

# AFRICAN BEAT LINER NOTES



## Put 311

### Blurb:

African beats and Western rhythms unite on these contemporary tunes from Cape Town to Bamako

African music has long managed to straddle the divide between ancient traditions and the futuristic cutting edge. Head into the hippest nightclubs in Lagos, Dakar or Cape Town and you'll be treated to rocking electric guitars, drum sequencers, turntables and computer monitors alongside hand drums, percussion, rhythms and dance moves that would look at home in the most rustic African village.

In fact, it's the infectious, irresistible beats of African rhythms that form the ancestral underpinning of most contemporary dance music, from the classic grooves of funk, disco, soul and R&B to the modern club sounds of techno, drum and bass, hip hop, house and much more. While African musicians respect their traditions, they continue to innovate and influence the latest trends.

Sometimes, as in the case with Mali's **Issa Bagayogo**, **Donso**, and **Adama Yalomba** they join forces with counterparts in Europe to blend inspirations and new production techniques. Musicians with deep connections to their roots, such as **Vieux Farka Touré** and **Les Barons** are remixed and reworked by Western DJs to create an exciting new recipe drawing on African flavors. Meanwhile, South Africa's **Busi Mhlongo**, Senegal's **Lëk Sën** and **Yodé et Siro** from the Ivory Coast reveal that hip hop, electronica and other contemporary styles have been re-adopted and taken in surprising and appealing new directions

On *African Beat*, we feature artists who are as likely to have traditional African drumming and classic Afrobeat, *soukous* and *mbaqanga* on their iPods as they are the latest European techno club hits, American rap and R&B and maybe even a Lady Gaga track or two. Indeed, these songs reveal that even in this globalized, hi-tech world, the divide between the past and the future really isn't as great as we might think.

## French:

La musique africaine sait depuis longtemps jeter des ponts entre tradition et innovation sonore. Dans les boîtes de nuit branchées de Lagos, de Dakar ou du Cap, les guitares électriques, les boîtes à rythmes, les platines et les ordinateurs côtoient des percussions manuelles et des pas de danse qui ne surprendraient pas dans le plus rural des villages africains.

En fait, les rythmes irrésistibles et contagieux de la musique africaine constituent la base ancestrale de la plupart des genres qui nous font danser aujourd'hui, des figures désormais classiques du funk, du disco, du soul et du R&B aux sons plus contemporains de la techno, de la drum and bass, du hip-hop ou de la house. Sans jamais renier leurs traditions, les musiciens africains ne cessent d'innover et d'inventer de nouveaux styles.

Certains, comme les Maliens **Issa Bagayogo, Donso** et **Adama Yalomba**, font appel à des complices européens qui utilisent des techniques de production modernes. Cet album comporte également des morceaux d'artistes très attachés à leurs racines, comme **Vieux Farka Touré** ou **Les Barons**, retravaillés et remixés par des DJ occidentaux, qui créent une musique originale aux accents africains. Quant au Sud Africain **Busi Mhlongo**, au Sénégalais **Lèk Sén**, et aux Ivoiriens **Yodé et Siro**, ils ont assimilé le hip-hop, l'électronique et d'autres genres contemporains pour les mener dans des directions inattendues.

*African Beat* réunit des musiciens qui doivent écouter sur leur iPod des percussions traditionnelles africaines, de l'afrobeat classique, du *soukous* et du *mbaqanga*, ainsi que les derniers tubes des boîtes européennes et du hip-hop américain. Ce qui tendrait à prouver que, malgré la mondialisation et la suprématie de la technologie, le fossé entre le passé et l'avenir n'est pas aussi large que l'on voudrait le croire.

## Busi Mhlongo - Yehlisian' Umoya Ma-Afrika

Busi Mhlongo was born in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in 1947 and started her professional career in music in 1963 after successfully auditioning for a Johannesburg production of the musical, *King Kong*, the same production that introduced the world to Miriam Makeba on the international tour. Mhlongo's music career, and the oppression of the apartheid era, led her on a wandering path, and over the years she lived in Portugal, the Netherlands, and Canada, among other countries.

Though well known for her work with some of South Africa's biggest stars, Mhlongo didn't release her first solo album until 1993. And, it wasn't until her 1998 release, *Urban Zulu*, and its modern blend of traditional South African *maskanda* music with funk, R&B, electronica, and more, that Mhlongo began to earn international fame. Sadly, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010, in the midst of the World Cup in South Africa, Mhlongo lost a long battle with breast cancer.

