



Common sound: Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita and Welsh harpist Catrin Finch

Beautifully rare connection

WORLD

Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita

Union Chapel, NI

★★★★★

Simon Broughton

CATRIN Finch, from Wales, plays concert harp and Seckou Keita from Senegal plays kora, the West African harp, which is a sublime combination of gourd, wood, cowskin and fishing line. They are closely connected in sound and metaphor.

The performance began with the description of a young osprey migrating from Wales to winter in Senegal following "the path of music and wings".

The sound of harp and kora are so close you have to watch carefully to see who is doing what. At first I feared that there may not be enough variety in the plucked strings, but Seckou also sings and they playfully exchange phrases in a piece called 1677, which

highlights a whole range of tone colours and coloristic effects. The creative dialogue of Wales and Senegal was maintained throughout, with Bach to Baisso starting with Catrin Finch playing Bach's Goldberg Variations and Seckou joining in on Bach and then transforming the music to Baisso, one of the oldest traditional kora songs in Senegal.

For a seductive summer song, Listen to the Grass Grow, they were joined by singer Gwyneth Glyn, who had sensitively opened the evening with a mainly Welsh language support set. And in a solo kora piece Seckou paid tribute to Senegalese bassist and composer Habib Faye who died last month. He himself performed at the Union Chapel with Youssou N'Dour some years ago.

After the upbeat major key finale, Hinna-Djulo, the audience leapt to their feet. It's rare you hear something so beautifully conceived and performed.

Catrin Finch and Sekou Keita review - life-affirming musical union

★★★★★

Union Chapel, London

From bluesy laments to strains of Bach, the Welsh harpist and Senegalese kora player brought songs to their touring rare album to life at a joyful set



Robin Denselow

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Catrin Finch and Sekou Keita from *History of FP*

Classically trained Welsh harpist Catrin Finch and Sekou Keita, the Senegalese exponent of the west African harp kora, first collaborated in 2013 on their widely acclaimed album *Clynnau Deyrn*. Its long-awaited follow-up, *Song*, was released last month. This concert was an emotional demonstration of how two virtuous musicians triumphantly bring different cultures together.

It began with a delightful and appropriate concept. Wales used to have a large osprey population, but by the 17th century the birds had been persecuted there to extinction. The ospreys have recently returned to the country, migrating from west Africa, and Clwrach celebrates the first Welsh-born osprey for hundreds of years. The track began with floating harp work punctuated by kora basslines, then developed into a soaring, gently rising improvisation celebrating freedom of movement.



The duo swapped improvised melody lines and rhythmic backing almost intuitively, in a set that showcased their new album. *Back to Saxso* started with a western classical theme – from Bach's Goldberg Variations – played on kora before easing into an elegant but lively Senegambian rumba, with Sekou providing laid-back vocals. Elsewhere, on 1677, they moved from a bluesy, atmospheric lament about slavery to a playful rhythmic workout, while on the charming *Láren* to the *Grass Grow* they were joined by Welsh singer Gwyneth Gyn, who had opened the show.

Finch is undergoing cancer treatment, and asked for donations for an NHS centre in Cardiff "that has saved many lives and is currently saving mine". Then she launched into *Hinna-Njola*, matching Sekou's now swinging, jarry kora improvisation with delight. It was classy, joyful and life-affirming set.

• At Crucible Studio theatre, Sheffield, on 15 May. Box office: 0114-281-6600. Then touring until 28 May.