



**MOTUS**  
Marionnettes & Théâtre

**THEATRE MOTUS  
PRESENTS**



**STUDY GUIDE**

## Foreword

Use the following play summary and word **boxes** to explore the world of Baobab along with the children.

This document and its annexes provide information, illustrations and suggestions for discussions and activities you can carry out with the children.



Bon voyage to Amondo's land!

## Summary of the play

Baobab is a puppet and shadow theatre production that tells the story of a little boy whose name is **Amondo**.

Under the **blazing** sun stands a giant thousand-year old **baobab**. In this **West African** area, a drought has been going on for very long.

One day from the baobab an **egg** emerges. And from this egg a little boy is born. The people in the village discover that this boy is the only one able to release the water.

And so begins a great quest in which the courage of a child might change the history of the world. In a sun-drenched world where shadows are a welcome break, African percussions turn into **animals** while **masks** and **puppets** become genies or witches! Let the great **griot** guide you into this mythical story inspired by African tales.

## Quick search for suggested activities and discussions:



If you have only little time



To find activities quickly



To find questions and topics for discussions quickly

## List of **ANNEXES**:

1. Shadow puppet models
2. The key musical instruments in the production
3. Some theatre crafts
4. A few Web references

## But who created this play?

### Theatre Motus

Where does the word Motus come from? From the Latin to move.

Founded by H  l  ne Ducharme and Sylvain Mass  , Theatre Motus combines the talents of a new generation of creative artists with artists who have already made their mark in Quebec's theatre community. By exploring colored shadow plays, acting techniques and puppeteering, Theatre Motus has developed its own artistic style. The company is one of the 21st century generation of children's theatre companies and its artists believe it is essential to carry on the older companies' approach and build on the quality and the originality of today's children's theatre.

In connection with its research and production work, the company is always looking to interact with young audiences. Through post-performance meetings, shadow-puppet workshops and joint projects in development, every effort is made to encourage interaction with young audiences.

### Baobab's team

Written and directed by **H  l  ne Ducharme**

Playwright collaborator: **Hamadoun Kassogu  **

Assistant to the Director: **Annie B  langer**

Scenography : The late **Ism  ila Manga** and **H  l  ne Ducharme**

Puppets and mechanisms: **Jean Cummings**, **Sylvain Racine** and **Claude Rodrigue**

Music: **Aboulaye Kon  ** assisted by **Nathalie Cora**

Shadow theatre: **Marcelle Hudon**

Costumes: **Louis Hudon**

Lights: **Michel St-Amand**

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***And now let's get to the heart of the matter***



**Prior to the performance**

**Griots**



*A griot in formal dress (Senegal)*

In this production, there are characters that are called griots. There is a chief griot, who incidentally is the first to speak to the audience:

***“Aw ni sogoma!*** We are the village griots and to tell our tale, we need your ears. Will you lend us your ears?”

Griots who are storytellers are also looked upon as poets, traveling musicians and the guardians of the oral tradition.

A man named Balla Fasséké, believed to be the first griot, began the line of Kouyaté griots that are still active to this day.

Since the beginning of time, adults have been telling stories to children and sometimes to adults. They do not always know how to read, but they all remember the stories that others had told them and so on from one to the next. This collection of stories is part of what is known as the oral tradition.

As a result, griots, like other storytellers in other cultures of oral tradition, are very important because for a very long time there weren't any books to keep an account of the very old and beautiful stories they tell.



**A small discussion on stories:**

- Aside from the theatre performers, who tells you stories?
- Are those stories taken from books or made up by the individual telling the story?
- What is the first story you were told and still remember?
- What is your favourite story?
- Are stories only told with words or can you tell them using gestures, sounds, drawings and puppets?



### Following the performance:



#### Questions about Amondo:

- What do children think of him?
- What are his qualities?
- Why is he called The-One-Who-Unites?
- What emotions does he experience?
- Where does he draw his courage?



#### Discussion topics:

**Self esteem:** in the show, when Amondo is taken aback by the great task he must face, that of going down to the heart of the baobab, he is asked if he has forgotten who he is, the son of the entire village, which reminds him that he, is not alone.

This is a great opportunity to discuss children's own inner resources, qualities, the meaning of perseverance, of resourcefulness and the importance of hope. You can use the example of Amondo and that of other people to reinforce self confidence, the idea that each individual is able to meet his or her own challenges.

