions daily reality as well as broader social evolutions and shares his observations with his audience through his dynamic yet deeply engaged art. Coulibaly examines the intersection 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. 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 were 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 emotive 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 are in a continuous dialogue, blend and complementation.



## Brussels Jazz Orchestra (BJO)

With their career spanning over three decades, Brussels Jazz Orchestra belongs to the icons of Belgian jazz. The band was founded by Frank Vaganée, Serge Plume, Marc Godfroid and Bo van der Werf in 1993. Since their beginnings in the legendary Brussels jazz club The Sound, the orchestra gained critical acclaim, which was proven by a Grammy Award nomination for their album *Wild Beauty* (2013) with Joe Lovano. Moreover, the Brussels jazzmen can count themselves among Oscar laureates, as they are featured on an Academy Award-winning score for the film *The Artist* (2012). The critical praise is paired with great appreciation by the audience: the band's numerous concerts are regularly sold out.

The quality of BJO's projects and collaborations proves that they belong to the highest echelons of European jazz. Throughout the years, the band toured, played and recorded with such greats as the Belgian legend Toots Thielemans, Kenny Werner (USA), Maria Schneider (USA) and Tutu Puoane (South Africa). BJO was welcomed numerous times in the most iconic jazz venues: Lincoln Center in NYC and New Morning in Paris, to mention but two.

Distinctive for BJO's artistry is their quest to push the boundaries of jazz. The record *Tango!* (2002) celebrating the eponymous dance- and music style was a result of their work with an Argentinian composer Carlos Franzetti. In *Creating Chances* (2009), they united the Brussels Philharmonic with a Belgian soprano soloist Iris Luypaers and South African singer Tutu Puoane. Throughout the years they continued to work with several other symphonic orchestras. The band's creative union with Tutu Puoane resulted in, amongst other projects, jazz arrangements of a selection of traditional African songs on the album *Mama Africa* (2010). *Luz des sur: Jazz inspired by Flamenco* (2013) was yet another original attempt at joining two musical universes. This time, as indicated in the title, it was jazz and flamenco. With *BREL* (2016) BJO gave a jazz taste to chansons of the legendary Brussels native Jacques Brel, and with *Kanneelvingers* (2017) to texts of Belgian poet Stefan Hertmans.

Beyond those musical ventures, the orchestra is known for its involvement in the education of youth. Not only does the band organize regular masterclasses for jazz students, but it also engages in musical initiation projects with elementary school children. Moreover, the BJO dedicated an entire album *The Future Is Now* (2016) to showcasing young talents and launched Youth Jazz Collective consisting of conservatory students in 2018.

For BJO, a project with Faso Danse Théâtre constitutes a new creative challenge in their history marked by dared, out-of-the-box collaborations.

## Music and performances with the BJO

Serge Aimé Coulibaly's selection of jazz classics that form the core of the spectacle is the starting point of the creation process. The choice, which will be communicated to the BJO and the West African guitarist at an early stage, is, for a large part, decisive for the creation. After this crucial step is set, the choreographer, his assistant, the dancers and the rest of the artistic team will set out to create the first outline of the choreography in December 2025 during a séjour in ANKATA, the International Laboratory for Research, Creation and Dissemination of the Performing Arts in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. An immediate presentation of the results of this first phase of choreographic work will give an impetus to the musical creation by the BJO. They will re-work the selected jazz standards in accordance with the newly created choreography, Coulibaly's idea of the spectacle and creative interactions with the guitarist. This rhythm of exchanges between choreography and music will be a main thread in the creative work process until arriving at a final creation in which dance, music and other elements will seamlessly flow together. The process will culminate in a series of mutual repetitions near the date of the premiere.

Several modes of performance are envisaged for *Back to Kidal*. The spectacle will be played as often as possible with the entire BJO on stage. In cases where this isn't possible, the dancers will perform to the previously recorded music. Collaborating with local jazz orchestras (under the direction of the BJO lead composer Frank Vaganée) in the instances when going on an international tour together with the BJO will not be possible is also being considered. All these options will be taken into account in the creation process by both the choreographer and the BJO, in order to create a spectacle that, despite its grand scope, will remain versatile and can be brought to diverse audiences in a variety of theatres.





## Choreography

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

## Cast and crew

For this creation, Coulibaly opts once again for an artistic team that is close to him and his oeuvre. Sigué Sayouba is in charge of the choreographic assistance. Sara Vanderieck, Faso Danse Théâtre's long-time associate, is in charge of 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, it is clear that the core of the ensemble will feature the dancers that have been essential for the spectacles of Faso Danse Théâtre in the past years, namely Ida Faho, Jean-Robert (Robbi) Koudogbo-Kikki. These signature performers will be accompanied by artists who proved to be excellent interpreters of Coulibaly's choreographic language in *C LA VIE*: the Burkinabe Djibril Ouattara and Cameroonian Arsène Etaba. A quest for the remaining three dancers who will fit within the concept of *Back to Kidal* is currently in course.

