

AND...

FOCUS ON SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The Last King of Kakfontein – Boyzie Cekwana, July 17-23,

La Chartreuse de Villeneuve lez Avignon

Kalakuta Republik – Serge Aimé Coulibaly, July 19-25, Cloître des Célestins

Dream Mandé - Djata – Rokia Traoré, July 21-24, Cour du musée Calvet

Femme noire – Angélique Kidjo, Isaach De Bankolé and their guests Manu Dibango,

Dominic James and MHD, July 25 and 26, Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes

ÇA VA, ÇA VA LE MONDE ! – RFI, July 15-20, Jardin de la rue de Mons

BASOKIN

At once danceable and hypnotic, the music of Basokin comes from far away, rooted in a traditional society that has little to do with our modern cities. Yet a constant electric surge goes through it, that of distorted guitars, of saturated microphones, of heavy bass guitars. Basokin is first and foremost an aural experience, but also a visual shock, with its dancers whose bodies are covered in white marks, performing what might be a ritual or a popular African dance... Basokin is a child of Kinshasa, that sprawling, chaotic city, in whose polyglot racket each community remains strongly attached to its identity... Basokin tells of an unexpected Africa, at once mysterious and hedonistic, ancient and modern. With its traditional drums and its rock'n'roll energy, with its savannah rhythms and its urban textures, Basokin is an ambassador of this mutant Africa.

THE BASONGYE OF KINSHASA

Basokin was born within the diaspora of the natives of Kasai-Oriental in Kinshasa and, in time, made its place among the best bands "in exile" in the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Several of its members, including guitarist and spokesman Mopera, are also part of Kasai Allstars, a supergroup considered to be one of the flagbearers of the Congolese tradi-modern movement, along with Konono n°1, whose *Congotronics* has grown in popularity these past few years. From the music of pre-colonial savannah to the sophistication of jazz and the electronic music of the rich neighbourhoods of African metropolises, their influences are many and — most importantly — unpredictable. Can we only imagine how communities with incredibly diverse cultures and languages converged on Kinshasa after the end of the Belgian Congo to create a melting pot that defies history? The tradi-modern sound of Congolese musicians, which reached Europe about a dozen years ago, is but one example: at once an aesthetic and a geopolitical shock — an incredible maelstrom of continuity and rupture.

71st
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.



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INTERVIEW WITH MOPERO AND MICHEL WINTER FROM BASOKIN

The name Basokin comes from both the Songye people and the city of Kinshasa. But the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo isn't in the region inhabited by the Songye people...

Michel Winter, group manager: The band was created about thirty years ago for the Songye people living in Kinshasa. The city is, in a way, cosmopolitan: the Congo is at least as diverse as western Europe. There are five official languages, but beyond that, we count about five hundred languages—and not patois or dialects, but five hundred different languages. I have this memory of a map of the languages of the Belgian Congo drawn by the Jesuits, and some of them were written in the margins because there wasn't enough room on the map itself. By the way, not all the singers in Basokin speak the same language, even if they're all from the Kasai region—which is almost as big as France, and divided into several provinces. They sing mostly in Kisongye, but in Kinshasa, they also sing in Lingala when people ask them to.

Mopero: Basokin is a tradi-modern band. Our music derives from Songye folklore, modernised thanks to some instruments. Even though we play electric guitars, we use the rhythms of our ancestors, in the old province of Kasai-Oriental.

Michel Winter: The tradi-modern movement was born in Kinshasa, simply because the city is extremely noisy: they had to use electric instruments just to be heard. But, by using second-hand sound systems and equipment they threw together as best they could, distortion and accidents of sound ended up transforming the music.

Is Basokin's activity comparable to that of a western-style band, playing concert halls and recording albums?

