

Laye Sow, Momo's Kemia Bar, London, July 6 2004

“An addictive new find,” said BBC radio’s Charlie Gillett, “Laye is surely one of the best young Senegalese singers.” After witnessing him perform at Momo’s, I have to agree with him.

Sat in the corner of an underground bar with a distinctive North African feel, dressed in a long yellow cotton top was Laye Sow, the cousin of acclaimed Senegalese singer Baaba Maal. Sow is a Futa, from Podor in the Futa Toro region of northern Senegal. He is a Muslim mystic. The songs on his latest album *Djamano*, vividly recreate his love for Africa, using traditional storytelling. Sow confronts the rights and wrongs of African society and the weaknesses that create division. “People are people. It makes no difference what possessions they have.”

Sow performed with Richard Caswell and Steve Marshall on

guitars, Cheikh Seck performing percussion and additional guitar. The music is full of emotion – a crossbreed of African tunes, using various local languages, neatly crafted with blues guitars. Powerful tracks like ‘Mauritania’, reflecting the violence of fishing rights and farming disputes between Senegal and Mauritania, still hold a hopeful message of peace and reconciliation. Sow’s influence for his music comes from his own experiences of life in Senegal – a strong family, loss of companions, the hypocrisies and violence of human behaviour, and wondrous stories of his homeland.

Jason Parkinson

Senegalese star Laye Sow
(Philip Ryalls)