**Cleverness and cunning:** how does Amondo manage to draw the witch in? You could mention his cleverness, cunning and perseverance. This part is also reminiscent of a very famous tale: the fox and the crow.

- You can use the opportunity to compare the cunning of Amondo to that of the fox, that of the witch to the crow's and why not the witch's hump to the cheese...
- You could also ask what kind of tree the crow in the story tale is perched on, if it could be a baobab and why.
- You could also use this tale to explain to the older kids what sets a tale apart from a legend:

A tale is a short narrative written in verse designed to be educational while a legend is a fictional narrative more often based on an oral tradition with a fantastic element.



#### Activity suggested on the qualities:

Gather in a circle and name your classmates in turn by replacing their first name with a quality associated with them, including that of being one who unites.

## His majesty the Baobab



Aside from being at the very heart of the story in the show and being the central part of the set, the baobab inspired many legends.

The African baobab is the most famous of the eight species of baobabs. It is a sacred African tree for many cultures and also serves as a meeting place. Cutting it is looked upon very badly or considered a sacrilege by people. It is the typical tree of dry tropical Africa and the emblem of Senegal in West Africa.

In Africa, the baobab is the traditional meeting place. Protected by its shade, young and old meet to discuss various topics, such as the life of the village, politics etc.

The baobab produces a fruit that is mentioned in the show. Its name is monkey bread:



The fruits of the baobab are edible. Humans and monkeys alike are fond of their slightly acid taste (which is why it is called “monkey bread”). It is very rich in vitamin B1 and C and has twice as much calcium as milk. It is used to make a very popular drink called bouy. When roasted, the seeds can replace coffee. The pulp of the fresh or dried fruits is used to make drinks.



**An activity based on the baobab:**

### **Become a baobab:**

On an appropriate piece of music, take time to imagine the heat of the African sun and slowly turn into a baobab. Imagine its curious branches, its curious fruits and imagine a monkey living in this tree... The same activity may be done with other trees, such as a fir tree, in the forest or in your house for Christmas.

## **West Africa**

### **Or when history meets geography:**

The story of Baobab takes place in West Africa. Incidentally, two of the creative artists who helped create the production, Hamadoun Kassogu  and Isma la Manga, were born in two West African countries, Mali and Senegal.

#### **Mali**



**Capital:** Bamako

**Size:** 1,240,000 square kilometres

**Population:** 13.5 million Malians

**Official language:** French

**Vernacular languages:** some thirty, including **bambara**, the language used in the production.

**Climate:** There three seasons in Mali:

A dry season that varies from North to South and lasts from March to June, a humid season from June to September and an inter season when temperatures are cooler, from October to February.

Mali is a former colony that gained its independence in 1960.

#### **Senegal**



**Capital:** Dakar

**Size:** 637,657 square kilometres

**Population:** 12.5 million Senegalese

**Official language:** French

**Vernacular languages:** approximately 35 local languages, including Wolof (35%)

Also a former colony, Senegal gained its independence in 1960.



#### **Suggested activities:**



- Positioning Africa, Mali, Senegal and our own country on a world map or a terrestrial globe.
- Drawing and cutting up small characters with all skin colours and then placing them on the world map, whether here or in Africa.
- Having the small characters dancing in a chain and moving from one continent to the next on the map.

### **Egg or ... baobab?**


The young hero Amondo is born from an egg that fell from the baobab. Everyone knows that trees do not lay eggs (even though some fruits have a similar shape) and human children are not born from an egg (well not exactly...) either.




#### **Thought-provoking questions:**

- What animals are born in an egg? (birds, reptiles, fish, insects)
- How are baby trees born? (fruits, seeds etc.)
- What about mammals and humans?

You could use this last more sensitive question to bring up the little legends that the children's great grand-parents may have heard when they were little:

- The stork,  which would go from door to door to bring newborns.

- The cabbage leaf,  in which you would find newborns (which is where Cabbage Patch dolls offered for adoption got their name).



#### **Suggested discussion topic: adoption**

Amondo's story helps audiences discover that aside from being born from an egg, Amondo is unique in that his parents are an entire village. When he was born, he is adopted by everyone in the village, humans and animals.

There may not be an adopted child in your group, but there is a strong possibility that the children know one or have heard of one. There are also adoptions among animals, even though they do not happen like Amondo's.



