



# sound waves

For centuries Africans have been expressing themselves through their unique and inspiring music. Whether you understand the words matters not – you get the message and so does the rest of the world. By KERRY DIMMER

Youssou N'Dour performs at the Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland

## It's Sunday afternoon in Miami and

you're feeling homesick. You miss Africa's earthy smells, the colours of the open market-places and its fiery sunsets. You walk to the beat of a different drum and that is exactly what the syndicated radio show *Afropop Worldwide* understands.

This show broadcasts to some 108 stations in the US (in Miami tune into WDNA 88.9 FM Sundays at 6 pm), and can also be heard in Africa and Europe or even streamed from its website, [afropop.org](http://afropop.org). It's been around for more than two decades and is hosted by veteran Cameroonian broadcaster Georges Collinet (or Maxi Voom Voom as he's fondly called by his fans).

When it launched, *Afropop Worldwide* was the first of its kind and for producer Sean Barlow, it was his vision of connecting the African diaspora to the Americas and Europe through music. He had found a niche and unleashed the continent's original sounds to a broad international audience.

Award-winning South African performer Johnny Clegg believes: 'International recognition comes with touring and the realisation that, as African musicians, we always start off as alternative and marginal in the international arena. But as touring develops we capture our own market. Our fans are loyal, interested in the sounds and combination of local and international hybridisation but also in the deep traditional sounds.'

What makes African music so different, so infectious is that it truly reflects the life and struggles of Africans: it's storytelling with a heartbeat.

Diane Thram, ethnomusicologist at the International Library of African Music (ILAM) at Rhodes University in South Africa, explains its appeal: 'It has a complexity that is so different from Western music. Fifty-six years ago people were listening to Cuban and American jazz that, with its mix of chords and vocals, was very interesting harmonically. The introduction of indigenous African music took this sound to another dimension way beyond what was known to the rest of the world at the time.'

'It introduced elaborate instruments that were completely foreign, like the multiple-stringed kor from Mali, which takes great expertise to play well; the Zimbabwe mbira (thumb piano) is another; and generally all the xylophone traditions that are complex and elaborate.'

Thram credits ILAM's founder Hugh Tracey's *Music of Africa and Sound of Africa* LP series



Members of the Kenyan Boys Choir in a Nairobi studio recording their newest album

## Festivals have been very important for the promotion of African artists since the world music craze of the 1980s

released in the early 1960s and Paul Berliner's recordings of Shona mbira music, released in the early 70s, for playing an important role in promoting African music to the rest of the world. 'As the industry began to release more recordings of African music, it just escalated the interest,' she says.

Today that interest is almost cultish and very difficult to measure economically. No in-depth studies seem to exist other than the one undertaken by Unesco in 2004 called *Take Note! The Renaissance of the Music Industry in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Unesco determined that there was no evidence of a music industry. Instead, a range of economic practices existed, relating to the production and consumption of music.

The study was frustrated by the lack of key economic indicators such as the number of people employed in the music industry, its contribution to GDP and export markets. At the time, Africa's music market was the world's smallest, representing 0.6% of total global sales with an annual average growth of 5%. What that is today is anyone's guess but if South Africa is a measure then the latest statistics issued by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry for 2010 may be interesting.

### VOICES OF AUTHORITY

#### ALGERIA

Hasna el Becharia, Souad Massi

#### ANGOLA

Bonga Kuenda, Waldemar Bastos

#### BENIN

Angélique Kidjo

#### BOTSWANA

Franco and Afro Musica

#### BURKINA FASO

Cheikh Lô

#### BURUNDI

Khadja Nin

#### CAMEROON

Anne-Marie Nzié, Coco Mbassi, Henri Dikongué, Kristo Numpuby, Manu Dibango, Richard Bona, Sally Nyolo

#### CAPE VERDE

Cesaria Evora

#### COMOROS

Nawal

#### CONGO

Bopol Mansiamina, Déesse Mukangi, Kanda Bongo Man, Koko Kanyinda, Modero Mekanisi, Ray Lema, Ricardo Lemvo, Samba Mapangala

#### CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Henri Gao Bi, Alpha Blondy

#### ETHIOPIA

Aster Aweke

#### GAMBIA

Foday Musa Suso

#### GHANA

Samini

#### GUINEA

Maciré Sylla, Mory Kanté, N'Faly Kouyate

#### KENYA

Suzzana Owiyo

#### MALI

Bassekou Kouyate, Boubacar Traoré, Habib Koite, Issa Bagayogo, Oumou Sangare, Rokia Traoré, Vieux Farka Touré