M.W.: Like all other tradi-modern bands, they play for their community. Two or three times a week, they play in a bar popular among Kinshasans from the Kasai region. But most important is the part they play in rituals. For weddings and mourning rituals, you need a lot of music. Mourning rituals can last a whole night, and sometimes even several nights in a row, which means several groups have to play in shifts. That's the main activity of bands like Basokin. Anyway, there aren't really concerts in the Congo. Only ndombolo stars like Werrason or the late Papa Wemba can do that. Most often, they're promotional events organised in stadiums by beer brands or telecommunication companies. There's no authority that would supervise the organisation of concerts throughout the country, partly due to transportation issues—many cities are only linked by plane. Sometimes, cultural actors seem to emerge, but their situation is extremely complicated. It's one step forward, two steps back... In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Minister of Culture doesn't finance creation, it is the artists who finance the Ministry of Culture. For instance, if they want to play abroad, musicians have to pay the Ministry for an official authorisation to leave the country, then pay for the visas, then pay again at the airport. But we know it could be the richest State in the world, and that it isn't the case. The Congo doesn't invest at all in culture.

M.: It's very difficult to earn a living playing music in the Congo. The country doesn't work well. But we don't give up. We make do, we're still there. We continue the work that was started thirty years ago.

Has Basokin experienced a lot of personnel changes since its creation?

M.: I've been a member of Basokin for the past fifteen years. There's in the band a papa who's been a part of it for over twenty years, the others joined three to five years ago.

M.W.: Since bands play during rituals, for hours and hours, they tend to have up to fifteen or twenty semi-regular members. At the beginning, Basokin was a band made-up mostly of low-level Songye civil servants from the Finance Ministry. Mputu Ebondo, singer and founder of Basokin (he's more well-known as Mi Amor) was a librarian at the Ministry. Mopero belongs to the first generation of musicians who don't have another job.

M.: I was the only boy in my family. I was born in 1970 and studied computer science. But my only job is music. Before joining Basokin, I played in modern bands.

You also appear in Alain Gomis's film *Félicité*, as part of another band, Kasai Allstars, along with other members of Basokin. For the past ten years or so, Kasai Allstars has recorded albums and toured the world. What is the band's goal?

M.: With Basokin, we only play Songye music. Kasai Allstars brings together musicians from five different bands to play music from different regions and different languages of the Kasai region. The band's been coming to Europe to perform since 2007.

M.W.: Kasai Allstars was created to be exported, to open the way for the musicians and bands from the Kasai region, by presenting their diversity. In Kinshasa, the members of tradi-modern bands are used to working together. There's a strong solidarity, since they face the same difficulties, including concrete ones, in particular when it comes to acquiring equipment.

Dance plays an important part for Basokin.

M.W.: Urban music bands adapt and mix dances that belong to different ethnic groups. Every ethnic group has its own dances. In the Kasai region, the function played by ritual dances can be the same, but the movements are different. The girls in Basokin work on the dances characteristic of the Songye people. The only difference is that those dances may have become a little more sensual in Kinshasa than they were in the Kasai region.

Basokin plays the traditional rhythms of the Kasai region, but with original compositions. What stories do your songs tell? Love stories?

M.: We have a few love songs, but we don't use them all that much. Most of our songs serve to educate, to advise, to help the people grow and thrive. When we write, it's always in relation to the present and to the problems the community is facing. For instance, we can tell people that we shouldn't let politics tear us apart, that even if you're a member of a political party, it's more important to be a Congolese first. If we want to help develop our country or our region, it will only work if we are united.

M.W.: We're in an African tradition of oral culture. Music has always had an educational function, similar to that of the troubadours and street singers who used to sing to an illiterate audience in Europe: the point is to transmit messages to the community, but also to tell its collective history. Basokin, like many other tradi-modern bands, delivers moral stories about public life, gives advice on health, on how to protect oneself to protect others, on how to behave as a good Congolese... Their songs aren't strictly-speaking political, but they're doing a citizen's work.

— Interview conducted by Bertrand Dicale and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach