

LES CAHIERS DE
LA FONDATION

From Afro-Cuban to Voodoo-Funk

50 years of music in Benin



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FLORENT MAZZOLENI

Florent Mazzoleni lives in Bordeaux and has written over twenty books about popular music from both sides of the Atlantic ocean. Well travelled, he's also a record producer, a photographer and an art curator.

INTRODUCTION

The partition of Africa by European powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884 produced major changes across the continent. In cities and ports, the continent was abuzz with a new liveliness as electricity made its first appearance. Thanks to a boom in shipping, 78rpm records brought by Latin American sailors, and also by soldiers or European settlers, left a lasting effect on a new musical direction up-and-down the African coast. To define the cultural and spiritual exchange taking place between Salvador de Bahia and the coast of Benin, the great French photographer and anthropologist Pierre Verger referred to an “ebb and flow”.

The entire Atlantic coast of Africa was transformed into a new laboratory for musical creation thanks to the development and penetration of Cuban music. From the late 1940s, in coastal cities like Ouidah, Cotonou and Porto Novo, and part of the African coast, local groups learned by ear the records that Cuban sailors played on gramophones in bars, playing for small change. *Sons, guajira, boleros, pachangas* and other *cha-cha-chas* began to make their presence felt in ports, merchant towns and capital cities on the continent.

The appearance of the phonograph, the first crystal radio sets, brass inherited from colonial military bands, and the rapid spread of the guitar to countries such as Congo, Guinea and Benin, laid the foundations for the emergence of an authentic modern African music. This new style shared much with Cuban music in the use of percussion in the rhythms and dances, and also in the vocal modulations. Gradually these Cuban musical elements were reinterpreted, alongside elements from Caribbean music, jazz and rhythm’n’blues. Having largely originated in Africa, these repatriated American musical styles reflect a natural truth about the continent.

Many dances and rhythms emanating from African folklore evolved on contact with cities and modern instruments, especially brass, saxophones and trumpets in mind, but also electric guitars, in the late 1940s. Some groups decided to 're-Africanize' the Afro-Cuban and African-American music listened to in ports, in public or broadcast over the airwaves. Bars, dance halls and youth associations also played an important role in the dissemination and development of this music.

Benin became an independent nation on August 1, 1960, known initially as the Republic of Dahomey. After a dozen years of sometimes-erratic democracy, experiencing no fewer than five coups, Major Mathieu Kérékou seized power on October 26, 1972. Despite lacking Soviet support, and to the surprise of the Beninese people and his African neighbors he suddenly realigned the country on the path of Marxism-Leninism in November 1975. To suppress some separatist wishes from the north, Dahomey was renamed the People's Republic of Benin in 1975.

As in most African cities of the time, many new musical groups sprang up in Dahomey in the 1950s and '60s. Alongside electricity, cars and films, they are symbols of modernity, and their music provided the soundtrack to the euphoria of the years following independence. They are partly influenced by the Ghanaian dance bands plying their trade in all the major cities of the Gulf of Benin, from Nigeria to Liberia. Via the coastal road, it was a mere three-hour journey to connect Accra to Cotonou, via Togo, and the opportunities for cultural exchange were enormous.

Like all major coastal ports, be it Conakry, Dakar, Abidjan and/or Douala, Cotonou was a ferment of many influences, American as well as European. Ghanaian and Nigerian records had found their way onto the turntables in bars, clubs and the homes of wealthy families from southern Benin. Although private record ownership was still embryonic at this stage, French *yéyés*, American rhythm'n'blues and Congolese rumba were also very popular.

In the 1960s and '70s, in the hedonistic atmosphere of the years prior to the revolution, an unprecedented musical effervescence seized the country. After the Afro-Cuban years, crazes for soul, funk and Afrobeat moved onto a higher plane. Dozens of bands, artists and labels were part of this unprecedented movement. Relative to its population, Benin was the most prolific African country in terms of record production, and the resulting musical melting pot remains unparalleled in Africa. Here are some of the highlights of the history of modern music of Benin.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN MUSIC IN BENIN

Influenced by what is happening in the Congo and Ghana, the first Beninese groups play as much Afro-Cuban and Caribbean music as rumba or highlife. The first Dahomean groups emerged in the early 1950s, including the Picoby Band d'Abomey in 1953, Mexicana Jazz de Ouidah – who would later be known as Super Star de Ouidah – or Alpha Jazz, one of the first professional bands in the country.

At the time, bands like Paul Behanzin et Son Ensemble, Théophile Aziassi et Son Groupe or Owowole Ajisé et Son Groupe would travel to the Philips studio in Lagos in order to cut the first Dahomean 78rpm records. Performed by Paul Behanzin, *Cholie* is already a piece of trance, a modernized folk song that would serve as an indicator of the frenzy to come. The songs are recorded mostly in the Fon language and, to a lesser extent, in Mina. Songs recorded in French were rare, as music was a means of emancipation from colonization.

Originally from the royal city of Abomey, the Picoby Band is one of the oldest groups in the country. Guitarist Nicolas Gomez joined the band in 1955 and became its band-leader. At the dawn of independence, the group was becoming more professional, with better instruments, and a friendly rivalry with the Renova Band, the other great historical band of Abomey, helped the group to climb the Beninese musical hierarchy.

Singer-songwriter Honoré Avolonto started his career with the group, as did Pierre Avohou. In 1965, the Picoby Band participated in the first Dahomean National Music Festival in Cotonou, an event based on the model of the 'National Weeks' of Guinea. The group would place third behind Annassoua Jazz de Parakou and the Renova Band.

To mark the occasion, a dozen four-track EPs are published by the Sonda label and they reflected the diversity of styles on display at the festival, mostly traditional folk songs, boleros, tangos and

rumbas. Three years later, the label Impressions Sonores du Bénin would come back to these recordings when it published a twenty EP collection offering a panorama of Dahomean musical production of the time. The sound was scratchy, as was the musicianship and singing, but all the influences were in place for the development of a quality popular music.

Echoing developments in Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Mali, each large city or prefecture had at least one modern group, whether in Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Parakou, Ouidah, Natitingou, Abomey or Bohicon. Nigerian labels like Badejo's Sound, Philips West Africa and Decca had already published records by National Jazz du Dahomey, Super Star, the Picoby Band and Black Dragons de Porto Novo. In the mid 1960s, the singer Sophie Edia was one of the first to spread the music of Dahomey outside the country's borders, starting with Nigeria.

She decided to start a career in music after hearing the Renova Band d'Abomey, led by William Basil Cakpo and saxophonist Nestor Hountondji. She convinced them to let her sing at the group's concerts, becoming the top female modern singer in Benin as part of the Renova Band d'Abomey. Subsequently, she recorded songs, including *Galunga*, accompanied by the Discafric Band, before founding her own band, Chameleon Sound.

The protest singer Gustave Gbenou Vikey was the first Dahomean artist to record in France, in 1965. After earning his stripes as a guitarist with Daho Jazz, he was spotted by talent scout Gilles Sala, and recorded some folk songs for Riviera, the African arm of the Barclay label, also home to Gnonnas Pedro. His album *Le chantre de la négritude et sa guitare africaine* was a huge hit, paying tribute to Kante Facelli of Ballets Africains, who was one of the first to introduce the acoustic guitar to the continent.