### Biographies

#### Choreography: Serge Aimé Coulibaly

Serge Aimé Coulibaly is a dancer and choreographer from Burkina Faso. He was born in Bobo Dioulasso, and has worked in Europe and far beyond since 2002. His productions, which include *C LA VIE* (2023), *WAKATT* (2020), *Kirina* (2018), *Kalakuta Republik* (2016), *Nuit Blanche à Ouagadougou* (2014) have been presented in theatres and festivals worldwide. His open view of the world and of differences, which he always questions, as well as his constructive attitude and will to persevere, has led to collaboration with numerous other artists since the beginning of his career. He regularly works on international productions, both as a performer and choreographer. Amongst his artistic collaborators are Moïse Touré (*La Maladie de la Mort*, 2015), Marrukegu Company in Australia (*Cut the Sky*, 2014 and *Burning Daylight*, 2009), Farid Berki (*Double Jeu*, 2013), Julie Dossavi (*Cross and Share*, 2012), Alain Platel (*(C/H)OEURS*, 2012 and *Wolf*, 2003), Kalpana Raghuraman (*I lost my English*, 2008) and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (*Tempus Fugit*, 2004).

Motivated by the will to create a place for experimentation, creation and reflection art and artistic commitment, Serge Aimé Coulibaly funded *ANKATA*, the International Laboratory for Research, Creation and Dissemination of the Performing Arts in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, in 2012. It prides itself in being a space open for exchanges between different continents, disciplines and communities, that share a common aim of inventing a bright future through art, education and ethical attitudes towards humanity and nature.

### **Choreographic assistance: Sigué Sayouba**

After a childhood spent in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Sayouba Sigué came back to Burkina for high school and entered the cultural and artistic scene in Ouagadougou. He is trained in traditional and contemporary dance. Discovered in 2001 by the young Burkinabe choreographer Souleymane Porgo, he joined his company (Téguérer) and was initiated into contemporary and afro-contemporary dance. He also benefited from training by several other choreographers of different styles and origins. In this manner, dance went from being an extra-curricular activity to progressively becoming a passion that he eventually chose as his career. He has performed in many productions with the greats of the African dance world such as Irène Tassembédo (in *Souf es*, *Carmen Falinga Awa* and *Le sacre du tempo*), Serge Aimé Coulibaly (in *A Benguer*, *Babemba*, *Nuit Blanche à Ouagadougou* and *Kalakuta Republik*) and Kathrin Wehlisch (*Schiff der Traüme*). He is also a co-director of the DIALAW FESTIVAL in Senegal.

### **Dramaturgy: Sara Vanderieck**

Sara Vanderieck obtained her degree in theatre directing at RITS in Brussels. In 2006, she joined Les Ballets C de la B, where she first worked as production manager and later as artistic assistant to Alain Platel for *Out of Context*—for Pina and C(H)OEURS and of Lisi Estaras for *Dans Dans* and *Leche*. In 2012, she left Les Ballets C de la B to join the artistic direction of De Grote Post in Ostend.

Sara also works as a freelance dramaturg/outside eye for various (danse)theatre personalities such as Claron McFadden/Muziektheater Transparant (*Lilith*, 2012), Serge Aimé Coulibaly (*Fadjiri*, 2013; *Nuit Blanche à Ouagadougou*, 2014; *GLOED*, 2015; *Kalakuta Republik*, 2016 and *Kirina*, 2018, *C LA VIE*, 2023), Bára Sigfúsdóttir (*The Lover*, 2015; *Tide*, 2016 and *being*, 2017) Ayelen Parolin & Lisi Estaras (*La Esclava*, 2015), Platform K/les ballets C de la B/Lisi Estaras (*Monkey Mind*, 2016) and Naïf Productions (*La Mécanique des ombres*, 2016; *des gestes blancs*, 2017-2018 ; *la chair a ses raisons*, 2018).

## Actor: Odile Sankara

Burkinabé actress Odile Sankara was born in 1963. She is the younger sister of the legendary former president of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara, and belongs to the most prolific figures of the contemporary Burkinabe culture. A graduate of literary studies at the University of Ouagadougou, she joined the theatre company FEEREN in 1991 where she worked with the actor, director, and pedagogue Amadou Bourou, while taking theatre classes at the Théâtre de l'Union des Ensembles Dramatiques de Ouagadougou (l'UNEDO). Parallel to the projects with FEEREN throughout the 1990s, Odile participated in spectacles abroad, notably *Millenium* (1992-1993) with Théâtre Vollard on the island of Réunion, *Les Coépouses* (1997) with Norade-National Theatre of Norway. Meeting a French theatre director Jean Lambert-Wild in the early 2000s during a residency in the Scène Nationale de Belfort (France), opened a new chapter in her career. From the 2002 on, she played in numerous plays directed by Lambert-Wild. *Mue*, *Première mélopée* (2006), to name but one of them, was a co-production of the Festival of Avignon and made a successful tourné in France. Odile Sankara's international career continued as she worked in Théâtre Nanterre Amandiers and with directors Jean-Louis Martinelli, Moïse Touré, Fargass Assande and with choreographer Salia Sanou, to name a few.