#### MOZAMBIQUE

Moreira Chonguica, MC Roger

#### NIGER

Mamar Kassey

#### NIGERIA

Dele Sosimi, Femi Kuti, Inemo, JJC, Lágbájá, Mose 'Fan Fan', Papa Noel, Syran Mbenza, Tony Allen, Weird MC

#### RWANDA

Cécile Kayirebwa

#### SENEGAL

Youssou N'Dour, Baaba Maal, Doudou Cissoko, El Hadj, King Ibu, Seckou Keita, Viviane N'Dour, Wasis Diop

#### SIERRA LEONE

Abdul Tee-Jay

#### SOUTH AFRICA

Claude Deppa, Doreen Thobekile, Rebecca Malope, Simphiwe Dana, Vusi Mahlasela

#### SWAZILAND

Maiuko

#### TANZANIA

Freddy Macha, Saidi Kanda

#### UGANDA

Rachel Magoola

#### ZAMBIA

JK (Jordan Katembula)

#### ZIMBABWE

Albert Nyathi, Chartwell Dutiro, Chiwoniso, Netsayi Chigwendere, Dorothy Masuka, Oliver Mtukudzi, Stella Chiweshe, Virginia Mukweshwa



Exact figures on the economic value that Africa's music industry adds to its GDP are not known

### GO TO...

- Sauti za Busara, Zanzibar from 8–12 February 2012.
- Womad (World of Music, Arts and Dance), Charlton Park, Wiltshire, England from 27–29 July 2012.

### TUNE IN...

[www.afropop.org](http://www.afropop.org)

PHOTOGRAPHY GALLO/GETTY IMAGES/CORBIS

The trade value for South Africa's recorded music sales for last year, both physical and digital, accounts for US\$123.4 million. This translates into South Africa being ranked 14th in the world for physical recordings and 34th for digital recordings.

Speculation by the Recording Industry of South Africa is that there are currently some 10 000 recording artists in the country among a total population of 49 million.

Without any definitive measure we are left to wonder at what this industry is really worth to the continent. But even if the value does not impact significantly in economic terms, you have only to look at the quality of some of the many African performers who have gained international fame and

in so doing catapulted the continent's musical heritage into the limelight.

Such a list includes: Youssou N'Dour and Baaba Maal (Senegal); Cesaria Evora (Cape Verde); Grammy award-winner Angélique Kidjo (Benin); Miriam Makeba, Lucky Dube, Yvonne Chaka Chaka (South Africa); and Fela Kuti (Nigeria), to name a handful.

Thram says there is no doubt that African artists are highly respected. 'Youssou N'Dour for example, is a great musician but he is also a very accomplished businessman. African performers are successful because they are very disciplined, very creative and accomplished and that is what has given them credibility.'

Hauke Dorsch of the African Music Archives in Germany says that festivals have been very important for the promotion of African artists since the world music craze of the late 1980s.

'Especially the Womad festival that actually introduced Youssou N'Dour to global audiences and boosted Salif Keita's international career. Even in Germany almost every mid-sized town has its own African music/culture festival. The point is that the demand for African music is immense, you just have to look at the World Music Charts Europe to confirm this.'

One of the most popular festivals, Sauti za Busara, held annually in Zanzibar, Tanzania, proves the point that there is far more value

in a festival than just music promotion. It has built a steady international reputation on the world music scene and in the cultural tourism sector. Next year it will feature 40 African artists, an incredibly difficult selection given the 560 applications, says its founder and director Yusuf Mahmoud.

'Government statistics reveal that the number of visitors to Zanzibar in February has increased every year and by more than 400% since the festival began,' says Mahmoud. 'It's a real example of an event that is designed to develop an appreciation of the uniqueness, wealth and diversity of traditional music with the benefit of employment and income gained in sustaining it.'

There is also a growing body of international global music that takes African sounds and fuses them to other traditional or popular trends. One example is Paul Simon's collaboration in the mid-1980s with South Africa's Ladysmith Black Mambazo on his *Graceland* album, which won the Grammy for Best Album that year.

This type of fusion may have popularised African music but it has actually been going on for years, as Mahmoud points out: 'The rhythms and melodies of Africa have had a major influence on the evolution of popular music be that blues, jazz, soul, funk, hip hop or reggae.' **AD**