The romantic *Sur le lac Ahémé* would also bring him success, as well as the song *Vive les mariés!* in 1969. He was enormously popular

throughout West Africa and recorded many songs, most notably alongside the Poly-Rythmo orchestra with an eloquent tribute to Demba Camara of Bembeya Jazz in 1973. Like his Cameroonian contemporary Francis Bebey, he was a precursor of folk sung in French on the continent.

Considered one of the greatest modern singers in Benin, alongside Achille Johnny, Elias Akadiri was the author of a handful of singles released on the Impressions Sonores du Bénin label in the late 1960s, and was nicknamed “the young star with the warm voice”. Accompanied by the Sunny’s Black Band de Cotonou, who would go on to achieve fame as Poly-Rythmo, Akadiri coaxes the listener on *Owo lore*, an exquisite *boléro* sung in Yoruba, in the vein of treasures recorded a few years earlier by Franco & OK Jazz. The jerks sung in French such as *Mission spéciale*, *L’amour et la mort* or *L’enfance* indicate strong R & B influences, laying the foundations of Poly-Rythmo.

THE PIONEERS

The repertoire of these early bands was very civilized. Traditional folk songs, and the Cuban adaptations, blues, ballads, boleros and beguines were very popular, both with the orchestras and the general public dancing rumbas, *guaguancos*, cha-cha-cha and other *pachangas* in outdoor clubs in Porto-Novo and Cotonou such as the Playboy Club, owned by Theophile Do Rego, better known by the name of El Rego.

EL REGO & SES COMMANDOS

A veteran musician who learned his trade in Dakar and Niamey, and also as part of Harmonie Voltaïque in Ouagadougou, El Rego was one of the masters of modern music in Benin, as well as a canny show-business entrepreneur. A native of Porto Novo, where he was born in 1938, he would finally return there in 1961, after his years of musical training, to form Daho Jazz with GG Vikey before launching another group, Les Jets in 1963. The following year they renamed themselves Los Paras and then again Les Commandos in 1965, before finally settling on El Rego et ses Commandos in 1966. The group sometimes went under the name of Les Astronauts.

Les Commandos developed a repertoire of covers based on Caribbean, especially Cuban, classics, most notably recording *Errante y bohemio* by Arsenio Rodriguez. Maracas, clave, trumpet and searing vocals combined to produce an instant classic, without any artifice, just a natural affinity for this style of music.

The band adapted itself to all musical styles, from Afro-Cuban to rhythm'n'blues through *boléros*, pop music, Afrobeat or accordion music. El Rego rarely sang himself, preferring to surround himself with singers like Clement Do Rego, Honoré Avolonto, Ferry Djimmy, Charles Rodriguez, Cornaire Salifou and a handful of other performers who were trained in the ranks.

Sung by the Ghanaian Eddy Black Power, *Feeling You Got* established itself in 1969 as one of the first Beninese Afro-funk tracks. It was actually a cover of a song by the Super Eagles of Gambia, who were very popular along the West African coast at the time, especially in English-speaking countries. Similarly, in 1970, songs like *Dis-moi oui*, *Cholera* and *Hessa* ranked among the best of Afro-funk, hypnotic and glowing.



After a brief stint with Les Commandos, Ferry Djimmy was strongly influenced by the soul and funk incursions of Geraldo Pino et ses Heartbeats. Accompanied by his Dji-Kings, and with El Rego contributing a song, he published one solitary album in 1971 on his own label, Revolution Records. His group brought together Ivorian and Beninese musicians, marrying afrobeat, funk and sato.

Like his Congolese model, Franco, El Rego did not hesitate to sing when the situation required it, as on *Achuta* or *Zon dede*. Striking a relaxed tone, at the crossroads of acoustic afrobeat and *boléro*, *E na mian nuku* is one of the headline tracks of Beninese musical history. The clave, electric bass and saxophone of Michel Diogo infuse this song with the scent of eternity.

Furthermore, Afro-Cuban bands like El Rego et ses Commandos, Ignacio Blazio Osho & Orchestra Las Ondas, the house band at the Hotel Bel Air in Cotonou, and Gnonnas Pedro y Sus Panchos illustrated the explosive Afro-Cuban mixtures taking place at the time. Cuban artists like Orquesta Aragon, Celia Cruz and Johnny Pacheco all toured with great success in Benin and throughout the region.

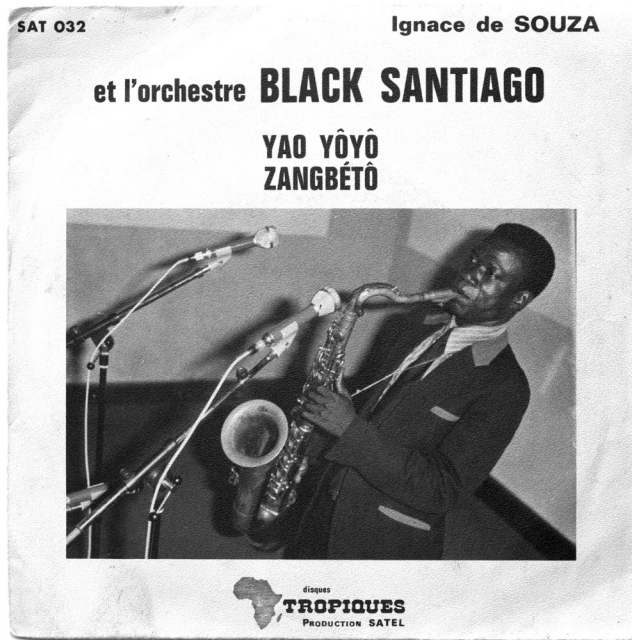
IGNACE DE SOUZA & BLACK SANTIAGO

Like Poly-Rythmo, Black Santiago has accompanied many Beninese artists and is a legend of Beninese modern music. Prolific in their recordings, the group was as comfortable playing the Afro-Cuban repertoire as Afro-beat, which Ignace de Souza helped invent the late 1960s, playing alongside the Nigerian saxophonist Fela Kuti.

A native of Cotonou, where he was born in 1937, Ignace de Souza began playing the saxophone at a very young age. The Nigerian trumpeter Zeal Onyia encouraged him to switch to the trumpet, which he did upon joining Alpha Jazz. In 1955, De Souza was in Ghana, where he joined the Spike Anyankor's Rhythm Aces, before launching his own group, the Shambros Band. He was only nineteen years old, and played a significant part in the explosion of the music scenes in Accra and Kumasi.

In 1962, he renamed the group Melody Aces. The success of the single *Paulina* allowed him to buy his own instruments, *sine qua non* for control over his destiny. A veteran of the highlife

scene, Ignace took on more calypso influences, rumba and twist, including the superb *Assaw fofor*, one of the most delicate tracks of the early 1960s. The Melody Aces were establishing themselves as one of the major groups around the Gulf of Guinea, notably winning great success in Nigeria with songs sung in Yoruba by Ani Johnson.