### **Musical instruments in the performance**

During the performance, the instruments played by the musicians are mainly the kora, the balophone and the djembe, but also the dum dums, the talking drum and the shekere. These are all African instruments.



**The kora**

**The balophone**



**The djembe**

**The dum dums**



**The tama**

**The shekere**

See also additional information in **ANNEX 2**



### **Suggested activity:**

#### **Making an African tam-tam with a plastic bottle**



#### What you need to make a tam-tam:

- One empty plastic bottle
- An old newspaper
- Liquid white glue or wallpaper glue
- Scissors
- Paint
- A paintbrush
- One hairspray can (or any other varnish of your choice)
- A pair of wooden sticks

#### Directions:

- Cut out a rectangular opening in the middle of the plastic bottle
- Cut strips of paper in an old newspaper
- Cover the bottle by sticking strips of paper one over the other (papier-mâché technique). Do not cover the opening
- Paint the drum with African designs
- Apply hairspray or varnish on the tam-tam to protect the paint

You can now play an African tam-tam with the sticks or simply use your hands!

### **The animals in the production**

As soon as the story begins, you will be introduced to five animals drawn to the egg that fell from the baobab and that will give life to Amondo: the spider, the crane, the caiman, the tortoise and the snake. Audiences will then discover a mischievous monkey, keeper of the baobab, and also a very special being, which in fact can be man or bird, the Marabou.



### **Suggested activities:**



- You can draw or do research on all the animals in the production.
- For instance, you can find out which animals eat eggs, which lay them and also what species of monkeys live in Africa.



Attention: one of the animals in the production, the caiman, is apparently an intruder in this group because unlike the others, it is not found in Africa, except in myths.

In fact, caimans are all native of Central and South America. However, Mali has a mythical caiman.



As for our cheeky monkey, a mandrill, while it is not an intruder in Africa, it mainly inhabits Cameroon and Gabon.

The other animals:



The spider: this spider is not typically African, but it may be nicer and less frightening. Interestingly, spiders do not scare African children at all. However, they fear lizards, African geckos.



A black-headed crane: this striking West African lady has a unique hairstyle.



An African snake: this snake gives you a clue by showing you what it eats...



An African tortoise: and here's another one giving you a clue on where it comes from...



And, lastly, our famous marabou...

Marabous are very tall tropical wading birds. There are three species: two in Southern Asia and the third in sub-Saharan Africa.

These birds are very large, between 100 and 150 cm with a wingspan (wings open) that reaches between 210 to 250 cm. Their head and neck are bare like vultures. Their bill is very long and massive. Young birds have down and are browner.

### **Masks**

Masks are very important in the rituals and ceremonies of many cultures, including the African and Amerindian cultures. Masks have been used for a very long time in the theatre to help tell stories.

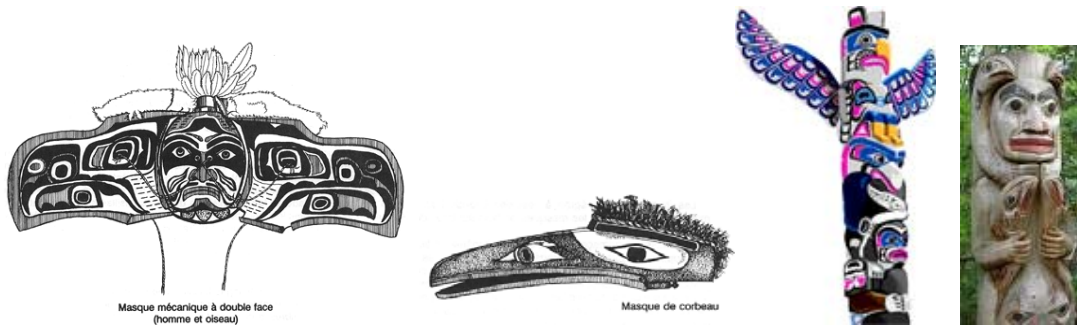
There is one region in Amondo's territory called the Land of the Dogons. It is famous for its story-telling masks, including the magnificent house masks and the kanaga masks:



### **Suggested activity**

Look at illustrations of Amerindian masks and totems and ask the children to compare them (for instance as to shape and what they appear to mean) to the masks of the Land of the Dogons or other African masks.

Examples of Amerindian masks and totems:



## Puppets

And when they turn into shadows...