On "Yehlisian' Umoya Ma-Afrika" (African Nation, Calm!), from her groundbreaking *Urban Zulu* album, Mhlongo sings, "How long, just how long are we going to cry? Calm down, my people—we've been killing each other for too long now."

**Lëk Sën****Rebel Blues**

Lëk Sën grew up in the fishing village of Ngor, Senegal, not far from the capital city of Dakar. He started singing as a young child and began rapping with the local band SSK, which started collaborating with the French production team Louxor Station in 2006. SSK's 2007 album *Jog Bala Nacc* led the band to be selected for the prestigious Radio France International Discoveries Prize. Eventually Sën met the Paris-based musicians Yvo Abadi and Miguel Saboga, members of the band Dirty District, a pioneer in the French rock scene in the 1980s and '90s. Together with Louxor Station, they produced Sën's solo debut album *Burn*, which was released in late 2010.

"Rebel Blues" reflects Sën's mix of acoustic, bluesy African folk style with funky grooves and subtle modern studio production techniques. "Let's stop being the lowest / Let's elevate our souls to the skies / Because I assure you all united we'll be stronger than the system / Hear me sing for Africa."

**9ice****Alapomeji Anthem**

One of the biggest stars on the contemporary Nigerian music scene, 9ice, whose real name is Abolore Adegbola Akande, brings the influences of hip-hop, R&B, reggae and soul into his Yoruba sound. 9ice got his start performing fuji music, the intricate popular music style popularized by King Sunny Adé and Ebenezer Obey, among others. Eventually, 9ice began incorporating Western urban music flavors into his sound, joining the boy band Mysterious Boys followed by the band Abinibi. His big break came in 2005 with the release of the hit single "Little Money" which was followed by a string of huge hits. 9ice was selected as Revelation of the Year and Best Male Vocal Performer at the Hip Hop World Awards in 2008, one of many accolades he has received.

While clearly influenced by American urban music, 9ice was inspired to sing in Yoruba by his 75-year old stepmother, who taught him about traditional Yoruba culture and language. "Alapomeji Anthem" is a tribute to the Alapomeji neighborhood where 9ice grew up.

**Issa Bagayogo****Kalan Nege**

One of 15 children, Issa Bagayogo started playing a *kamélé n'goni*, the traditional Malian lute, when he was 12 years old. French producer Yves Wernert and Foamed Koné, a former member of Ali Farka Touré's band, asked Bagayogo to front their experiments fusing Malian roots music with modern technology. The result was an innovative and intriguing blend of electronic and traditional music. Rather than overwhelming the traditional elements, Wernert's production served to enhance the deep grooves of Malian music and present it in a new light. Bagayogo's recordings have been successful internationally and inspired many other efforts to blend African traditions with contemporary influences.

On "Kalan Nege," Bagayogo calls out to the young people and women of Mali, encouraging them to live up to their country's hopes and expectations. "Youth of Mali / It is on your behalf that I challenge the world / Don't let me down / Brave women of Mali / I am proud to stand for you / Be up to this trust."

### **Fredy Massamba      Zonza**

While he now calls Belgium home, singer and dancer Freddy Massamba is originally from the Republic of the Congo. Born in the city of Pointe-Noire on the Atlantic Coast, Massamba got his start as a street performer before joining Les Tambours de Brazza, a drumming and dance group that tours abroad regularly. During these tours, he collaborated with Zap Mama, Didier Awadi (the lead singer of the successful Senegalese hip-hop group Positive Black Soul), and bass player/singer Manou Gallo. When Massamba's homeland became too politically unstable to return in the late 1990s, he settled in Brussels. He recently released his first solo album, *Ethnophony*.

On "Zonza" (Words), Massamba sings in the Kikongo language, "Let's talk about your words/ The words that you use to touch me / Sometimes in a positive way but too many times in a negative way / You use your mouth like a weapon and you don't know your power."

### **Yodé & Siro      Quel est Mon Pays?**

Yodé et Siro are popular performers of *zouglou*, an uptempo dance music from the Ivory Coast. Heavily influenced by Caribbean *zouk* and Congolese *soukous*, *zouglou* first became popular among students at the University of Cocody-Abidjan in the 1990s, and has since mushroomed into one of the most ubiquitous sounds at nightclubs and parties across the country. Sung in local languages and French slang, *zouglou's* lyrics tackle social issues with humor and irreverence while giving people the perfect soundtrack to which to dance their problems away. While Yodé et Siro have yet to achieve the international success of fellow *zouglou* performers Magic System, they are huge stars at home and in African communities around the world.