After playing in Lagos, De Souza invited a young saxophonist and his group, the Koolas Lobito, to come and play in Ghana. He and Fela Kuti would go on to teach each other a great deal, and from these musical exchanges, with the release of the single *Ole* by Black Santiago at the end of 1968, one of the first examples of a musical revolution in progress – Afrobeat.

After fifteen years in Ghana De Souza was forced to return to Dahomey, where he launched a new version of his group. From its base in Cotonou, the orchestra was able to spread its influence

to the surrounding countries, while supporting many visiting artists. Under contract with the Disques Tropiques label, Black Santiago published a series of classic albums from 1972, as well as numerous singles, including an incredible Afrobeat version of *Paulina*.

In the same vein, *Gbé o houzou* offered a brass-infused cover of Arsenio Rodriguez's classic, a kind of Latin Afrobeat. Written and sung by the young drummer Danialou Sagbohan, this piece was one of the highlights of Beninese music in the 70s. The next single, *Zangbeto*, was one of the first examples of the use of a modernized voodoo rhythm, a few months before the exploits of Poly-Rythmo in the same musical territory. Sung by Honoré Avolonto, *Dou Dagbè wè* illustrated the group's natural Afrobeat affinities, the languid trumpet and slowed percussion evoking a tropical eulogy rocked by ocean spray.

Over the 1970s, Ignace de Souza recorded two albums under his own name as Black Santiago accompanied many artists, including Joachim Boya, Pierre Avohou, Cicacy Mathey, Christophe Tahoué, Léon & Germain Keita from Mali, and Abdoulaye Cissé from Burkina Faso. However, the group went into decline in the 1980s, and resettled in Lagos, where Ignace de Souza died in a car accident in 1988.

OTHER REGIONAL GROUPS

Outside of the strong Afro-Cuban influences, Congolese rumba left a lasting mark in Dahomey. At the beginning of the decade, the visit of Franco's OK Jazz to the Palais des Congrès in Cotonou in 1962, and that of Brazzaville's Bantous de la Capitale the following year, inspired many Beninese to new vocations. Groups performing Ghanaian highlife plied up-and-down the coast, offering a musical apprenticeship to many musicians, including Ignace de Souza.

In the early 1960s, the rich local traditions, starting with the music of trance and voodoo ceremony, began to merge with the Afro-Cuban, Congolese rumba and highlife influences. In the north, Mandinka heritage played a strong role, associated with the influence of Franco, especially within Super Borgou de Parakou.

Contrary to what was happening in Mali and Guinea, the Dahomean state apparatus only gave very timid support to local bands, except the National Jazz of Dahomey, based in Porto-Novo, with no equivalent system of regular events or festivals such as the Guinean 'National Weeks' or Malian Biennales. Nevertheless, several festivals, starting with the 1965 Festival National and the Festival de la Douane in 1969 stimulated competition between the different groups. Most of them were from the south of the country, from Cotonou, Porto-Novo and Ouidah.

Riding on the back of the powerful Nigerian record industry, a Beninese record industry was born in the late 1960s. Most Beninese output at the time was pressed in Lagos. Labels like Discafric, Echos Sonores du Dahomey, Impressions Sonores du Bénin and Aux Ecoutes gave rise to an explosion of 45rpm singles. In 1970, the arrival of Albarika on the market, and the huge success of *Gbeti madjiro* by Poly-Rythmo created an extraordinary rivalry, ushering in a new era for Beninese music.

Bruno Apovo, the owner of the Discafric label, was the producer of Les Troubadours de Ouidah, who published a rare album in 1970, one of the first 33rpm EPs of the country. Apovo launched the careers of several orchestras, including the Sunny's Black Band, but also African Succès National from Porto-Novo. Led by Nestor Djikpo, the Discafric Band was able to distinguish itself by its ability to back many artists. Like all groups from Benin, the outfit was versatile and open to all musical fusions.

Super Star de Ouidah was one of the oldest groups in Dahomey and was led by guitarist Timothy Apovée. He played in the tradition

of Guinean guitarists, being both candid and subtle and never demonstrative, and he earned the nickname 'Guitar God'. Pascal Médagbè and Joseph Tao, nicknamed 'Honey' for the softness of his voice, were the two main singers of the group. They mostly produced covers of boleros, rumbas and biguines early on in their career. Gustave Benthò, who would find fame with Poly-Rythmo, learned his craft with the group. Super Star famously covered *Feeling You Got*, by the Super Eagles and popularized by El Rego et ses Commandos, on one of their most famous EPs.

Led by bassist Elias Winsa, the Troubadours de Ouidah recorded a handful of 45s, including *Je vais épouser cette fille*, a ballad of a romantic vein in vogue in the late 1960s, one of the first modern Beninese songs recorded in French. The influences of French *chanson* were still quite strong at the time. Up to 1973, French music was taught in schools and widely broadcast on the radio. From Charles Aznavour to *yéyé*, through Johnny Hallyday and Nino Ferrer, all the big names of 1960s French music were broadcast on Dahomey's Radio Nationale.

Hailing from the northeast of the country, Annassoua Jazz de Parakou was one of only a handful of bands from this region, alongside Super Borgou. Led by singer, guitarist and composer Alidou Boukary, the band published a dozen-or-so 45rpm records for different labels such as Impressions Sonores du Bénin, Albarika and Discafric, including *Un temps avec elle*, an amazing EP released in 1970. Sung in French, it was an explosive piece of Beninese garage rock, with its hypnotic rhythm, hyper-realistic lyrics and classic psychedelic guitar.

Led by guitarist Moussa Mama, Super Borgou de Parakou recorded a score of records that revisit the folk music of northern Benin with a twist of *jerk* and/or Afro-beat. Originally from the Borgou region, this group was one of the most intriguing in the country. Like many musicians throughout Africa, guitarist Moussa Mama Djima learned his trade by laboriously learning by ear from

records of Franco and OK Jazz in the early 1960s. He subsequently brought together young local musicians and taught them in turn. Based for a time in Niamey, Borgou established itself as a formidable dance group, mastering the dances and languages of the region. The stand-out track of their back catalog, *Congolaise Bénin ye*, was made in the Nigerien capital, where the band was playing at the Congolaise club, run by a Guinean man and his Vietnamese wife.

“Come! Come friends, brothers, sisters, come and dance!” urge Les Volcans du Bénin on *Oya ka jojo*. Released in 1980 and sung by Joël Lawani, one of the best Beninese *salseros*, it marks a high point in the band’s career as trumpet, trombone, snare drum and organ combine in unrestricted joy. As the National Orchestra of the Gendarmerie in Benin, based in Porto-Novo, Les Volcans were one of the most active groups in the late 1970s. Formed in 1962 as National Jazz du Dahomey, the band hosted dances set to Afro-Cuban rhythms around Porto-Novo throughout the 60s.

It was not until 1973 that the group started to expand, both in terms of musicians and instruments. Les Volcans recorded their first two singles in 1974. Combining pachanga and blues, the group demonstrated incredible versatility, especially around Cuban compositions. Singers Joseph Lawani, Julien Da Costa and drummer Marcellin Kpohonou are the pillars of the group.

