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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 23, 2009

**What:** Lionel Loueke Trio  
**Where:** Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine Street, Philadelphia  
**When:** April 25, 7pm and 9pm  
**Price:** \$25 / \$12.50 for Bride Members

“I flipped. I’d never heard any guitar player play anything close to what I was hearing from him. There was no territory that was forbidden, and he was fearless!”  
–Herbie Hancock

“Mr. Loueke is a gentle virtuoso. As a singer, he has a husky, sincere baritone and a melting falsetto that he uses to scat-sing along with his guitar solos. He’s also a full-fledged jazz guitarist, and he uses both electronics—guitar synthesizer, looping devices—and African roots.”  
–Jon Pareles, *The New York Times*

## **Guitar Virtuoso from Benin, Africa Makes only East-Coast Tour Stop at the Painted Bride Art Center**

PHILADELPHIA, PA – Painted Bride Art Center is proud to present the first-ever Philadelphia appearance of the Lionel Loueke Trio. The performance will be the group’s only East Coast stop on a world-wide tour in support of their recent Blue Note release entitled *Karibu*. Painted Bride has long emphasized the growing number of international artists who are pushing the limits of jazz through diverse world traditions. Loueke is emerging as one of the most daring and distinctive artists in this movement. With swinging harmonies and percussive vocal counterpoint, Loueke combines the folk traditions of his native West Africa with a downtown New York edge.

In Swahili, “karibu” means “welcome” and those who have heard Loueke’s new music are embracing him with open arms. In the past few years, he has rapidly risen to prominence, going from Benin, Africa to playing alongside Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter on stages across the globe. In between, he studied at the Berklee College of Music, where he met Massimo Biolcati and Ferenc Nemeth, who would become the other two players in his trio. Loueke, Biolcati, and Nemeth all went on to enroll at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, an elite music school whose leaders include Hancock (chairman), Shorter (artistic director), and Terence Blanchard.

Loueke began attracting attention when all three of these jazz luminaries invited him on tour, but it is his trio with Biolcati and Nemeth that has garnered praise in recent months for entering uncharted territory. The three musicians have a shared interest in African music, from which they expand outward into other traditions. Biolcati grew up in Sweden and Italy while Nemeth is from Hungary and they draw upon a much wider range of world influences. When speaking about Loueke, Herbie Hancock comments, “His scope is so broad. He draws on his African heritage. He’s comfortable in the area of electronics, with a more acoustic style of playing, with a Spanish style, a Brazilian style...he brings new things to the table.”

## **Lionel Loueke Bio**

Loueke's story begins in Benin, a small country in West Africa, where he was born to parents that he describes as "intellectual," adding that "music was part of everyday life, but not in the family." Fortunately an older brother played guitar and was part of a band that played Afro-Pop music in the style of Fela Kuti and King Sunny Ade. "I remember when I was 11 or 12 I was going to see my brother perform. I would be listening from 10pm to 3am in the morning, just looking at him playing, listening to the music." Finally when Loueke was 17 years old, his brother let him pick up his guitar, and he quickly realized that he had a great facility for the instrument. Besides the Afro-Pop music that he heard his brother performing, Loueke also began to be enamored with the traditional African music of Benin, as well as Nigeria, Congo, Zaire, Mali and Senegal. However, it was an encounter with jazz music that would set Loueke on a different course. A friend of his brother's came to visit from Paris, bringing with him a CD of guitarist George Benson. "I listened to that and it was unreal for me. I had to transcribe every single line trying to play like him. Then I tried to check out what happened before him, Wes Montgomery, Joe Pass."

Loueke finally decided to pursue music more seriously and left Benin to attend the National Institute of Art in the Ivory Coast. Short of money, Loueke stumbled fortuitously into his first professional gig. He explains: "I was a student, and I couldn't pay my rent so they kicked me out, and I needed to get a gig so bad. So there was a club, and I tried so many times to get a gig there. So one night I just went to the club because I was desperate. I didn't have anything. I needed money to survive. The band took a break, during the break I went on stage, I picked up the guy's guitar and I start playing. They came to me and tried to grab back the instrument. And the manager said 'No, let him play.' So after I played the manager said 'Man, you want a gig?!' [laughs] That was my first gig, and I carried that gig for two years!"

In 1994, Loueke left Africa and moved to Paris to pursue Jazz studies, enrolling at the American School of Modern Music, a small conservatory run by several alumni of the Berklee College of Music in Boston. After graduation, Loueke was awarded a scholarship to attend Berklee, and so he left Paris and moved to the United States. It was at Berklee that he first met Massimo Biolcati and Ferenc Nemeth, the musicians who would become his core band. Through jam sessions, the trio developed an immediate rapport, in part fueled by internationalism. Biolcati is of Italian decent, but grew up in Sweden, while Nemeth was born and raised in Hungary. Both had extensively studied African music and were drawn to Loueke who was just beginning to fuse a Jazz technique with his African roots.

After graduating from Berklee, Loueke was accepted to the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz in Los Angeles along with Biolcati and Nemeth. The Monk Institute is a selective program that allows students to study and perform with some of the finest Jazz musicians in the world, including three legends that would nurture Loueke's burgeoning talent and become his greatest mentors: Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Terence Blanchard. "I flipped," says Hancock, recalling the moment he first heard Loueke's audition tape. "I'd never heard any guitar player play anything close to what I was hearing from him. There was no territory that was forbidden, and he was fearless!"

Before even graduating from the Monk Institute, Loueke began touring in Blanchard's sextet, a highly-creative band that recorded two albums for Blue Note (Bounce and Flow) and allowed Loueke to begin expressing his own voice as a soloist and composer. Since leaving Blanchard's band he has been hired by Hancock and become a prominent member of the pianist's current quartet, touring extensively and recording on Hancock's Grammy-nominated album, *River: The Joni Letters* (Verve). Loueke has also recorded two albums under his name for independent labels, *In A Trance* (Space Time) and *Virgin Forest* (ObliqSound), as well as the collective *Gilfema* (ObliqSound) with Biolcati and Nemeth.

**TICKET INFORMATION:** Ticket prices vary for all Bride events. Many Bride shows sell out; order tickets in advance 24 hours a day at [paintedbride.org](http://paintedbride.org) or Tuesday – Saturday, 12-6pm at 215.925.9914. Bride members receive 50% off of single tickets. Students and seniors with ID receive a 25% discount. The Bride is located at 230 Vine Street in Old City, Philadelphia.

**MISSION:** Painted Bride Art Center collaborates with emerging and established artists to create, produce, and present innovative work that affirms the intrinsic value of all cultures and celebrates the transformative power of the arts. Through performances and exhibitions, education and outreach, the Bride creates a forum for engagement centered on contemporary social issues.

**PHOTOS, VIDEO, AND INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE.**

Contact Oliver Wunsch, Painted Bride Marketing Director, at 215-925-9914 x14 or [oliver@paintedbride.org](mailto:oliver@paintedbride.org)

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