

BIOGRAPHY

Derek began his formal musical training at the age of six on the violin. After studying classical music in Cape Town for the next thirteen years he began to look further afield for musical inspiration. This search took him to India where he studied South Indian Carnatic music. On his return home he began to focus on the guitar, trying to find a new direction for the instrument. He was attracted to the use of multiple layers in the music of Oliver Messiaen, the African-influenced structures of Steve Reich, as well as to guitar arrangements of the music of J.S.Bach, but it was when he met up with Cape Jazz trumpeter Alex van Heerden that he started to see that his previous studies could be used to find new directions for the music of South Africa.

After a host of groundbreaking albums which redefined the landscape of South African music, most notable being the visionary Sagtevei with Alex van Heerden, Derek began to incorporate the music of other composers in his performances. His long-time fascination with the music of Brazilian Egberto Gismonti led to a project to transcribe this musician's guitar music, a composer that Gripper describes as "the Heitor Villa Lobos of our time." The result is a constantly growing collection of Gismonti's scores and recordings, many of which have only been recorded by Gismonti himself. The Sound of Water, Derek Gripper's recording of the music of Egberto Gismonti was nominated for a South African Music Award (SAMA) for the best Classical and Instrumental album of 2012.

In 2009 Derek began studying the playing techniques of this instrument by learning traditional Malian compositions on the kora, and two years later had a breakthrough: by using the simple textural language of the Spanish renaissance lute (called vihuela), it was possible to play the highly complex kora compositions of the great Malian virtuoso Toumani Diabate on the six string guitar, without omitting a note of the original performances. Derek Gripper's project to create an African repertoire for the classical guitar, based on transcriptions of works by some of Africa's greatest musicians, resulted in a growing collection of outstanding African Guitar arrangements, with works by Toumani Diabaté, Ballaké Sissoko, Ali Farka Touré, Amadou Bansand Jobarteh, South African bow player Madosini and others, bringing the guitar and the music of African to life in new and exciting ways.

Derek Gripper released his ninth album, One Night on Earth: Music from the Strings of Mali, late in 2012. Recorded at an all-night session the album magically conjures anew a centuries-old ancient African musical heritage, interpreting kora compositions (21 string harp) on solo guitar, a feat which classical guitar legend John Williams said he thought was "absolutely impossible until I heard Derek Gripper do it." When Kora maestro Toumani Diabate heard these recordings he asked his producer Lucy Durán to confirm that she had actually seen one person play this music on just one guitar. He immediately invited Derek to collaborate with him in Mali, an invitation which saw Derek performing at the Acoustik Festival Bamako in early 2016, the first international festival held in Mali since 2012. The UK's top world music publication, Songlines, called One

Night on Earth "a staggering achievement," and selected the recording as a Top of the World album in 2013. Derek's "guitar has found the Kora-playing spirit, he captures the magic bound up in the way it is played", says Williams, who invited Derek back a second time to collaborate in "The John Williams Series" at London's Globe Theatre in June 2015 where the two musicians performed duets based on Diabate's kora works.

In 2014 Derek was commissioned by Botkyrka Konsthalle in Sweden to compose and record a sound installation for two exhibitions linking architecture and art: The Venice Architecture Biennale and Fittja Open, a new biannual in Stockholm. The installation has been released on CD as *Cassette Locale After Masanobu Fukuoka*.

Libraries on Fire, a new record of kora compositions has just been completed, exploring kora duets on solo guitar. The Kronos Quartet have also premiered one of Derek's arrangements for string quartet, continuing Derek's work to bring "African guitar into the classical mainstream." (Evening Standard).