

09 July 2012

AFRICA UTOPIA HAS ARRIVED!

Southbank Centre's month-long celebration of African culture launches under the spreading branches of a multi-coloured, 15 metre high baobab tree

Revered musician and Oxfam Global Ambassador **Baaba Maal** realised a 'decade-long dream' when Southbank Centre's **Africa Utopia** launched this week. Programmed in conjunction with the renowned Senegalese singer and human-rights campaigner, Africa Utopia is a month-long festival of music, theatre, film, literature, dance, fashion, talks and debates and part of Southbank Centre's *Festival of the World* with MasterCard.

Africa Utopia kicked off on Sunday July 1 with readings by the 2012 **Caine Prize** nominees - providing a brilliant snapshot of contemporary African fiction. Other events over the first few days saw poets **Lemn Sissay**, **TJ Dema** and **Pauline Black** take to the stage of the Queen Elizabeth Hall for a revelatory evening of poetry read aloud to the sublime rhythms of Baaba Maal and his band and a barnstorming show by the legendary blues musician **Taj Mahal**. With so much more to come – including a full concert by Maal and guests later in the festival - Africa Utopia taps into what many are beginning to call the 'African renaissance'.

Beyond headline concerts by internationally renowned artists **Angelique Kidjo**, **Baaba Maal**, **Oumou Sangaré**, **Muntu Valdo** and the just confirmed dance from rising star South African choreographer **Gregory Maqoma** and thrilling spoken word from **Inua Ellams**, Africa Utopia offers an exciting range of talks and debates. Expertly put together by The Guardian's Eritrean born **Hannah Pool**, the titles speak for themselves and range from **China Loves Africa**, on China's growing interest in and influence on the continent to **Quick, Hide – Madonna's Coming** on the controversial issue of adoption in Africa and **Nollywood or Bust**, a discussion about Nigeria's booming film industry. The talks, which look to shed an illuminating light on the reality of contemporary Africa, are **free** and take place in the Queen Elizabeth Hall Front Room throughout the day on Friday 20, Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 July.

Not only is Africa Utopia a celebration of the continent, but it constructively looks at the issues it faces. Later in the festival, **Senior Advisor to UNAIDS Executive Director, Dr Djibril Diallo** will be in conversation with Baaba Maal. Together they will be looking at the role of sport in AIDS advocacy and empowering young people in the response to AIDS.

Other luminaries helping us to think about Africa differently throughout the festival, include world-class writers **Noo-Saro-Wiwa** and **Nii Ayikwei Parkes**; Guardian journalist **Gary Younge** and author and journalist **Hannah Pool** (Guardian, Grazia, Arise Magazine); CNN's **Stephanie Busari**; blogger extraordinaire **Ms Afropolitan**; RIBA Fellow, **Elsie Owusu**; Rising stars in the world of fashion **Bestow Elan** and **Chichia London** plus many more.

Africa Utopia will provide many opportunities to party, including The Ultimate Afrobeats Utopia; a club night in the Royal Festival Hall's Clore Ballroom on Saturday 21 July, featuring the very best in Afrobeats with headline act; Ice Prince (named 2012 African Artist of the Year) alongside BBC Radio 1/1 Xtra's **DJ Edu**, award-winning **DJ Neptizzle** and Afro House specialist **Sef Kombo**.

Jude Kelly, Artistic Director at Southbank Centre, said: *"Africa's cultural contribution to the world is incalculable. Throughout July we hear the music of inspirational musicians, see the work of rising star choreographers and gain fresh perspectives on contemporary Africa through the writings of some of the continent's most talented writers and poets. And, guided and mentored by an illustrious gathering of 'elders', an invited group of young delegates explore the transformative potential of culture as an agent of social change through talks and debates."*

Baaba Maal, singer and human rights campaigner, said: *"Africa is all too often written off as an intractable 'problem' for the world to solve, I hope this festival will reveal just some of what Africa has to offer the rest of the world: The energy of our youth and their desire to engage with the world; The transformative potential of culture and, perhaps most potently, the power of community to bind people together."*

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Notes to Editors

**Southbank Centre's Festival of the World
1 June to 9 September 2012**

Southbank Centre's summer 2012 site-wide Festival of the World with MasterCard opens on 1 June 2012 for the Diamond Jubilee Weekend, and closes on 9 September 2012. As London welcomes the world this summer, Southbank Centre's Festival of the World will include inspirational projects from the UK and around the world, which showcase the power of the arts to change the lives of individuals, communities and whole societies. The site will be transformed with art installations including a giant 'robot' sculpture; a colossal baobab tree made from fabric; 'Rainbow Park', a multi-coloured beach; and an exhibition in the Royal Festival Hall of the thinkers, artists and communities who have inspired and contributed to the Festival. The reopening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall Roof Garden, weekly food markets, and a pop-up cafe complete the Festival landscape. www.southbankcentre.co.uk/world

Southbank Centre

Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, occupying a 21-acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 *Festival of Britain*. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and the Hayward Gallery as well as The Saison Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. www.southbankcentre.co.uk.

About MasterCard

MasterCard cardholders can enjoy exclusive experiences and privileged access to the very best the Festival of the World has to offer by visiting southbankcentre.co.uk/MasterCard.

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Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2011 and 2015, we will invest £1.4 billion of public money from government and an estimated £1 billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. www.artscouncil.org.uk.

About the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival

The London 2012 Cultural Olympiad is the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic Movements. Spread over four years, it is designed to give everyone in the UK a chance to be part of London 2012 and inspire creativity across all forms of culture, especially among young people. The culmination of the Cultural Olympiad will be the London 2012 Festival, a spectacular 12-week nationwide celebration bringing together leading artists from across the world with the very best from the UK, from Midsummer's Day on 21 June and running until the final day of the Paralympic Games on 9 September 2012. The London 2012 Festival will celebrate the huge range, quality and accessibility of the UK's world-class culture including dance, music, theatre, the visual arts, fashion, film and digital innovation, giving the opportunity for people across the UK to celebrate the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Principal funders of the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival are Arts Council England, Legacy Trust UK and the Olympic Lottery Distributor. BP and BT are Premier Partners of the Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Festival. For more details on the programme, to download the London 2012 Festival official guide, and to sign up for information visit www.london2012.com/festival.

Bresi-Ando consults

A global, boutique PR consultancy specialising in growing awareness, positioning and connecting brands with talent for a variety of clients in the luxury, arts, consumer tech, entertainment and music industries. One arm of Bresì-Ando consults' is to promote brands that have their roots in Africa or have an African focus. Past clients such as Helen Jennings (editor of Arise and author of New African Fashion), Mo Saïque Shoes, Joansu jewellery, Christie Brown, Villa Monticello, Ghana, have all benefitted from the insight, expertise and connections of the consultancy. www.bresi-ando.com.