On "Quel Est Mon Pays?" (What Is My Country?), Yodé et Siro sing about the struggles to define one's identity in the new Africa, where people often have diverse roots. "My mother is Guinean / My father is from Mali / Where do I come from? / My father is from Chad / My mother Benin / Where do I come from? / The country of mixture."

### **Donso      Mogoya**

Donso brings together French and Malian musicians seeking to create an organic blend of traditional West African sounds with electronic beats. The project is the brainchild of French musician and producer Pierre-Antoine Grison, best known as Krazy Baldhead, a popular figure in the French breakbeat, techno, and hip hop scene. Malian musician Guimba Kouyaté brings to the project his talents with the guitar and the *n'goni*, a traditional Malian lute that is fundamental to the Donso sound. Thomas Guillaume provides the live percussion as well as a second *n'goni* to the mix, which is topped off by the soulful vocals of Mali's Gédéon Papa Diarra.

"Mogoyo" (Good Manners) comes from Donso's eponymous 2010 debut EP. "Good manners depend on every one of us / In a household, everything depends on the behavior of each and everyone / In a country, in a town, a village or a county, everything depends on the attitude of the leader and of his people / Good manners belong to everybody / Love depends on everybody's good will."

### **Adama Yalomba            Africa**

Adama Yalomba was born in 1970 in Bamako, Mali, and was taught by his father to play the *dan*, a traditional six-stringed instrument. He took to it naturally and at a young age was performing throughout Mali. While he has yet to develop a wide international following, Yalomba is highly respected in Mali for his talents as a musician and performer. He has accompanied many African superstars, from the late Ali Farka Touré to Oumou Sangaré and Tinariwen. Yalomba has released three well-received albums, which feature his masterful playing on his homemade instrument coupled with sophisticated Western pop and electronic grooves.

### **Afro-Fiesta                            Baweli**

While Afro-Fiesta is based in South Africa, the band doesn't usually perform South African music styles. Founder and bandleader Mermans Kenkosenki moved to South Africa from the Republic of the Congo in 1998, joining thousands of Africans who have emigrated to South Africa in search of economic opportunity and political stability. He formed Afro-Fiesta with the goal of bringing some of the continent's other popular music to South African audiences, and the group performs *makossa* from Cameroon, *soukous* and *kwassa kwassa* from the Congo as well as Afro-Latin blends that have been long popular in his native country. Recently, Afro-Fiesta has been closely involved with the renowned Playing for Change project, and Kenkosenki has toured as a member of the PFC band.

### **Vieux Farka Touré                    Wosoubour**

If musicians were royalty, Vieux Farka Touré would be a crown prince. In fact, some would argue that after the death of his father, Malian guitar legend Ali Farka Touré, in 2006, Vieux Farka Touré is the natural next in line for the mantle of the king of African guitar. While Touré is the first to recognize that he has a long way to go before he earns that title, his rising international renown, appearances at major events such as the World Cup in South Africa, and collaborations with Dave Matthews and Derek Trucks of The Allman Brothers Band reveals that Touré is on his way to becoming one of Africa's most respected guitarists.

Touré's youthful energy and mind open to new influences has led him to take his traditional Malian sounds in exciting new directions. One example is this funky remix of the song "Wosoubour" by the Brooklyn-based disc jockey Chris Annibell. The original version of the song appeared on Touré's self-titled debut album in 2007, and this remix is from the 2008 collection of remixes *UFOs over Bamako*. Touré sings in the *Songhai* language, "Nowadays the misunderstandings between two brothers / Two sisters, or even two families are severe / Amidst all this, let us fight against injustice."

**Les Barons****Lagos Sound System**

Les Barons is a recording project spearheaded by three French producers working from a small studio in the trendy Brick Lane neighborhood of London. Drawing on influences from Brazilian, French, African, and Latin music as well as electronica, techno, and new music, they invited musicians representing the modern melting pot of London to contribute to their album.

"Lagos Sound System" is inspired by the funky Afrobeat sound popularized by Nigerian iconoclast Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Kuti, who passed away in 1997, was one of the world's great musical characters, who transcended music to become an important advocate of social justice, African liberation, and political freedom. His trademark sound, which blended complex drum kit patterns that were based on a mix of Nigerian traditional rhythms and James Brown-style funk, jazzy horn lines and meandering, extended songs that usually lasted 15 minutes or more, has greatly influenced music around the globe and inspired countless imitators and offshoots. To this day, Kuti epitomizes the eternal hipness of African cool, which crosses generations and social strata to appeal to teenage trendsetters and Baby Boomers alike.