These songs preceded the release of a handful of albums under their own name and also as the backing group for many artists, of which perhaps the best known were Cyrille Amade, Thierry Boco and some others. Back from Cuba, the young singer Thierry Boco enlisted the services of Les Volcans de la Capitale, one of the best Afro-Cuban groups in the country. Published in 1980, *Medewui* appeared out of the blue with the airs of a forgotten classic, combining Boco’s elastic voice, velvety Afro-Cuban rhythms, enticing brass and ribald synthesizers. “Be careful what you do” he advises listeners as the song soared high into the blue skies

over the Gulf of Guinea. Toffo Housso Miguelito would also take Les Volcans de la Capitale as his backing band for an album he released in 1980, an homage to the Dragons football team.

Led by Nestor Hountondji, the Black Dragons were named after the football team Les Dragons de l'Ouémé, a region in southeast Benin. A veteran of modern Beninese music and the gendarmerie orchestra, Hountondji played with the Daho-Melo group and then the National Jazz du Dahomey in the 1960s. A native of Abomey, Nestor Hountondji emerged as one of the pillars of modern Beninese music.

He started out with the Daho-Melo band and then moved onto National Jazz, before joining the Renova Band d'Abomey. At the beginning of the next decade, he published some singles and EPs with the Black Dragons on the Albarika label. Some of these tracks are at the crossroads of jerk and soul. Nestor Houtondji then launched Les Perles Noires, then Les Sympathics de Porto Novo. Next he formed Les Axes 80, before launching a solo career.

Les Sympathics were one of the many Beninese bands in the 1970s who wrote, in their own way, the history of popular music in the country, in the face of the world's indifference. Founded in 1972 by bassist Herman Laleye, former band-leader of Les Black Dragons de Porto-Novo, the Sympathics recorded four albums and a handful of singles, all released on Albarika Records, including the sublime *Afrika*.

Their first album is a classic. The sublime *Benin* is a passionate ode to their country and stands as one of the great moments of modern African music. Almost weightlessly, the rhythm section of Lalèyè brothers, Herman on bass and his brother Marc on drums, supports the vocals of Gangbo Bonheur and the choruses of Lalèyè and Jean-Louis Avognon. Calm-yet-full, this piece seems to capture the musical soul of Benin, in the space of six minutes of absolute beauty – a musical epiphany. The guitar of Armand

Pognon flirts with the blues as the organ of Camille Zanou brings hypnotic overtures to the track.

Unlike most Beninese productions of the time, this disc avoids incursions into afrobeat, afro funk or Afro-Cuban styles. Taking up one whole side of the record, *Femmes africaines* is a pure piece of soukous dance, of the style being recorded in Congo and Ivory Coast. In a little over sixteen minutes, the group painted an eloquent picture of feminine virtues.

The lead guitarist Pognon brought his unique style to bear on *E sin nin*, an alert and inspired piece of Beninese pop sung in Mina, set to a tearful synthesizer. Nothing is more expressive than the intensity of his gaze in the cover photograph taken in a studio in Porto-Novo. The *joie de vivre* and amazing talent in these three compositions were a great breath of fresh air from the Sympathics. Their second album saw them explore Yoruba and English sounds. Whilst continuing his musical activities, Herman Layèlè became a voodoo cult leader in Porto-Novo.

**THE TOUT-PUISSANT ORCHESTRE
POLY-RYTHMO DE COTOLOU**

As the creators of a unique and fascinating sound, the Poly-Rythmo is one of the greatest African ensembles, for whom poly-rhythmic music was not an empty concept. With hundreds of recordings, the band is one of the most prolific on the continent, alongside the Congolese OK Jazz, its only possible rival in terms of numbers of releases.

The Tout Puissant Orchestre de Cotonou was influenced by music from Ghana and Nigeria, as well as by traditional Beninese music like Sato. The first version of the band was founded in 1966 under the leadership of guitarist Mélomé Clément, singers Lohento Eskill and Joseph 'Vicky' Amenoudji, drummer François Houessou and percussionist Nestor Soumassou. These musicians formed the Sunny Black's Band of Cotonou. This versatile band covered pop and latino standards in various dance halls around Cotonou, most notably the Canne à Sucre.

The members of Sunny Black's Band decided to stand on their own two feet and form a new band. They were then joined by guitarist and organist Bernard 'Papillon' Zoundegnon and rhythm guitarist Maximus Adjadohoun. Vocalist Vincent Ahehehinnou, drummer Leopold Yehouessi, bassist Gustave Benthó, tenor saxophonist Peter Loko, percussionist Mathurin D'Almeida, trumpeter Cosme Cakpo and a handful of other musicians rounded out the line up.

The set was structured around American R&B influences, Nigerian Afrobeat, Congolese Rumba and Ghanaian High-Life, but also French pop and Afro-Cuban rhythms. The owner of the Poly-Disco record shop bought them a set of instruments and wanted the group to be renamed Poly-Orchestra or El Ritmo to advertise his shop. Mélomé Clément finally settled on Poly-Rythmo, in reference to the wide variety of rhythms mastered and used by the band.

In their lyrics the band spoke as easily of the evolution of Beninese society and its flaws as of the complexity of relationships. Despite

fierce competition from other bands on the teeming music scene of the time, Poly-Rythmo quickly rose to become one of the leading modern bands in Benin.

Poly-Rythmo gradually began to find some stability by focusing most of its production on one label, and not hesitating to re-record some of their songs. In 1973, Seydou Adissa became the new patron of the orchestra. The owner of a record store, Albarika, he provided the new instruments that were vital to the success of any African band.

T P ORCHESTRE POLY RYTHMO ZOUNDEGNON
DE COTONOU-REP POP DU BENIN GUITARISTE PRINCIPAL
trop parler cest maladie. debrouiller nest pas voler

 MELOME CLEMENT CHANTEUR COMPOSITEUR	 ZOUNDEGNON BERNARD PAPILLON-GUITARE SOLO ORGUE	 BENTHIO GUSTAVE GUITARE BASS	 YEHOUESSI LEOPOLD BATTERIE
 LOHINTO ESKILL VOCAL	 AMENOUIDI JOSEPH VICKY VOCAL	 AGREMADON PAUL GABO VOCAL	 LOKO PIERRE SAXOPHONO
 HERASSI KONI SAXO ALTO/TROMPETTE	 ADJANGHOUN MAXIMUS GUITARE ACCOMPAGNEMENT	 KOUTOUAN OSSEY THEODORE TROMPETTE	 GAKPO COSME TROMPETTE

ALBARIKA STORES

Lagos - 115 Alifrago Marina Street Ikot-Ero Lagos Nigeria
 ABIDJAN - BP 10478 Tel 325217 Av 16 Rue 22B Treichville Abidjan RCI
 COTONOU - BP 1067 Tel 315660 Carre 590 Boulevard St Michel Cotonou Benin
 PORTO NOVO - Rue Lacour BP 129 Tel 212053-212520 Porto-Novo Benin
 PARAKOU - Succursale Face Grande C. 1000m Tel 51225 Parakou Benin

D'AMEIDA
MATHURIN
CONGAS



He also bought costumes and vehicles, in exchange for the rights to release their records, which would be pressed in Lagos and appear with the famous yellow Albarika logo. Under Adissa's aegis, Poly-Rythmo began recording at EMI studios in Lagos, where they released their first 45 rpm record for Albarika in 1970. This master stroke defined the sound of Poly-Rythmo for

the coming years while revolutionizing Beninese music, leading towards a form of supreme voodoo funk.

