



Saturday | November 19 | 3pm
Roxbury Community College Media Arts Center

Celebrity Series of Boston presents a Neighborhood Arts performance

Balla Kouyaté, Mike Block & Friends: Bamako to Boston - West African and American collaborations

Balla Kouyaté balafon/vocals

Mike Block cello/vocals

Sekou Dembele djembe/vocals

Idrissa Kone talking drum/calabash/percussion/vocals

Luke Okerlund electric guitar

Mike Rivard bass/sintir

Program to include selections from the following:

Balla Kouyaté	Balla Folike
Mike Block	Iniche Cosebe
Trad./arr. Kouyaté	Soura Sy
Balla Kouyaté	Toumasera
Trad./arr. Kouyaté	Bani
Trad./arr. Kouyaté	Diraby
Trad.	Filen Kolon Balani
Ola Belle Reed/arr. Block	I've Endured
Trad./arr. Block	Billy in the Lowground
Trad./arr. Block	Koromanti #1
Balla Kouyaté	Gansan
Mike Block	Tune for Tunde
Balla Kouyaté	Yiri Dolen

Today's program will run approximately 60 minutes with no intermission.

2022/23 Neighborhood Arts Presenting Sponsor **Stephanie L. Brown Foundation**

2022/23 Season Sponsors **Amy & Joshua Boger**

Neighborhood Arts is sponsored by the Barr Foundation through its ArtsAmplified initiative, Boston Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture, Foley & Lardner LLP, Klarman Family Foundation, Liberty Mutual Foundation, Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Endowment for the Arts, Yawkey Foundation, U.S. Small Business Administration, and other generous supporters.

ABOUT THE COLLABORATION

Balla Kouyaté and Mike Block have been collaborating for more than a decade, bonding over their shared interest in music from across the world, and their commitment to innovating on their instruments. **Balla Kouyaté**, a balafon player and singer coming out of the Djeli tradition of Mali, was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship from the NEA. **Mike Block** is an American cellist / singer / composer, and a Grammy Award-winning musician with the Silkroad Ensemble originally trained in Western Classical music. They have teamed up with friends from America and West Africa to create an exciting fusion of musical styles, joined by **Sekou Dembele** (djembe / vocals), **Idrissa Kone** (talking drum / calabash / percussion / vocals), **Luke Okerlund** (electric guitar) and **Mike Rivard** (bass / sintir).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

To say that **Balla Kouyaté** was born into a musical family is an understatement. His family lineage goes back over 800 years to Balla Faséké, the first of an unbroken line of djelis in the Kouyaté clan. Djelis are the oral historians, musicians, and performers who keep alive and celebrate the history of the Mandé people of Mali, Guinea, and other West African countries. Balla explains that the word “Djeli” derives from his Mandinka language, “It means blood and speaks to the central role we play in our society.” One must be born into it. The Kouyaté family is regarded as the original praise-singers of the Malinké people, one of the ethnic groups found across much of West Africa. In 2001, the “Sosso bala” was declared a site of intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. This powerful symbol of Mande culture is brought out once a year for ceremonial playing. Balla also regularly plays with world renowned West African musicians who are touring in the US. He often accompanies kora master Mamadou Diabaté, and in 2004 joined NEA National Heritage Fellow Sidiki Cond Kouyaté for a monthlong residency at Carnegie Hall.

Mike Block is a pioneering cello player, singer, composer, and educator, hailed by Yo- Yo Ma as the “ideal musician of the 21st century.” Mike is member of Yo-Yo Ma’s *Silk Road Ensemble* (SRE), having joined in 2005 while a student at the Juilliard School. Touring extensively throughout the world with SRE, he has been featured as cello and vocal soloist, contributed arrangements and compositions, and earned a Grammy Award in 2017 for their album, *Sing Me Home*. As an innovator, Mike is among the first wave of cellists to adopt a strap in order to stand and move while playing. With *the Block Strap*, Mike was the first standing cellist to perform at Carnegie Hall. The New York Times characterized the performance as, “Breathless ... Half dance, half dare.” As an educator, Mike is passionate about creativity and collaboration, and is the founding director of *Silkroad’s* Global Musician Workshop, and the Mike Block String Camp.

Did you enjoy the
performance?
Let us know your thoughts
Scan for our survey