The artists in the **Baobab** production use many kinds of puppets: characters (like Amondo), musical instruments and other objects that they transform into characters (like the kora that becomes the crane), puppet garments (like the monkey) and also what are called shadow puppets.



**Suggested activities:**

### Creating a shadow puppet show

It's simple! All you have to do is to hang an old light coloured sheet and light it with a desk lamp with a halogen type or regular bulb. Now all you need to do is to move an object, your hands or your whole body between the lamp and the screen for your audience to see shadow theatre!

### Required material for a shadow puppet show:


- A model cut-out character (see models suggested in **ANNEX1**)
- Various coloured gels
- Scissors
- A wood dowel or a Chinese stick
- Scotch tape

### Directions:

- Cut out the character
- With the coloured gels, make clothes or props for the character
- Stick them on the body
- Fasten the pin or the stick in back of the puppet

You now have a shadow puppet that is both black and coloured.



or  **Research or discussion topics:**

- How long have humans been doing theatre?
- What types of theatre are there? (tragedy, comedy, musical etc.)

See our non comprehensive list of theatre crafts in **ANNEX 3**



For complementary research on topics this document examines, see our Web references in **ANNEX 4**

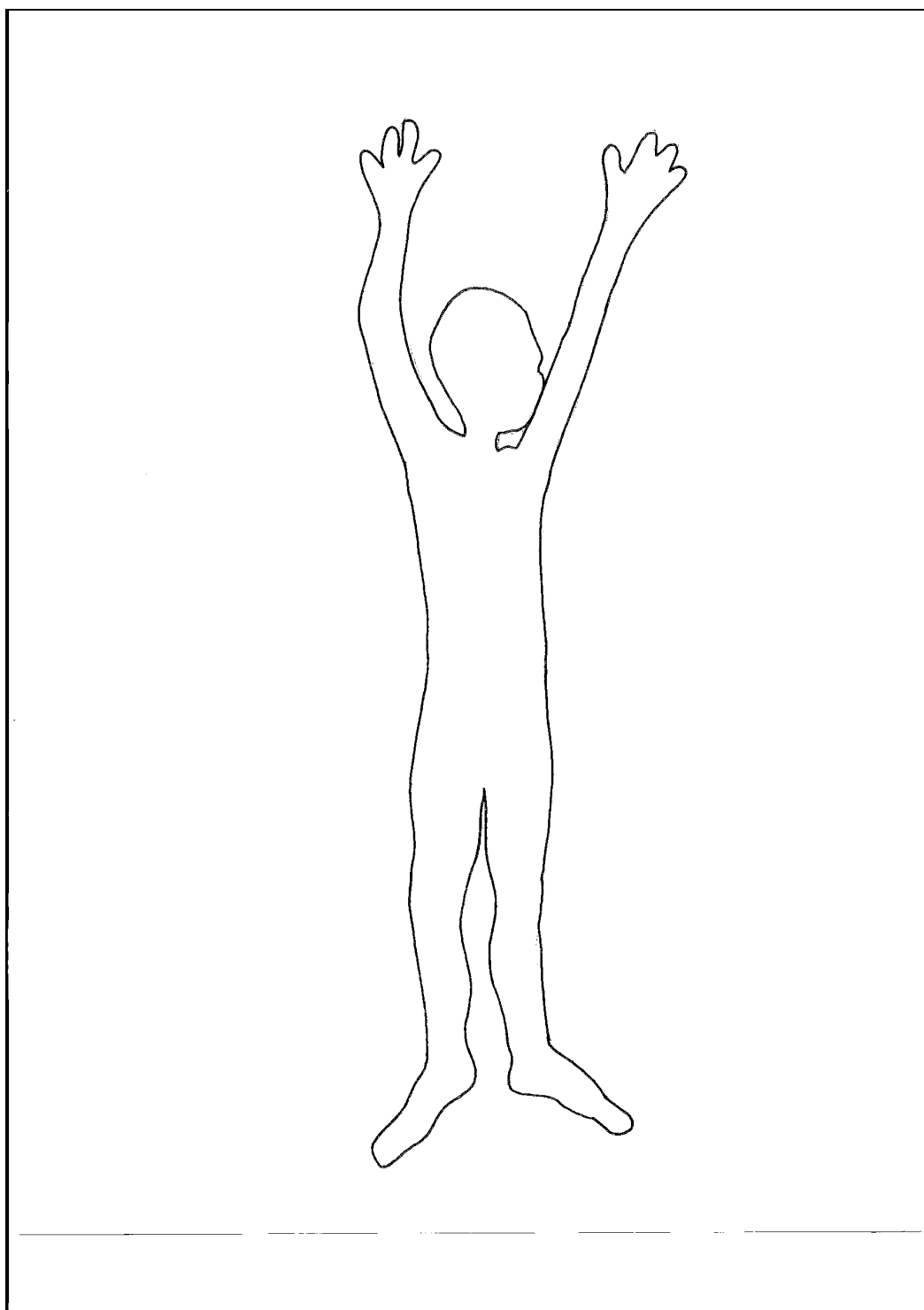
To find out more about Baobab and Theatre Motus: [www.theatremotus.com](http://www.theatremotus.com)