Sung in Fon by Lohento Eskill and written by Mélomé Clément, Gbeti madjiro won massive acclaim throughout West Africa, especially in Nigeria and Benin, thanks to Albarika's ambitious distribution strategy. In addition to its headquarters in Lagos, Albarika also had branches in Cotonou, Porto Novo, Parakou and even in Abidjan.

Ground Zero for local musicians, the EMI studio in Lagos was one of the best around at the time and a hive of extraordinary activity. The rich and dynamic sound of the band was greatly influenced by the Afrobeat sounds that pulsed throughout Lagos at the time. At the beginning of the decade, Poly-Rythmo was thus right at the heart of this emerging musical revolution, which would provide a seemingly endless source of inspiration.

One of the best assets of the band was its killer groove, played by musicians with no complexes in relation to their African neighbors or American cousins. One of Poly-Rythmo's great successes was to have created a confluence between African traditional rhythms and external influences, sometimes mixing them, other times dissociating them.

Freed from all constraints, the band took on the Ghanaian and Nigerian acts. Some songs, such as the irrepressible *Mi kpon bo do*, *A non zoun mi* or *Gendamou na will we gannin* are perfect examples of Poly-Rythmo's subtle, yet ferocious, groove. The professional studio sound added a new dimension to the group's recordings, freshly renamed Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de l'Atlantique in 1973.

Songs like the delirious and cosmic *Les djos*, sung by Bluecky D'Almeida, *Medida*, sung by Sébastien Pynasco, *Houe djein na da* and *Mi si ba to* by Eskill Lohento combine to create an irresistible catalogue of pure groove. The band excelled in creating funk

and soul interpretations, both in vocal performance and in the free use of rhythm and interpretation. The local Fon language blended perfectly with their arrangements.

Poly-Rythmo's output was so prolific at times that they had to spread releases around small local labels such as Disques Tropiques, Echos du Terroir, Daho Disco Ambiance, Graitadisc or Echos du Dahomey/Echos Sonores du Bénin, and sometimes even abroad via the Musette de Niamey – a label and record store for Beninese music in Niger – or Badmos in Abidjan. This prolific production was mostly released as 45rpm singles, at a time when that format was becoming accessible throughout West Africa.

The band released a series of fundamental 45rpm records on the Affisoulai Lawani label, Aux Ecoutes, one of the leading record importers in Benin. Sung in Fon by Lohento Eskill, the jerk track *Akue we non houme* defined the Afro-funk direction of the group. Vicky tried his hand at slow dance tracks on *Asu we honton*, a mixture of influences ranging from French to Anglo-Saxon pop and rock (*Ma savo home*). Congolese soukous (*Kunu ho dié*) and Afrobeat (*Zoun mi bo ; Ahou gan mi an* or *Nougbo vêhou*) are also featured. The group also recorded a pachanga version of one of its early classics, *Gendarme si wé*. Folk songs, High-Life sung by Vicky in the Mina language, slow dances, rock, and biguines sung by Nestor Somassou round out the wide musical panorama embraced by the orchestra.

In 1972, the regime change and the arrival of Mathieu Kérékou to power put an end to the apparent insouciance that pervaded Dahomey during the early years of independence. Poly-Rythmo became – almost unwillingly – the quasi-official orchestra of this revolution, recording several songs of praise for the CNR. In 1973, the Satel record pressing plant opened in Cotonou, with its own label, Disques Tropiques, sparking an incredible dynamic and making Cotonou one of the capitals of the African recording world. Poly-Rythmo recorded many 45s there, including the

classic *Mi homlan dadalé*, with its terribly effective syncopated sound.

On the first album of the band released in 1973, singer Vincent Ahehehinnou delivered a spirited performance, strongly influenced by James Brown but also by Fela. He brought soul and funk intonations to Poly-Rythmo. At the same time, sung in Mina, the single *Y'a pas moyen* stands out as an awesome Afrobeat track. On the B side, *Dans les ténèbres* borrows its chords from the blues and borrows its tension from rock, with a persistent organ, and sentimental yet never mawkish lyrics sung in French.

Danialou Sagbohan was one of the pioneers of the modernization of sato, a rhythm traditionally associated with voodoo rites, which formed an important part of the local repertoire. Mélomé Clément and Poly-Rythmo released an album named *Le sato* in 1974. Other traditional dances and rhythms such as agbadja were also modernized by the orchestra and other pioneers of Beninese music such as Gnonnas Pedro.

Encouraged by its first successes, the orchestra then added the prefix Tout Puissant (Almighty) to its name, in tribute to the Tout Puissant OK Jazz congolais. In 1976, wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Year 1 of the Revolution" on two albums sleeves, Poly-Rythmo released its first volume on the Albarika label. Paul Gabo a.k.a. Brown and Danialou Sagbohan stand out on *Gbeta vivi*, *Toe nam toe nam*, and *Dety motema* is sung in Lingala by Brazzaville performer Théo Blaise Kounkou. These three songs are the big dance tracks of the album.

The second volume shows the thirteen members of the band walking, enthusiastic and dashing, in the streets of Cotonou. A perfect illustration of the band's groove, with the addition of a synthesizer, played by Papillon, *Ma won ye o* shows the heights reached by the ensemble, led by Eskill's singing. The synthesizer is also the star of the formidable *Houe towé houn*, one of the best

Beninese groove tracks of the decade, which the orchestra would re-record many times.

In 1976, Malian saxophonist Tidiani Koné was recruited to the orchestra. A former conductor of the Rail Band of Bamako, Koné arrived from Lagos, where he had worked for several months with Fela following a triumphant tour with the Rail Band in July 1975. Disillusioned with his work with Fela, Koné invested all he had in Poly-Rythmo, and in just a few weeks became the new star attraction. He brought a cohesion and rigour that the band had previously lacked, as well as a sense of lyricism largely borrowed from Mandinka culture.

Together they recorded several sumptuous albums. Their highlight remains *Djanfa magni* (*Betrayal of love is not good*), an Afrobeat reinterpretation of a Mandinka classic, which had famously been recorded by the Orchestre National A du Mali in 1970, but also by the Tiwara Band of Kati, Bembeya Jazz and several other artists in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Spurred on by Koné, this ten-minute song is an incandescent, hypnotic jam, existing outside of all space & time. Trumpets and saxophones join forces in perfect harmony, punctuated by interjections from the keyboard, a joust that ranks among the best moments of the orchestra.

In January and February 1977, Koné and Tout Puissant Poly-Rythmo represented Benin at the Festac in Lagos. In the company of the Super Borgou of Parakou and of the Picoby Band of Abomey, they formed the short-lived Orchestre National du Bénin. Mélomé Clément is the president of the orchestra and Moussa Mama Djimma du Borgou, its conductor. For the occasion they recorded the candid *Special Festac 77*. In addition to the saxophone, Koné also played trumpet on this record as the band stood out as a tightly knit ensemble.

