

The Filmmaker's Journey

“**M**any years ago, I first heard a kora, live. It felt like the top of my head blew off. I vowed to go to the source and learn to play it. I went to Guinea in early 2000 in search of a teacher.

I found a desperately poor country. The living was hard. I was hungry all the time. I lived in a hot airless room with a guy dying in the room next to me, and a few bedbugs (to put the situation mildly). I was ripped off. And I was never happier or healthier in my life.

Trained as a classical cellist, the professional quality of the dance and music teaching, especially by the elders, not only rivalled any I've encountered in New York or Paris, but the virtuosic skill and integration of the arts into daily life knocked my socks off. Yet it was as foreign as going to the moon.

After a series of mishaps, I found my teacher. Ba Cissoko was balm to the soul. I found peace under the mango trees at his home. He was then a young master kora player and a budding international performer. Since that time his group [Ba Cissoko](#) has grown into a major musical force around the world, especially in Europe. They endlessly tour the world receiving rave reviews as they go.

Through the patriarch M'Bady Kouyate, I learned about the utopian-seeking history of Guinea and of the family connection to the ancient heart of Mandingo music. I was embraced by them, and in turn took to heart a culture that is generous at its core. ”



[Ba Cissoko](#) and [Mardi Kendall](#)

[Mardi Kendall](#), former director of the [Sydney Yoga Centre](#), first visited Guinea in 2000 to study the kora, the sacred 21-string harp, and found an exceptional teacher in Ba Cissoko, and was subsequently embraced by the Cossoko and Kyoute families. Captivated by Guinea's rich culture and artistic virtuosity, Mardi began filming her experiences, capturing the beauty and pain of daily life in this vibrant, but profoundly poor nation. Using this footage she has completed a short film—a launchpad to the more



comprehensive documentary featuring the people and music of Guinea. This film will tell the story of Guinea through the eyes of Ba's extended family who has played the kora in an unbroken line since the 13th century. We plan to use this film as an ongoing funding source for the [Ba Cissoko Foundation](#) and to inspire global interest in this little-known country.

“I have lived with Ba's family in Guinea happily off and on for four years, and will continue to do so until I move there permanently. Their story is important!”

Mardi Kendall

Filmmakers Bios

Members of the core film team, include:

George Trad

Documentary filmmaker,
multimedia developer and
technology educator

Winner of the **Australian
Video Festival Award**

Documentary projects as producer, editor and/or camera include: *Eternal Lebanon* – 1994, produced for SBS, examining the ancient and modern history of Lebanon; *Greece 98 – World Basketball Championships* – 1998: insight into Australia's World Championship basketball campaign by the Boomers, produced for Fox Sports; *Gold Cup 98 – World Wheelchair Basketball Championships* – 1998, produced for Basketball Australia; *Night Racing – The History of Trotting in Australia* – 2000, produced for Fox Sports.

As an educator with over 20 years experience, George has been at the forefront of educational technology and instructional design. Under the *Sydney Kings*, he produced sponsorship proposals, introduced reporting procedures and marketed the game of basketball at a national level, as well as developed software for the National League to implement in the *Player Development Programme*.

As managing director of his own multimedia and internet production company for the last 10 years George has worked on large scale CD and DVD authoring projects, internet hosting, website design and TV documentary and electronic news gathering, mainly for sports clients. Major multimedia productions include "Foxtel Digital" Launch DVD, Rugby "True Colours Tour" Interactive Roadshow, Coca Cola "Wallabies CD Player Card" Promotion, Kelloggs NutriGrain "Make Your Own Music" CD, and Coca Cola "Dragonball Z CD Picture Card" promotion.

Tom Cowan

Distinguished director
and cinematographer

Tom Cowan (Thomas Michael Cowan) has an illustrious film career as a director and as a cinematographer. While a trainee at ABC-TV, he directed *The Dancing Class*, which won AFI's Best Film of the Year and First Prize at the Commonwealth Awards in Edinburgh. Tom was part of the '*Larrikins in London*' in the '70s. , he was Director of Photography on Philippe Mora's wacky musical feature film *Trouble In Molopolis* with Germaine Greer, Robert Stigwood, Martin Sharp, Arthur Boyd, John Weiley, Richard Neville and many others. Tom included Germaine in his own London documentary *Australia Felix* about ex-patriots' rosy view from afar of their homeland.

Tom Cowan wrote, co-produced and directed four feature films. His *Journey Among Women* won the AFI's Most Creative Feature Film Award in 1977. It was commercially highly successful as well as being a personal statement – running for 16 weeks in Sydney's George Street and selling in 17 countries. Other feature films as director are *The Office Picnic*, *Promised Woman* and *Sweet Dreamers*. Tom was also the support system to other directors in the '80s. For John Duigan he photographed four features including the seminal *Mouth To Mouth* and *Winter of our Dreams* with Judy Davis and Bryan Brown.

Scott Ferguson

*24 years in Film and
Television*

Technically trained in television operations at the ABC in Sydney in the early 80's, Scott moved into directing live television in London in the early 90's before returning to Australia to write produce and direct corporate videos, short films and documentaries. With his strong background in post-production he created **Garden st Studios** with Gary Davis and established the one stop shop for client direct advertising. In 1997 together with Director Anthony Rose the onetrickpony filmco became one of leading production companies of music videos in Australia. In 2004 Scott directed the epic coverage of the 50th Anniversary of the Rock Esiteddfod Challenge and then in 2006 adapted Matthew Hall's best selling book: *The Away game: the inside story on Australia soccer superstars*, into a ratings hit documentary for SBS TV during the FIFA world Cup 06. His television credits as an editor are extensive including a feature film in 1998 *A Change of Heart*, the award winning documentary series *Champions of the World* and reality drama and entertainment too many to mention.

Scott has taught for 10 years at the Eastern Suburbs Regional Evening College in film production and for 8 years in Television Commercial production in the Advertising faculty of the **Macley College**. Scott produced and co-facilitated the inaugural *Below Ground* film workshop in 2004.

Max Hensser

*Award-winning Sound
recordist*

Max Hensser is a freelance sound recordist with 20 years experience in both film and video media. Max trained with **Bettersound** in London. He has worked all over the world on 16 and 35mm and video in all formats. Max has a long list of credits which include documentaries for cinema and television, feature films, TV series, educational programs, commercial advertising, and corporate PR. For example, from 2001 – 2004, Max worked on *IMAX: The African Elephant* for Discovery Pictures, *Monsters We Met* for BBC, *Guns, Germs and Steel* for National Geographic, *Evelyn and Layla*, *The Making of Star Wars*, and many others. Max won an AFI Award for *Birdmen of Killimanjaro*.