

### **301 Kora**

Sona Jobarteh is the first woman of her family, the Mandinka tribe, and her country to be recognized as a griot, or storyteller. She is highly respected as a trail-blazing genealogist, historian, and mediator across Gambia, West Africa, and the globe, honored for her wisdom, her guidance, her music and her poetry. Her pioneering path encourages other girls and women to sing in their own language, play their own music and tell their own stories.

Kora is named for the instrument she holds. Sometimes called the African lute or harp, it is constructed from half a hollow gourd covered tightly by animal skin. A wooden neck supports twenty-one strings; the musician plucks with her thumbs and forefingers while she sings the stories of her people.

Since the 13th century, West African culture has prohibited women from playing music or sharing their tribal and personal histories. Called the first female kora virtuoso, Jobarteh broke this gender barrier, opening the door for other female musicians. She presents a novel woman's perspective through her music and words, and teaches a new generation, that includes her own daughter, how to preserve their family and cultural traditions. Her passion is educational reform in Gambia, with an emphasis on gender equity.

Kora's music and poetry, and her courage to challenge traditional gender boundaries, will continue to inspire others to spread the unique stories of women throughout the world.