On the following record, Bernard 'Papillon' Zoudegnon is in the spotlight on the sentimental *Chérie coco* and on the very efficient melody of *Mille fois merci*, one of the group's greatest hits. These two tracks are featured on one of the most popular albums released by Poly-Rythmo, released under the reference *ALS 038*.

The album *Spécial 30 Novembre* pays a strong tribute to the Kérékou revolution, especially on the title track, which celebrates this historic date of the new People's Republic of Benin with its direct, bouncy groove. In an even more dynamic vein *Loterie nationale* deploys a fantastic back and forth between the guitars of Papillon and Maximus Adjanohoun.

On the B side the twenty minute long *Mede ma gnin messe* shows remarkable fire-power. Flexible yet powerful, Poly-Rythmo's music now used vocals as punctuation for the unstoppable drive of their rhythms. Going beyond simple Afrobeat and rhythm'n'blues influences, the orchestra surfed on the wave of its own unique sound.

In a similar vein, *Davi djinto super no 2* highlighted not only the drumming talents, but also the lyrical power of Léopold Yehouessi, and the track remains one of Poly-Rythmo's enduring hits to this day. On the B side, organic and implacable, *Aiha ni kpe we* is a testament to the finest hours of the orchestra. The musicians played harder, with some flights of brass on a subtle rhythmic canvas, the key to the success of many a track.

Tout Puissant Poly-Rythmo's striking rhythms were carried along on the magical guitar of Papillon, who also played the organ, and the hypnotic drums of Léopold, one of the best drummers on the continent, as can be heard on the masterful *Avoun Doupou Me Douga*. 'Papillon' laid tight and pointed melodies over already tight rhythms, blending Nigerian Afrobeat, Ghanaian High-Life and American funk, with a soupçon of Afro-Cuban, jazz and rumba influences.

Now a democratic orchestra serving the Beninese revolution, TP Poly-Rythmo reached a rare fullness. Albums were published on a regular basis, showcasing the talent of most of the big names of the band. Always relaxed, be it on the sleeve art or in his soft singing, Lohento Eskill, the lead singer of the band, shines on the number one hit *Agbaza mimin*, served by the rounded and voluble bass guitar of Gustave Benthó. On the B side, *Djo mi do* quickly turns into a generic track despite Eskill's vocal efforts.

On songs such as *Unité africaine*, *Jolie beauté africaine* or *Afrique Afrique*, Poly-Rythmo celebrated the continent that they now travelled regularly. The soppy slow-dance track *Afrique Afrique* appeared on the next album, featuring saxophonist Loko Pierre. The six compositions contained within this album made it one of the more homogeneous recordings released by the orchestra. Harking back to Afro-Cuban roots, every moment of *Passi* is a wonder of refinement. The atmospheric *Super yao bebenon* allows the band to bring the tension back down a notch, before launching into frenzied dance floor jolts with *Ye wele yao*.

Guitarist Papillon is in the spotlight on volume 5, where he can be seen sitting at the entrance of the Hotel Beau Rivage in Porto Novo. The bouncy track *Trop parler c'est maladie* – a number one in the Beninese charts – announces a kind of generic zouk with indigent lyrics and a close knit orchestra, yet sorely lacks emotion. The B side, *Débrouiller n'est pas voler*, is even more disappointing. In contrast, on volume 7, Papillon soars with his guitar, reaching for perfection on *Blues ya de*, one of the greatest tracks released by Poly-Rythmo at that time.

In the late 1970s, Poly-Rythmo often travelled to Côte d'Ivoire. Out there they recorded ten or so 45s for the Badmos label. In a jerk style, *Hin huidé glin*, composed by Mélomé Clément, reveals new heights, not to mention the superb *Boyi kaka*, another composition by Mélomé Clément. In this series, Gilbert Dossou, better known as Prince Dgib's, also records *Salowa* with the band,

where the Yoruba “*talking drums*” can be heard.

By the mid-1970s, Poly-Rythmo toured throughout the subcontinent. It became one of the most prominent ensembles in the region. For some ten years it was a key player on the local scene. A majority of Beninese artists were accompanied at one point or another in their careers by Poly-Rythmo, including Stanislas Tohon, Assa Cica, Danialou Sagbohan, Germaine Jourias, Joachim Boya and many others, as well as the young Angélique Kidjo, who recorded her first tracks with the orchestra in 1980.

A composer and Voodoo initiate, Antoine Dougbè was accompanied by Poly-Rythmo on three classic albums, which are amongst the jewels of the rich Beninese discography. As a voodoo priest, he could not sing profanely. He therefore surrounded himself with some of the most beautiful voices of Benin. Whether Bylledey Guissey, Miguelito or Lohento Eskill, singers flock to sing his songs.

Poly-Rythmo performed with Cameroonians Manu Dibango, when in Benin, Yiegn’s Cabrel a.k.a. Radio Moustique, Bébé Manga and Pierre Tchana for a cover of *Doni doni*, a Bembeya Jazz song from Guinea turned into *Il n’est jamais trop tard* in its Beninese version. This record illustrates the wide range of influences of the group. Among many others, Burkinabe singer Kaboré Oger on *Les vacances*, as well as Ivorians Aïcha Koné or Ernesto Djedjé are also accompanied by the orchestra during their visits to Benin. The reputation of Poly-Rythmo crosses borders.

In 1979, the band cut a record in homage to their neighbouring country, - *One Nigeria*, a French and English composition by Mélomé Clement. The B side features a bland reggae serenade to the glory of Togolese President Eyadéma. With its introduction largely inspired by *La condition masculine* by Francis Bebey, *Jalousie* addresses lighter themes in a style typical of Poly-Rythmo, with inter-weaving guitars and a compellingly hip-swinging rhythm.

In 1980, Vicky and Eskill released under their own names and album entitled *152 kg de voix* where the hypnotic *Ecoute ma mélodie* can be heard. In the process, Vicky Amenoudji launched her solo career with a handful of albums and with the orchestra as a her backing band. Synthesizers started taking precedence over the overall consistency of the band. Production no longer did justice to the organic cohesion of the past.

In 1981, continuing in a reggae vein, *Siyen bangbetome*, written and sung by Mélomé Clément, reflects the versatile talents of the orchestra. On the B side, vocalist Paul Gabo sings on the hypnotic *Gazzo agueche* set to parade whistles, while Yéhouessi tiptoes back with the very Latin *Yemalin*, also sung in French. This album is one of the last of the orchestra featuring its star guitarist and drummer.

In 1982, the loss of guitarist Papillon, followed by that of drummer Leopold sounded a momentary death knell for the ambitions of the orchestra. Yet it managed to survive somehow over the following decades. However it was not until 2008 that Poly-Rythmo reformed around Mélomé Clément, Gustave Benthó and a dozen of its original members thanks to the machinations of French journalist Elodie Maillot who became their manager.