Odile is known as an exceptionally versatile artist, who has excelled in roles in plays strongly rooted in African cultures, for example *La vie est un songe*, 2008, directed by Moïse Touré, as well as in classics of European theatre and literature, such as an adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Joséphine la Cantatrice* directed by Jean Wild-Lambert in 2009. Beyond acting, Sankara is involved in the artistic education of the youth, girls in particular, through the activities of her NGO Talents de Femme in her native Burkina. Moreover, she serves as the artistic director of the Récréatras in Ouagadougou, one of the most prestigious theatre festivals in Africa.

## Dancers (a provisory list)

### Ida Faho

Ida was born in 1990 and began training in the performing arts in 2003. She studied theatre and entered the EDITA dance school in 2009. She regularly dances with the company of Irène Tassembédo while developing her own projects and training with other choreographers, in Africa, at the Ecole des Sables, but also in Europe, in the Pavillon noir of Angelin Preljocaj. Her dance has been nourished by all these encounters. Ida succeeds in harmoniously marrying a powerful gesture, an electrical presence with gentleness, grace and sensuality.

### Jean-Robert Koudogbo Kiki

Born in 1986 in Burkina Faso, Jean-Robert Koudogbo Kiki, was strongly influenced by the dancer choreographer Lebeau Boumpoutou, who first passed the passion for contemporary dance to him. Taught by Éloi Bama from the company Teguerer and by Michel Neya, the founder of the group Génération 2000, he danced in *Nassongo*, a musical which toured France and Luxembourg (2008) and in *Entre chiens et loups* (Montpellier Danse 2010). In 2010, he joined the company Je Danse Donc Je Suis (I Dance Therefore I Am). He worked on the opening and closing of FESPACO in 2009, 2011 and 2013 with the choreographers Irène Tassebedo, Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro. In 2014, he acted in the play *Tichèlbè aires de jeux* with Kettly Noel in the Festival du Niger.

### Djibril Ouattara

Djibril Ouattara is a dancer, choreographer, and pedagogue born in 1988 in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. He currently works as an artistic director of Ardji Danse Company and as the educational director of the three-year multidisciplinary training programme Ankata Next Generation. He trained as a dancer at Centre de Développement Chorégraphique (CDC) la Termitière in Burkina Faso and the Ecole des Sables in Senegal, notably with Salia Sanou, Patrick Acogny, Serge Aimé Coulibaly, Ildevert Meda and Hassan Kouyaté. As a dancer and actor, Ouattara has worked with Salia Sanou in 2014 (*Rue Princesse*), Olivier Tarapaga (*No because you are black*), Nicole Seiler in 2015 (*K-Two*), Hélène Ducharme in 2019 (*Ganou-Gala, la Traversée*), Moïse Touré in 2020 (*La traversée de la littérature africaine*), Serge Aimé Coulibaly in 2021 and 2022 (Opening and Closing Show of the Ouagadougou Pan-African Film Festival (FESPACO), and company Exodos in 2023 (*My Dear Ritual*).

He created several works with Ardji Dance Company, including two group creations, *La grande marche du retour* in 2020 and *Au crépuscule des bâtards* in 2023. Djibril Ouattara has also been invited to work on a number of projects and creations as a choreographer or choreographic designer, including a performance created with internally displaced people from Burkina Faso and *Moi Pierre Rivière* with the Compagnie Les Blouses Bleues in Lille, France in 2023.



## **Arsène Etaba**

Arsène Etaba (Doula, Cameroon, 1999) specialises in both traditional African dances and in a number of contemporary Afro-styles as Afrostyles (House, Jizz, NewStyle, DanceHall, Pop). He is an artistic leader of the multidisciplinary dance group The Performers, created in 2017 and inspired by social events and daily life. Moreover, Arsène is a member of numerous cultural movements such as Patri'Art and FENASUR (Fédération Nationale des Arts et Sports Urbains) in Cameroon, whose aim is to promote and perpetuate the cultural and artistic values of Africa, Cameroon in particular, and to strengthen the dance industry in Cameroon through teaching, round tables and symposia, and collaborative activities across different ethnic groups and generations. Etaba regularly travels the world to participate in festivals and dance competitions. He is a sought-after animator of workshops and a tireless dance teacher. Beyond the will to exercise and propagate dance, Arsènes contagious energy is fuelled by his mission to denounce the ills of the world and to deconstruct arbitrary rules imposed on an individual by society through expression and the composition of movement. He holds a degree in pharmacy from the University of Douala.



## Credits (preliminary version, subject to change)

**Production:** Faso Danse Théâtre

**Concept & choreography:** Serge Aimé Coulibaly

**Created and performed by :** Jean Robert Koudogbo-Kiki, Ida Faho, Djibril Ouattara, Arsène Etaba, Odille Sankara, and others to be confirmed

**Music:** Brussels Jazz Orchestra

**Assistant choreographer:** Sigué Sayouba

**Dramaturgy:** Sara Vanderieck

**Light Technician**

Herman Coulibaly

**Technical director**

Thomas Verachtert

**Stage manager**

Dag Jennes

**Tour- and production manager**

Arnout André de la Porte

**Coordination and communication Faso Danse Theatre**

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