

Interview with Seckou Keita

In this interview we asked Seckou about life on the road and the aspects of home that are most important to him.

Interviewer: Where is home for you?

Seckou: *I have two homes, Senegal and the UK. Well, for me, there is home, as home- Senegal, which is landscape, the sea, the sun and all of that, the smell of the food, the atmosphere, but in the UK, it's a similar thing - atmosphere, neighbourhood, community, because I live in a street where it's so mixed, and that visual always stays in my head as home. It's not a community for just Senegalese or Gambians, it's all mixed together, Scottish, Irish, Senegalese, Gambian, Indian. So both these places make the balance.*

Interviewer: What's it like when you are touring and away from home?

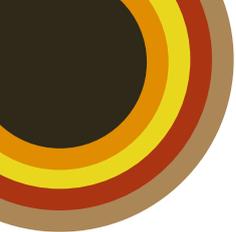
Seckou: *Well, touring from home is basically different, because then I'm leaving my community behind. It's either UK or Senegal, I'll be leaving the style of the landscape behind and going elsewhere. I feel or think positively, as I'm going to meet new people, other people, different community, probably different look of a landscape, you know the style is different. So that's what I always look forward to, because it's like going to a new thing. And it's also exciting to go and meet those things, people, atmosphere a new thing. It's always exciting.*

Interviewer: What do people do that make you feel at home, when you are travelling?

Seckou: *What people do for me to feel at home when I go to places is always things that are very small. Little things but they mean a lot, and there's lots of similarities. Welcoming, that's the one thing, a smile makes me feel welcome, that's another thing. Some food that really reminds me of home. Some kind of atmosphere when we're just chatting. And then, you know when we are sharing, it's another thing that is very important. In fact, sharing, even if it is just like a chat, food, anything, little things that always matter. Because in this world, we have a lot of similarities, many similarities. Yeah, we have lots of differences as well, but similarities are there, and those are very little and different. Sometimes you don't even think about it. They just come out, you just say 'aah this is how my grandmother used to do it' or this is just like my granddad. Or, this is like my friends, that's how or that's what they say, the smile and stuff like that. So, that sharing is very important, that's always there.*

Interviewer: Is there anything that you take with you when you're traveling to help you feel connected to home?

Seckou: *Well, first of all, my instrument. That always takes me, it's like, partly my home. If I have my instrument, I feel like I have a part of my house, or my neighborhood, with me. That's definite, I got that one. The second thing, sometimes I have little things that are not really relevant, but you can find them in places as well, which keep me in touch food wise - some spices, I have to be honest, play a part. But even clothes that I wear, they're really like, part of my identity and just remind me, when I was in childhood or even in the community, so I carry those things with me. And yeah, well being, which is really important, you know, I carry that as well. Apart from clothes that I wear, things that I'll take, is my prayer mat, for example, which is my faith, and I just take that to places and what is amazing in this world, is how open places are, to be able to share and to follow your faith, These are very important.*



Interview with Seckou Keita

Interviewer: Do you ask for anything on your rider so you can feel at home whilst you are away?

Seckou: *Yeah, I do ask for stuff on my rider when I go on tour. Food is always important. Of course, where I come from rice plays a big part. Certain spices that I always like to have for my drink, ginger and remedies that are really interesting, that I like. I'm not very into spice, but I like a tiny bit of tasty spice. I like to ask for those things up front and some really important things that help with health and well-being - things that I drink and eat and things that I can't drink and eat so not to provide that for me, that's also, very important, because then they are away from me because I don't need them. Things like gluten free or dairy free. I have to be careful because of my technique and vocals and all of that. It's all part of it. But you know most of what I need in those places is usually little things, I'm not that complicated!*

Interviewer: Does it make a difference when people make an effort to welcome you?

Seckou: *It does. Well sometimes people go beyond to really make me feel at home, to meet me with things that I need, which is really amazing. It does add extra to my performance, to be honest. It does add to the atmosphere. It does add to my beaming smile as well, because I have found something that I wasn't expecting to have in those places. And then home related things could be food. It could be things that I need before the show. You know, after the show, the atmosphere, chat, whatever it is, and it's just being open. Those things will always add to the performance, definitely.*

Interviewer: What about the stage? Is that home?

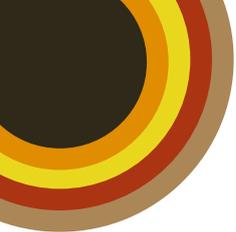
Seckou: *Well, one home that I always carry with me, that always will be with me, is the stage. First, I've mentioned about the kora it's one of the tools that I take with me, just like taking part of my bedroom. That's my instrument. And then, of course, the stage is part of my home, because that's where I feel like I belong. That's my workspace. It's either in Senegal, in the UK or anywhere around the world. If I have the stage then I know I have a slice of the cake of home. If home was a cake, it's like a slice of it. So that's important, because then at that moment, I feel like I am partly at home, because I feel very comfortable with it, and I really feel at peace when I'm on stage.*

Interviewer: If the stage is one slice of the cake, Nottingham is another and Senegal another, are there any more slices of the cake that represent home?

Seckou: *There is more than three slices. It depends, because there's the landscape, you know, that's something else, there's similarities. Other things I like, are the welcoming people when you meet them. Open-minded people. That's another slice of the cake, so a little slice of the cake. Again, I did mention food, the atmosphere is wide and very positive. Any positive vibes is another big part of the cake, so that's important.*

Interviewer: What about hotel rooms and airplanes?

