

# An Evening with Sona Jobarteh

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP EVENT

THURSDAY APRIL 4, 2024

6:30PM-9:00PM

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THE UNDERGROUND AT

YALE SCHWARZMAN CENTER

168 Grove Street New Haven, CT

# About the Visionary Leadership Event

**The Visionary Leadership Event** was created in 2010 in honor of the late Jean M. Handley and her thoughtful and effective leadership as a lifelong champion of many of the region's arts, cultural, social, and educational organizations. From leading the fight to allow women into the then male-only Quinnipiack Club to co-founding LEAP and the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, Jean was a role model for women, a person of extraordinary wisdom, and an individual of exceedingly high standards who was generous with her talent and time and who left an indelible mark on the city of New Haven.

*"When I think about Jean, I think of a woman who stepped forward at a time when women were expected to stand back: who broke out of proscribed roles, and never accepted no for an answer."*

—Liz Fisher, Former Co-Director of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas



All proceeds from the Visionary Leadership Event support the Jean Handley Fund at the International Festival of Arts & Ideas. The Jean Handley Fund supports programs at the Festival each year that represent the values and passions of our co-founder, including US Premiere performances, family-friendly programs, free performances, and major international projects.

In recent years the Jean Handley Fund has supported outdoor performances on the Family Stage, circus on the New Haven Green, as well as works from Mark Morris, Kronos Quartet, Dallas Black Dance Theatre, and Heidi Latsky Dance—just to name a few. This year, proceeds will support the performance of **CONTRA-TIEMPO: ¡AZÚCAR!** at University Theatre.

To make a contribution to the Jean Handley Fund online, visit **ARTIDEA.ORG/JHF**.

Donations can also be made via Venmo to @ArtIdea, and checks payable to International Festival of Arts & Ideas can be mailed to our offices at 195 Church Street, 12th FL, New Haven, CT 06510.

Contact **Bobby DellaCamera**, Development Associate, at **203.498.3727** for more ways to give!

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# CONTRA-TIEMPO: ¡AZÚCAR! JUNE 28–29, 2024

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## **SONA JOBARTEH**

*Performer, Public Speaker/Activist,  
Composer and Lecturer*

The spirit of Sona Jobarteh's musical work stands on the mighty shoulders of The West African Griot Tradition; she is a living archive of the Gambian people. Born into one of the five principal Griot families in west Africa, a hereditary tradition dating back 700 years to the Mali Empire, Jobarteh is the first female to master the kora, a 21-string instrument that combines the qualities of a lute and a harp.

Jobarteh's childhood was spent between England, and the village in Gambia of her grandfather, Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, a kora master and griot, who was so influential he served as an adviser to Gambia's first president. Sona earned a scholarship to the prestigious Purcell School of Music and the Royal College of Music in the UK where she studied the cello, piano and harpsichord as well as composition and scoring. However, she was originally introduced to the kora at age 4, and officially began studying under her father at age 17, breaking an ancient, male-dominated hereditary tradition that had been exclusively handed down from father to son for the past seven centuries.

With one ear on the family's historic reputation, one ear on the all-important future legacy and her heart in both places, she is preparing a place today for the next generation. Her singing and kora playing while fronting her Afro-pop band, spring directly from this tradition. Today, she has over 27 million views on YouTube and 400,000 to 500,000 monthly listeners on Spotify. All this despite singing in her native languages and keeping to her own path within the music industry.

Sona has brought her live performances across the globe, including North America, as well as throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa. She was commissioned to write the opening and closing sequence music for the 2022 Hollywood blockbuster, *Beast*, starring Idris Elba, and composed the score for the multiple award-winning film, *Motherland*. She has released two albums. The most recent in 2022, *Badinyaa Kumoo*, is a musical manifesto expressing her vision of empowering women, children, artists, and African societies to effect positive change.

Sona's dedication to spreading powerful humanitarian messages through her songs and her stage performances makes her much more than a musician; she is active in social change and leads by her own example. Sona founded The Gambia Academy in 2015, a pioneering institution dedicated to achieving educational reform across the continent of Africa. This Academy is the first of its kind to deliver a mainstream academic curriculum at a high level, while also bringing the culture, traditions and history that belong to its students, to the front and center of their everyday education. These efforts have gained her invitations to deliver speeches at high profile events around the world – including summits for the UN and UNICEF. In 2023, Sona Jobarteh received an honorary degree from the prestigious Berklee College of Music.



## **LUCY NALPATHANCHIL**

*Moderator*

Lucy Nalpathanchil is Vice President of Community Engagement at Connecticut Public where she leads strategies to deeply connect and grow collaborations with community- focused organizations across the state.

Before becoming a member of the company's senior leadership team, Nalpathanchil was the Executive Producer and Host of Connecticut Public's morning talk show and podcast, *Where We Live*, for nearly seven years. Under her leadership, WWL went beyond news headlines and interviews with policymakers to feature more conversations about Connecticut and the stories of its residents.

Nalpathanchil has been a public radio journalist for more than 20 years covering everything from education to immigration, juvenile justice, and child welfare issues to veterans' affairs and the military. Her reporting has taken her to all sorts of places, including a ride aboard a Coast Guard boat in Florida and to Tambacounda, Senegal, to talk with women journalists and farmers.

She's contributed to National Public Radio and her stories have aired on several national NPR shows including *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Weekend Edition*, *Weekend All Things Considered*, *Here and Now*, and *Latino USA*.

In 2021, Nalpathanchil and the *Where We Live* team received a first- place award among large stations from Public Media Journalists Association or PMJA for this interview with a Norwich woman. In 2020, Nalpathanchil received a national Gracies Award from the Alliance for Women in Media in 2020 for her conversation with a Connecticut mother and her trans-son.

The Festival thanks the following donors for their support of this year's Visionary Leadership Event

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