

# SONA JOBARTEH REVIEW – KORA PLAYER WITH ALL THE MAKINGS OF AN INTERNATIONAL STAR

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This concert starts with a slinky riff from guitarist Derek Johnson, backed by bass, drums and percussion. Then on comes Sona Jobarteh carrying a kora, the west African harp that is traditionally played by male griots, or hereditary musicians, and never by women. This is the woman who decided to change the rules. She bravely starts with Jarabi, a classic griot piece popularised by the world's finest kora player, Toumani Diabaté, who is her second cousin. She stands as she plays, and after demonstrating her elegant and intricate kora work, she proves that she is also a fine singer, with a cool, laid-back style.

Jobarteh is unique. Her father is from a distinguished griot family but her mother is English, and she studied music and composition in London before returning to Africa to become the first female griot kora virtuoso. Inevitably, she has an eclectic style. Kaira, another griot favourite, starts as a kora solo but develops into a funky and improvised workout, with Sona now trading musical phrases with the inspired percussionist Mamadou Sarr, best-known for his work with Baaba Maal. On Gambia, a tribute to her homeland, she eases towards Afropop, while on the bluesy Gainaako she switches to guitar.

She has all the makings of an international star, but needs to tighten the set and talk a little less – although she has a fine sense of humour. And a new album would help – the last one was released five years ago.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/nov/17/sona-jobarteh-review-kora-rich-mix-london>