Seckou: *That's very hard to connect, but they're like travel tools and usually hotels are like a passage. It's almost like going through the tunnel. In and out. So, some hotels, it depends how they are, or Airbnb you might call it, it depends how they are set but they might give you a glimpse of home, but not as home, home, because you know that spiritually other people have passed in and out of those places. But again, as I said, the atmosphere is very important, and if I have my kora next to me, I feel like part of my bedroom is with me.*



Interview with Seckou Keita

Interviewer: What triggers feelings of home for you when you are away?

Seckou: *Well, what triggers feelings of home for me, there are a few things. Just to name a few: the smell of the food that's a trigger; the community, the people that I meet wherever I am in the world, that is a trigger; open minded people, just sometimes, some conversation, a few people that understand each other, between me and them, or whoever is around, that is also trigger. And the response I get from the first ever song I play on stage, that also triggers home. Because that for me, is an important thing - the first five minutes I walk on stage, the first two to three minutes - the response, the nods, the smile, or the look, or the body language, even a clap at the very end of the show that also triggers that feeling like I'm welcome here. And of course, the natural sounds of my surroundings, trigger home - a bird, the sun, the sea, the sound of the water will always trigger that as well.*

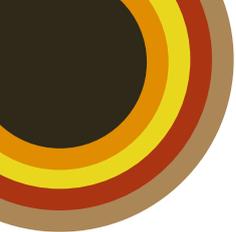
The language adds a big part, because you are comfortable with it. You know already, it's two homes. If I go to a place that doesn't speak these languages or has their own language, and then I hear English, I feel like I'm going to be at home, that's one thing, and French it's like even home again. Wolof, yeah, here we are, but Mandinka, then that goes deep, because that's my mother's tongue. Jolla, you just take me to the south of Senegal, where I come from. So those languages, I hear them as I go, I feel like more and more and more and more at home, it will trigger more parts, because that's I where I come from, you know, or where I belong, as they call it.

Interviewer: What's the best thing about being on the road?

Seckou: *Well, first of all, is the mission to deliver the gift that I have to share. The talent that's not me, it's a gift, that's my belief, my faith, this is what I've been given to share with this world. That is one thing. The other thing is knowing that you're carrying a joy with you that you want to share again with other people, and you are going to be sharing music or works that feels like first of all you are healing yourself every day, but you are sharing that healing with other people that might need it in the room. Some people might just want to smile, some people just might want to just sit and cry. Some people might just want to stop and dance and forget about whatever is around them. Some people might even want to meditate. So going on that mission. It feels like, right, I'm sharing something, that I'll become a channel when things come up, go in, pass on, and then I share that joy. As people receive I also receive it back, because the energy is usually 90% or more than 90% positive in those rooms from my experience of 30 years of musical career, 25 years of album release, that can guarantee that I always have a 90 or more than 95% of positive vibes or energy even on stage, wherever I go.*

Interviewer: What's the hardest thing about being on the road?

Seckou: *The hardest thing on the road is the travelling, the waiting, the patience, the unknown when you just don't know what what's going to happen, when you don't know what's going to happen next, that's the hardest part. And sometimes the lack of sleep, and knowing, that you are going to have to perform. Sometimes, when you get your instrument that as I said, is part of my home that I carry with me, and I arrive, but it doesn't arrive with me. I'm waiting for it. That's really, really hard and sometimes very, very scary, because you feel like you're so apart. That's why you are there. You are just on your own and you are just, like nobody, because the instrument is part of it. That's the really hard part. And, yeah, sometimes, you know, you get an atmosphere in the area of the places where you are and you have to be able to be really open-minded. That always has to be part of it, ready to receive whatever comes in. It might be good or bad. You know, that's sometimes the hardest*



Interview with Seckou Keita

part of it. But one thing that triggers those hard parts is the joy knowing that what you are going to deliver is important for the world and you are participating in other people's life as you go.

Interviewer: If home was an invisible backpack, what is in yours?

Seckou: *Well, what I take with me wherever I go in this like invisible bubble, with whatever band is with me is, first of all, the imagination of the landscape, the atmosphere, the community, the natural sounds around me, as I mentioned earlier, the sea, the sun, the moon, is everywhere. That's very important. The food, you know, imagination, and of course, the people I meet and talk to. Different colours that you meet. If you imagine that in my bag I might have a Senegalese, an Indian guy, British person, or French, whatever it is. When you get to those places, it's like, this is what is going to be in my bag. And those spices and food as well, if possible, but natural sounds is the bigger part.*

Interviewer: Are there other cultural aspects that you kind of carry with you wherever you go?

Seckou: *Well, first of all is the respect, the communication between people, cultures and language are also very touching. You know, working on the street of New York, for example, or Edinburgh or Paris, you heard English and so, oh that reminds me of my second home, or I hear French and I say, Oh, my own home even better. Here is Wolof. Then I feel like I'm in the middle of Dakar, or sounds coming out and my mother's tongue, which is Mandinka. Then you are really deep that make me close and Jola language, which is also a language that I grew up with in Senegal, that's also another important part of the journey. And hearing those things, for me really reminds me a lot of home.*

Interviewer: Do you carry a positive outlook on life?

Seckou: *Positivity? I do, and I always look for it, because that is very important. Because wherever you go, if you receive positivity, and I feel like I'm carrying it as well, that for me, is the main thing. It's, the main thing. No matter what else I have said, you know, if things are positive, then that's it. I look at the person and it's a positive look, I talk to a person and it's a positive talk. I share food with people, it's a positive sharing, you know, the stage, the music, whatever I'm doing on the road, even travelling sometime in the flight or whatever, and the positive thought, These are elements that have to always exist in among the many things that I've said, but this, that's the key point. Positivity is the key point. The faith is another thing. And of course, the rest that I've said, it's all part of it.*