During the years 2009 and 2010, the orchestra travelled the world, visiting Europe, Japan and North America, and also a large part of the sub-region. In March 2011, they released the surprising *Cotonou Club* on Strut Records, an amazing album that revived the incredible groove of the golden age of Poly-Rythmo, with some exceptional collaborations, especially with oblique Scottish rockers Franz Ferdinand. More than forty years after its foundation, Poly-Rythmo bravely embarked upon its fifth decade of activity. Alongside the Orchestra Baobab of Senegal or the Guinean Bembeya Jazz, Poly-Rythmo is now one of the oldest African orchestras still performing.

BENIŃESE STARS

HONORÉ AVOLONTO

One of the most versatile and talented artists in Benin, Honoré Avolonto passed through all the major orchestras in the country, from the Volcans to the Commandos, via Poly-Rythmo and Black Santiago, yet he never started his own outfit. Having grown up listening to High-Life, he quickly mastered every musical trend of the 1960s, before starting his musical career with the Picoby Band of Abomey, where he honed his skills. After recording a few singles with Poly-Rythmo, he joined Ignace de Souza's Black Santiago, with whom he released his first album under the name *Honoré Avolonto & Black Santiago*.

He released four more albums. In 1981, he recorded *La mort n'a pas de date fixe*, where he shone with *Na mi do gbe hue nu*, a dazzling afrobeat track. Two years later, he came back with *Tin lin non*, a new and remarkable afrobeat track performed with Poly-Rythmo but with Sagbohan Danialou on the drums as a replacement for Léopold Yehouessi, who had just died. The spirit was still there, even though the chemistry of the great years of Poly-Rythmo was already waning and the rhythm fleeing.

SAGBOHAN DANIALOU

A self-taught genius drummer, Sagbohan Danialou first started playing with the Dji-Kins of Ferry Djimmy before joining Black Santiago, with whom he played for several months in 1971 in Lagos with Fela Kuti. During that time Black Santiago released Afrobeat titles such as *Paulina* and *Dou Dagbè Wè*. Sagbohan was one of the first artists in Benin to play Sato, a name which includes all modernized voodoo rhythms. He recorded *Sangbeto* with the Black Santiago. In 1975 he launched his solo career, accompanied by Poly-Rythmo, on his first 45rpm record produced on Albarika. During the same period, he also recorded with Les Astronautes, an ensemble led by El Rego.

STANISLAS TOHON

During the 1970s, **Stanislas Tohon** modernized the traditional *tchinkoumé* rhythm by infusing it with rhythm'n'blues and soukous influences. He turned it into a modern dance and adopted an orchestra with new instruments, synthesizers and drum machines. His biggest hit was *Tchink System*, which made him a star not only in his own country, but also in neighbouring Togo and Burkina Faso. However, like many musicians, the impact of the curfew on local night-life forced him into exile. Thus Nel Oliver fled to France where he performed in a modernist funk style. Back in Cotonou, when electoral pluralism was restored in the late 1980s, he became the lead performer for a new generation of artists.

MIGAN CÉLESTIN

A virtuoso guitarist, **Migan Célestin** played with Poly-Rythmo's Papillon, who was one of his disciples. As band-leader for the Commandos de Cotonou, who accompany El Rego, he is nicknamed Mig-Tino. After the dissolution of this ensemble he founded the Supermen. He released a handful of albums, including *Wonderful of Africa* featuring the ballad *Agbeyame*. He also joined Danialou Sagbohan in the Orchestre de la Banque Commerciale du Bénin. Singers Bluecky D'Almeida and Roger Tchaou also played with the group. The B.C.B. band was created in 1976 during the curfew. He also performed with a group called Les Vodun for one single entitled *On ne se marie pas n'importe comment*.

GNONNAS PEDRO

Nicknamed “*the baobab of Beninese music*”, **Gnonnas Pedro** is the biggest star in Benin. Pierre Sousou Gnonnas Kwasivi was born in Cotonou on 10 January 1943. As a teenager on the eve of independence, he listened to French and Afro-Cuban songs and Congolese rumba. The euphoria of the years of independence was set to music by bands influenced by the Ghanaian dance bands who played in every major city in the Gulf of Benin, from Nigeria to Liberia. French *yéyés* and Congolese rumba were also very popular.

Inspired by Cuban music and El Rego and his Commandos, Gnonnas Pedro formed his own band called the Panchos, with whom he released three EPs on Riviera. In the late 1960s, he also listened to a lot of rhythm’n’blues and music from Ghana or Nigeria. Alert to outside musical trends, Gnonnas Pedro performed under the name Gnonnas Pedro & His Dadjès Band, with whom he developed an eclectic repertoire that combined covers of the hits of the time, pop songs and traditional rhythms. He had no hesitation in mixing the three major regional languages: Fon, Mina and Yoruba in the same song.

With roots in Lokossa, in the Mono region, he modernised the agbadja rhythm. With percussion as its base, this rhythm was originally associated with funerals. But Gnonnas integrated it to other influences and turned it into a real trademark that can be heard from one album to the next. He first recorded *Dadjè Von O Von Non* in 1966, a song that he would revisit many times throughout his career.

Pedro made the agbadja style popular; the name is derived from drums played in his native Mono region, and he combined it with Afro-Cuban influences. This style became the rhythmic foundation for his music, so much so that people refer to Agbadja beat when talking about his music. He performed throughout the region, becoming famous in Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

In the 1970s he was accompanied by the Dadjès Band, with whom he recorded fifteen albums released in Benin, Nigeria, France and Ghana. A cover of a Silvestre Mendez song, the classic *Yiri yiri boum* easily became a veritable pan-african hit in the early 1980s. In the same style and on the same album *El cochechivo* is one of his best Afro-Latin productions. Recorded in 1980, this song displays a vocal refinement that is served to perfection.

He also founded his own record label and studio, named Gnoinsope ("the source of goodness" in Mina). The album "*Africa tei Cuba*" clearly indicates where his influences lie, straddling several Atlantic cultures, especially relying on Latin music. Like many of his songs, this record was produced in a Lagos studio. *Africa tei Cuba*, *Cicibilici* and *Manzanillo*, a cover of a Benny Moré standard, are amongst the jewels of African salsa.

Flexible and versatile, his voice works wonders throughout the five compositions. Taïga and Juliento provide back-up vocals and the rhythm is exceptionally slick. His brothers, Pablo on the saxophone and Mathieu on the bass, support him perfectly. Even the hilarious *Hommage aux douaniers*, with its inane lyrics in French and its 1970s French pop slow-dance tune, has a form of indescribable charm. In addition to his many recordings, Pedro also produced Beninese artists such as Joel Lawani, who performed in an Afro-Cuban style.

A few years later, *Etro coco masawouinné* was another of his own productions on Gnoinsope. In it he denounced a worsening situation: "*Some leaders have sold Africa. You, brother, sister, wake up and ask yourself every day what you did for the revolution*". This was clearly a reference to his country as it began to disintegrate in a "Laxism-Beninism" that was casual to say the least.

