

Amadou Hampaté Bâ

Gregory Mosher: It was Hampaté Bâ who, when speaking of the oral tradition in Africa, said, "Anytime an old man dies in Africa, a library burns down." And I remember being so struck by that. I heard that when I was a student. Hampaté Bâ wrote about twenty books, and anyone who speaks French, really, is aware of Hampaté Bâ. And this includes, for instance, any West African who you run into in New York. I find often that cab drivers are West Africans, so I ask where they're from and I ask if they know Amadou Hampaté Bâ, and invariably they say, "Oh yes, we studied him in school."