



FESTIVAL AU DESERT

6-7-8 JANUARY

2011

PRESS RELEASE POST EDITION 2011

FESTIVAL IN THE DESERT ELEVENTH EDITION !

Commitment made, challenge won: the Festival au Desert 2011 was held as planned, despite the odds against it. Even better than before, exceeding all expectations, this edition was a total success. Some observers described it as a "celebration of joy and wonder for the greater good of peace and humanity." The event indeed took place in the Saharan desert ambiance, friendly and festive, a backdrop for the meetings and exchanges of cultures and civilizations. A beautiful parade of camels was held under the chairmanship of his Excellency Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali.

None of our guests were troubled, let alone threatened, for their safety thus refuting those predictions and assertions hypotheticating the cancellation of the Festival in the Desert, those statements and advisories

placing the event in a red zone, forbidden and beyond the pale.

It seems that Time and the Desert decided a different fate than some had presaged! Blessed is the protection of the Desert, of the Sahara!

The staging of this eleventh edition was secured and made possible by the evidence we had mentioned in our latest publications: the essential fact and effect of the Festival in the Desert is that it has become, in ten years, an essential event for the Saharan region, for Timbuktu, for culture and tourism in Mali and for a spirit of travel and adventure. The Festival in the Desert is a gathering without precedent, whose creed is peace and dialogue among cultures and civilizations. In addition, this openness allows worldwide access to a heritage, ancient and little known, a patrimony



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Timbuktu the 6, 7 and 8 January 2011



of Humanity, the cultures and civilizations of the Sahara, once in desert hermitage. The Festival in the Desert has emerged an essential actor, especially for the nomads of the region, so that as a result it enjoys a special protection, securing its occurrence and guaranteeing its existence. These foundations guarantee regional peace in the Sahara, and the stability of our world. These points allowed organizers to overcome pessimism, to believe despite the sometimes heavy challenges, the constant objections and the constant battles that this essential, always singular, and also gigantic and unique meeting was possible.

The resurgence and the globalization of violence occurring in our world is no more dangerous in Timbuktu, Baghdad, Yemen, Tehran, or Kabul, than it is in Athens, Paris, Rome, London, Mexico City or New York. Many factors demonstrate that this borderless reality goes against the spirit and principles of the Festival in the Desert, a reality which our festival denounces and against which we constantly struggle to put on an event whose creed is peace and the meeting of cultures! This reality was understood, measured, and overcome by the **more than 700 non-Africans**, mainly from Western Europe, North and South America, but also from Asia and Australia. They came to participate in this latest edition of the Festival in the Desert. We thank them for having confi-

dence in us and for having listened when their hearts told them to participate in this gathering of cultures, for being able to erase the ignorance and to set aside the fear of others and of differences for a hope in the future, in a tomorrow more secure for future generations. This message was reported by a **hundred journalists** accredited for edition 2011. They came from Germany, Taiwan, Colombia, Mexico, the United States of America, France, Luxembourg, England, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, South Africa, Mozambique, Liberia, Algeria, Mauritania, and Mali.

This eleventh edition of the Festival in the Desert was mobilized with a particularly onerous and expensive logistics burden and faced a budget deficit that we have nevertheless been able to overcome. But consequently, logistical conditions were sometimes not able to be up to our expectations and we regret any inconvenience that this may have had on our festival-goers. Despite this difficulty, omnipresent and potentially crippling to each edition, the overall picture of this edition is a success judging by the positive comments from our participants.

Timbuktu was swarming with a world so different, coming from five continents. This city was once forbidden to foreigners but that time is far, far in the past and gone! Nearby its exit road

to the north, the gateway for camel caravans, a campment was built that took the appearance and shape of nomadic camps in the region. The Saharans met here for three days, tents side by side, meeting and welcoming the rest of the world in their historic tradition of hospitality, legendary and renowned, and celebrating together a stunning and unforgettable communion which nobody wanted to end. The crowd is estimated at more than **10,000 people**.

Major prizes were awarded to the most beautiful camels and to race winners, co-hosted and in partnership with the organizing commission of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Malian Independence celebrations. The director of the Festival in the Desert expressed his gratitude to his Excellency Amadou Toumani Touré and his government for their invaluable assistance and support that made this edition of the festival possible.

The coming of the head of State is a gauge of the security on the site of the Festival in the Desert. In his statements to the press and the public, his Excellency Amadou Toumani Touré reminded them several times that insecurity exists everywhere, bans and warnings for foreign

travelers, notably westerners in the Saharan zone of Mali, are unjustified. The thrust of the words of the head of the Republic of Mali was that by seeking to ban the Festival in the Desert, a lever for local development, the hypothetical risks and threats which feed fear and inflate an unjustified sense of insecurity have more serious consequences on the local populations.

At sunset of the last night, the presence of the head of State was welcomed by all the artists with a giant "Jam Session", begun with singing the National Anthem of Mali. The singers then followed each other in an ambiance quasi "religious" and ceremonial, before the completely overcome public. This anthem echoes the identity and the purpose of the Festival in the Desert, advocating a united Mali, rich in its differences and open to the rest of the world.

Great names from the music of the world participated. Citing the international artists: Najma Akhtar (India/UK), Leni Stern (USA), Dinamitri and Marta Politi (Italy), Sanjosex (Barcelona), Etran Finatawa and Bombino (Niger), Wafash (Senegal). The Malian stage was represented by: Oumou Sangaré, Tartit, Habib Koité, Bassekou Kouyaté, Khaïra Arby, Vieux Farka Touré, Amanar, Amkoullel ... and many

more. These artists offered performances and compositions, sometimes collaborative and improvised, performances varied and multiethnic, in the image exactly of the audience for which the artists, drawing their inspiration from the desert, gave their best.

The enthusiastic spectators always demanded encores, even as the concerts continued late into the night. A pinnacle of emotion was attained. The desert chill created impromptu groups around the campfires on the dune that served as the grandstand onto the main stage. In front of the tents where everyone were housed, conversations continued late into the night, around the fires, sometimes until dawn or early morning, creating an warm and friendly ambiance.

On the 6th, 7th and 8th of January 2011, the mythical city of Timbuktu hosted the Festival in the Desert: an unprecedented meeting of cultures and civilizations! Timbuktu, where the Almoravid Kingdom, the most powerful of its time, reigned over part of West Africa, the Maghreb and Spain, meeting the empires of Ghana and Mali, links permitting the founding of the mysterious City, once forbidden, meeting giving birth to landscapes, social, ethnic and racial

present in the Sahara. Timbuktu, where the caravan trade flourished, where knowledge and learning had the meaning of High Culture. Tin Bouctou, the marketplace between North and South, destination, fascinating travelers and explorers, writers and the poets.

The Twelfth Edition of the Festival in the Desert will be held on the **12th, 13th and 14th of January 2012**. The spirits of Ibn Battuta and of Marco Polo will cross paths and travel together across the immense Sahara, then, beyond that, for a spiritual quest, for the spirit of adventure, for a total change and for a search of feeling and authenticity.



Bamako, the 25 January 2011

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Bamako

République du Mali