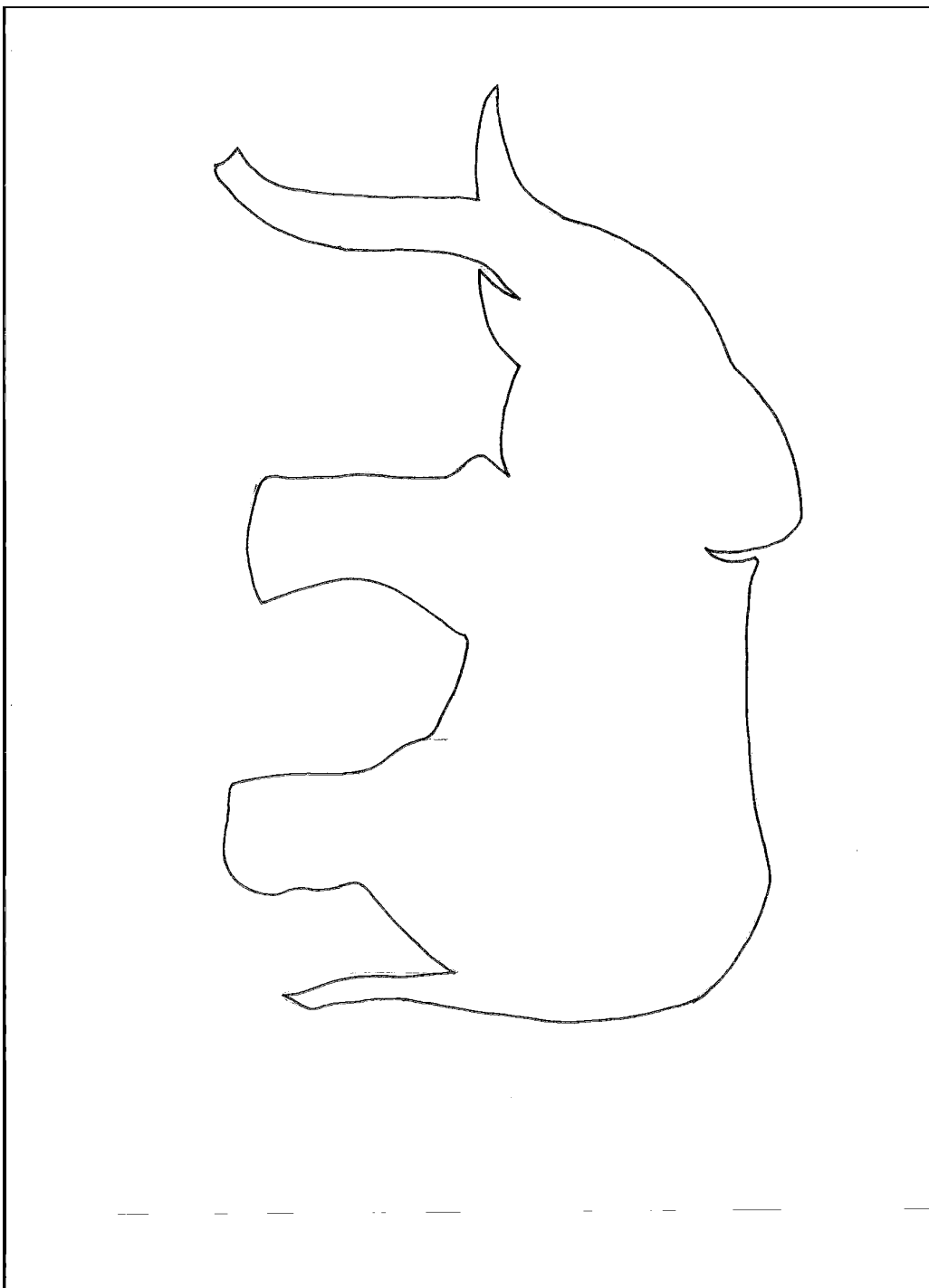


*This study guide was created for Theatre Motus by Marie-France Bruyère with the help of H el ene Ducharme, Suzanne Fortin and  Elise Lefebvre and translated in English by Maurice Roy.*

