

FREEMUSE AWARD WINNER:

# 'FESTIVAL IN THE DESERT' IN MALI



**“The Freemuse Award 2013 is given to ‘Festival au Désert’, which in spite of extreme Islamists’ attempts to silence all music in Mali, defends freedom of musical expression and struggles to continue keeping music alive in the region”, says Marie Korpe, Executive Director, Freemuse.**

From Bamako, Founder and Festival Director Manny Ansar says:

“It is an honour for our festival efforts to be recognised by your prestigious organisation; thank you! It is just this type of solidarity and global recognition that helps galvanise our deep musical tradition in Mali and the Sahel. While extremist forces may attempt to divide and silence our communities, the cultural heritage that lives and weaves between us, will always overcome. With your generous

support, we will continue to spread our international message of tolerance and plurality in exile, until we are able to return home to Timbuktu in peace.”

The festival, which went into exile last year due to threats from the Al Qaida linked extremists, was created in 2001 to celebrate Touareg culture. It soon attracted international artists and audiences and already in 2003 lead singer Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin was quoted as saying: “It’s one of the few honest things I have been part of in a long, long time. It’s amazing to play out in the sand. There are no doors, no gates and no money. It reminded me of why I sang in the first place. It’s not commercialized.” (Rolling Stone, 6 March 2003).

Manny Ansar has tirelessly promoted, developed and defended the festival for years. A festival in exile was planned to take place as a caravan in Bamako and in neighbouring countries during this spring, but due to the war and conflicts in the region the festival has had to cancel the spring tour.

## About the Freemuse Award

The Freemuse Award is sponsored by the *Björn Afzelius International Culture Foundation* (BAIK). Björn Afzelius, who died in 1999, was a Swedish rock singer who became a passionate spokesman for suppressed people around the world combining his musical career with political activism.

It is the first time that the Freemuse Award is given to an organisation. The award is given to an individual or an organisation that “has worked for freedom of musical expression in a remarkable way”. Previous winners include Tiken Jah Fakoly, one of Africa’s greatest reggae artists, who ironically for several years lived safely in exile in Mali having received death threats in his home country Ivory Coast.

### Media contact

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More information about Mali and press photos: [www.freemuse.org/sw49734.asp](http://www.freemuse.org/sw49734.asp)