

farming, as in the 17th and 18th century, was good at carbon capture and sympathetic to a more environmentally friendly way of being. Land ownership has brought about a new relationship with the land by which people can do what they like and exploit and destroy land to make it ecologically unsustainable. The hard work of our ancestors is being walked over by agricultural policy and big companies who know how to exploit and intensify agriculture.”

“Folk music still speaks up for industrial workers and those who till the land,” he continues, “but its radicalness was also about the severance of people due to, say, enclosure, and being there to remind us of the bonds forged between those who worked the land – and the land.”

### GREENING AFRICA

Billed as ‘*Buena Vista Social Club meets Years of Living Dangerously*’, *The Great Green Wall* is a musical road movie led by Malian singer Inna Modja. Its name is taken from an 8,000km ‘belt of green’ currently being planted from Senegal to Djibouti, in a bid to halt desertification south of the Sahara and prevent a climate and humanitarian disaster in a part of Africa already stricken by many woes.

Born in Bamako, Modja says she has already experienced the reality of the front line of the climate crisis. “I come from the Sahel, where we deal with the negative impacts of climate change every day. At a very young age I was conscious about the issues around it. Where I grew up, access to clean water wasn’t a given, and drought was pretty frequent. As a citizen, I’ve always felt concerned about it, and so ten years ago I decided to educate myself better and actively try to find solutions.”

As an African living between Mali and Europe, Modja says she has “two voices on the climate crisis,” as well as a duty to widen the subjects that are covered in artistic responses to it, including migration and terrorism. “People have to flee their homes and region because they’re not able to make a living there anymore because of climate change – drought, scarcity of resources, unemployment etc. Climate migration is a real

thing, and a lot of people in Europe do not know that or want to look away. The biggest industries that pollute the planet and are responsible for climate change are not based in Africa, yet the Sahel people are harshly facing the consequences of the lifestyle of other continents. A consequence of this migration is human trafficking, and people losing their lives in the desert or the sea.”

“Look at how 90% of Lake Chad has shrunk in just 50 years, and how the insurgency of Boko Haram has taken advantage of that crisis. Unemployment and desperation in some countries of the Sahel has made it easier for terrorist groups to enrol the youth or create conflicts between different ethnic groups.”

Across Africa, singers and musicians are having to work out how best to respond to a crisis that is immediate and pressing. From Mauritania’s desert blueswoman Malouma’s work as an IUCN Goodwill Ambassador, to Zambia’s Maureen Lupo Lilanda joining forces with other artists on the song ‘Samalilani’, to the work of Conservation Music, a body founded in 2015 to help sub-Saharan musicians and activists to collaborate on musical projects, the emphasis is on information and education, localism and African realities.

Modja, though, takes a rather different tack, using cool, contemporary rhythms, upbeat songs, ultra-stylish videos and positive notions about African art, European fashion and women’s right to drive home a nuanced, optimistic message. “Music is received completely differently than political speeches,” she says. “I believe art is a powerful and universal way to reach the hearts and mind of people everywhere.”

“As a musician, I’m a storyteller. As an activist, my purpose is to shift consciousness and create a space where people would want to step outside of their bubble and take a look at a bigger picture. On my journey along the Great Green Wall,



Inna Modja investigates Africa’s green belt through the forthcoming film, *The Great Green Wall*