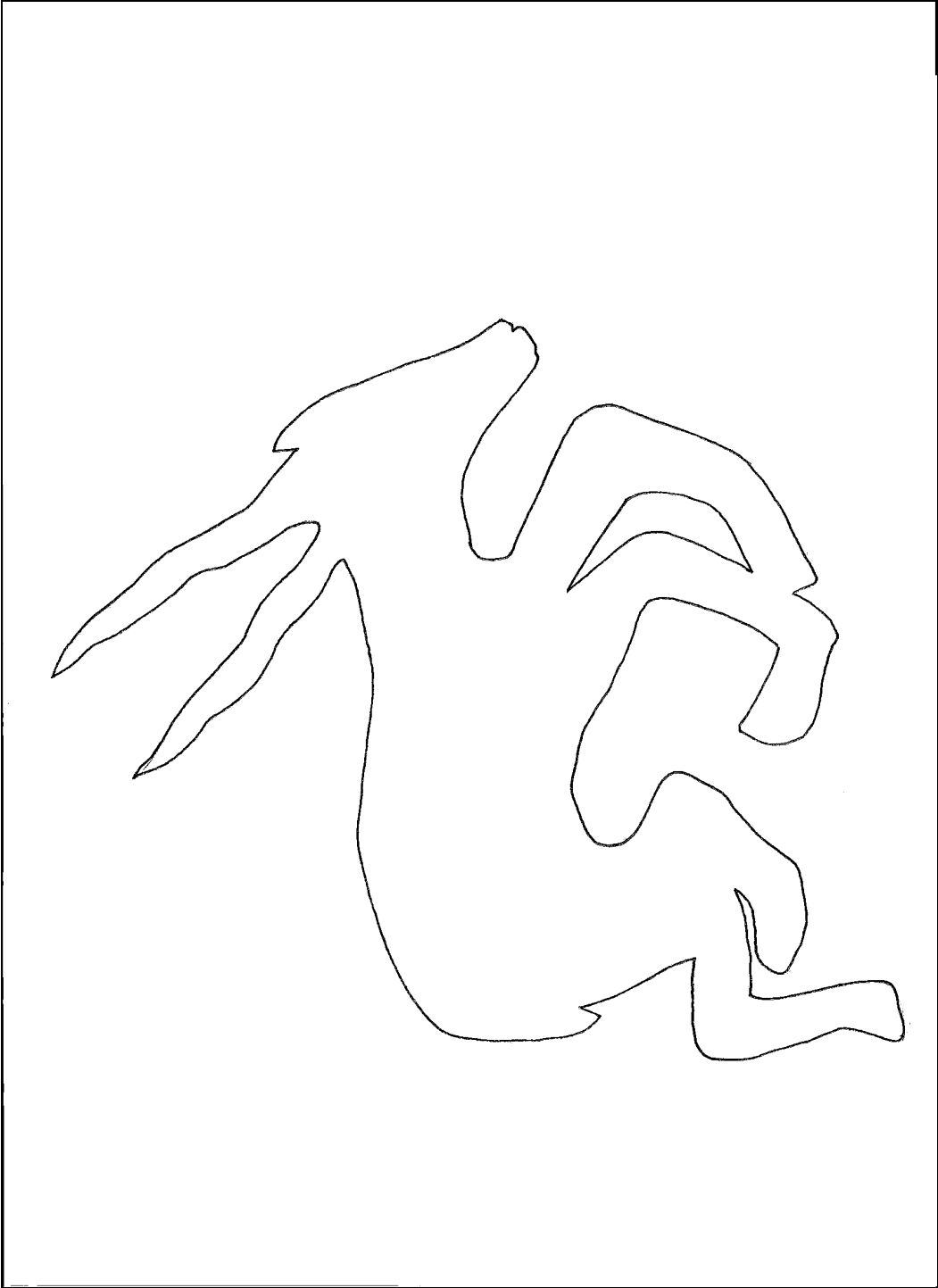
**Annex 1**

**Three puppet cut-out models**









## Annex2

### The main musical instruments

#### **The kora:**

The **kora** is an African string instrument. It is a lute-harp.

According to the legend, it was discovered by a great war chief, who gave it to one of his griot companions. The first kora was the personal instrument of a female genie that lived in the Gambian caves. It was then handed down from father to son and to Tilimaghan Diabaté who brought it to Mali.

The kora is made from a half calabash that is covered with a skin. The bridge is fitted with strings (formerly 7, now 21) that run through rings of cowhide strips. With the improvements to the kora, the rings are increasingly being replaced by hardwood keys or guitar keys. The strings that used to be made of twisted skin are now nylon.

#### **The balophone:**

The **balophone**, **bala** or **balani** is originally an East African percussion instrument. It is xylophone-like and tuned to either a pentatonic (5 note) or heptatonic (7 note) scale.

In the malinké language, one of the languages spoken in Mali and Senegal, “balafon” comes from the terms bala (instrument) and fon (sound).

The first balophone is believed to have been invented in the Mandingue Empire, between Guinea and Mali. This balophone still exists today and is called Sosso bala. A ceremony takes place every year with this balophone.

*Traditionally, the balophone was played standing as one would walk through the village to pass on the word. Today, it is often played sitting and its form has evolved.*

#### **The djembe:**

The **djembe** is the best known instrument in the performance. It is an African percussion instrument.

Made of a goblet-shape piece of wood covered with goat or antelope skin and fitted with a tension system (rope, metal rings), the djembe is an instrument that is played with bare hands and whose resonance spectrum generates a very large and rich tone.

The djembe comes from the Mandingue Empire that used to cover parts of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast.

### Annex 3

#### Some theatre crafts

- ❖ **The playwright:** the person who imagined and wrote the story told in the play.
- ❖ **The actors:** they interpret the script to tell you the story.
- ❖ **The puppeteers:** they are the artists that give life to the puppets on stage.
- ❖ **The musicians:** they invent and/or interpret the music heard during the play. One does not often see the musicians on stage at the theatre, because soundtracks are usually used, as they are simpler to bring on tour, but in **Baobab**, they interpret the music under your eyes... for your ears!
- ❖ **The set designer:** it is the person who imagines and designs the set. In this case the set is meant to make you believe that you are in Africa. Before having the set built, the set designer draws plans of it and usually makes a scale model of it.
- ❖ **The puppet designers:** they design the mechanisms which allow the puppets to move and create their bodies and costumes in order that they may look as alive as possible. In this case, they also are the ones that sculpted Amondo.
- ❖ **The lighting designer:** this artist paints with light! He or she designs the various lighting effects which allow us to appreciate the set, the artists on stage and the puppets. They can create different atmospheres.
- ❖ **The shadow theatre designer:** he or she designs and creates the shadow puppets, in this case, crafting the silhouettes out of wood with a jigsaw.
- ❖ **The costume designer:** this person imagines the various fabrics for the costumes and designs the characters' costumes.
- ❖ **The director:** the director is the chief of the expedition! He or she directs the actors, the musicians and all who contribute to the play. He or she must make sure that all involved work well together in order to offer you the best play possible.
- ❖ **The stage director:** during performances, the stage director looks after the performers and is responsible for the proper and timely set up of the stage and of the lighting and sound equipments required. Once the play is ready to go on tour, the stage director becomes its new chief of expedition.

**Annex 4****A few Web references****Mali and Senegal**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegal>

**The Bambara people**

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/oldworld/africa/bambara.html>

**The baobab**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansonia>

[http://www.krugerpark.co.za/africa\\_baobab.html](http://www.krugerpark.co.za/africa_baobab.html)

**The kora**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kora\\_\(instrument\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kora_(instrument))

**The balophone**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balafon>

**The djembe**

<http://echarry.web.wesleyan.edu/jembearticle/article.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Djembe>

**Masks**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mask>

**African stories**

<http://www.allfolktales.com/folktales.php>

<http://africa.mrdonn.org/fables.html>

**African wildlife**

<http://www.africaquide.com/wildlife/index.htm>

<http://www.meandmepphoto.com/Extras/ColorBk/ColorBk.html> (coloring pages)