His passion for Afro-Cuban music and salsa was rewarded in the finest way in 1996 when he became the lead singer of Africando, the great Afro-Cuban project of producer Ibrahima Sylla, replacing

Senegalese vocalist Pape Seck. There Gnonnas Pedro found a dream setting for his voice and aspirations and performed with as part of the band for some ten years before his death on 12 August 2004.

GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL STYLES:

AFROBEAT : Born between Nigeria and Ghana in the late 1960s, Afrobeat is at the crossroads of jazz, funk and Yoruba percussion. It is as much a product of saxophonist Fela Kuti's creation as of his drummer's Tony Allen or of trumpeter Ignace de Souza. A hypnotic style, Afrobeat introduced, in addition to rhythmic radicalism, a discourse that was often political, a genuine raised fist of activist African music.

AGBADJA : Gnonsas Pedro made the agbadja popular – it takes its name from a drum of the Mono region, in West Benin, and is combined with his Afro-Cuban influences. This style became the rhythmic foundation of his music, so much so that his style was referred to as *agbadja beat*.

BOLERO : Although it started out as an eighteenth-century Spanish court dance, the Bolero as it came to Africa originated for the most part from Oriente province. It refers to a slow, often introspective dance. Congolese musicians, starting with Franco's OK Jazz would popularize this style throughout Africa, especially in Benin and Burkina Faso.

CAVACHA : Halfway between Congolese rumbas and soukous, the Cavacha rhythm came to prominence in the mid-1970s as one of the fashionable dances that Beninese and Ivorian people would excel at. Created in 1971 by the Zaïko Langa Langa band, this hectic rhythm derives its origin from the sound of a train, played with emphasis on a cymbal or snare drum.

HIGH-LIFE : During the 1940s, High-Life took shape in Ghana with bands that were influenced by American jazz, calypso and colonial brass bands, not to mention Ashanti rhythms. During the following decade artists like ET Mensah & His Tempos, the Ramblers and others would popularize this style to make it one of the most fashionable modern styles on the continent.

JERK : In early 1965, a Los Angeles trio called The Larks launched a new dance that would prove long-lasting. It was literally based on dancing “like a jerk”. Jerk was soon associated – in France anyway – with fast rhythm’n’blues songs that made people dance. In Benin, the term referred to any and all fast songs, funk or related styles.

RUMBA : This musical style was born on both banks of the Congo River in the late 1940s. It combines Afro-Cuban influences with electric guitars and the natural flow of Lingala as a re-appropriation of a dance that originally came from Africa. Through Radio Leopoldville and ensembles such as the OK Jazz, African Jazz, African Fiesta or Les Bantous, Congolese rumba would spread throughout Africa.

SATO : This traditional voodoo ceremony rhythm was revived and adapted to modern times by musicians such as Mélomé Clément and Danialou Sagbohan. Sato is a generic term that includes all modernized voodoo rhythms, which often belong both to Funk and Afrobeat.

TCHINKOUMÉ : This funeral music was originally played with water-filled drums. In modern times – at the end of the 1970s – the Tchinkoumé was popularized by Tohon Stanislas and the famous Tchink Système that would become his trademark.

LIST OF THE MAJOR BENINESE BANDS: Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou, Picoby Band d'Abomey, Messagers de Porto-Novo, Super Jheevs des Paillotes de Bohicon, Alpha Jazz, Discafric Band, Black Santiago, Super Borgou de Parakou, National Jazz du Dahomey, Commandos de Cotonou, Renova Band d'Abomey, Volcans de la Capitale, Mongols de Cotonou, Astronautes, Superstar de Ouidah, Picoby Band d'Abomey, Black Dragons de Porto-Novo, Annassoua Jazz de Parakou, Sympathics de Porto-Novo, Perles Noires du Bénin, Sunny's Black Band de Cotonou, African Succès National de Porto-Novo, Troubadours de Ouidah, Les Vodun, Diamant Noir de Bohicon, Kings de Porto-Novo, Orchestre Electro-Succès de Cotonou, National Jazz du Bénin, Essogbè de Porto-Novo, Grands Génies, Black Fingers de Cotonou, Elytes de Cotonou, Daho-Stars, Nérose Rhythm, Supermen de Cotonou, Dynharmonie de Cotonou, Les Cotonois, Orchestra Las Ondas, Les Panchos, Les Dadjès, Négro Jazz de Cotonou, Jazz Spot, Daho Jazz, Les As du Bénin, Vétéran Jazz, Aziza Joymakers de Porto-Novo, Les Axes 80, Génies de Cotonou, Beluce Jazz Band, Anos Band de Parakou, Echos du Zou, Los Bomberos, Superstars de Cotonou, Alafia Jazz, Orchestre de la BCB, le Jam Star, Precious Stones.

LIST OF THE MAJOR BENINESE ARTISTS: El Rego, Gnonnas Pedro, G.G. Vickey, Achille Johnny, Behanzin Paulin, Ambroise D'Almeida, Joseph Tao, Billedey Guissey, Sagbohan Danialou, Stanislas Tohon, Sophie Edia, Elias Akadiri, Akpla Ballo Simon, Pierre Avohou, Thierry Boco, Nestor Loko, Nestor Soumassou, Gabriel Apovo, Migan Célestin, Toffo Hossou Miguelito, Joachim Boya, Ouinsou Corneille, Babiao Agbandou, Pablo Medetadji, Nestor Hountondji, Ferry Djimmy, Clément Do Rego, Vicky, Bluecky D'Almeida, Pierre Loko, Lohento Eskill, Honoré Avolonto, Fak, Allognon Degbevi, Mélomé Clément, Pascal Médagbè, André Lokonon, Gabo Brown, Vincent Ahehehinou, Antoine Dougbè, Toité Sandja, Assa Cica, Lucas Touleassi, Parfait Gneza, Kpochan Pierrot, Yien's Cabrel, Sena Joi Jelia, Athanase Akpovi, Adolphe Yelouassi, Johnny Ahoosi, Coffin's, Ignace de Souza, Guenshi

Ever, Vicky Joseph Amenoudji, Ometh & Louisana T., Cornaire Salifou Michel, Charles Rodriguez, Aristide Hounwannou, Thomas Codo, Jimmy Pop, Prince Dgibs, Cyrille Amade, Angélique Kidjo, Sébastien 'Pynasco' Ahouangnimon, El-Em Fanaja.

LIST OF THE MAJOR BENINESE LABELS: Albarika, Disques Tropicque, Graitadisc, Echos Sonores du Dahomey, Aux Ecoutes, La musette de Niamey, Daho-Disco, Discafric, Sonda, Impressions Sonores du Bénin, Studio Gnoinsope, Echo d'Afrique, Voix Africaine, Editions Les Collines, Editions Boyess, Editions Ouinsou, Agbandou, Palais du Disque, Etoile Noire, Echos du Terroir, Disques BSA, International Radisco, Afro-Disco, Editions Hounkpevi, Editions Le Mono, EMEC, Revolution Records, Poly-Disco, Disques Sachey, International Records, Etablissements des Lyriques, Le Caméléon, Disques Kahn, Nesto Disco, Pita Disco Sound, Sema, Editions Bénin en marche, Discadam, Dieu Merci, Editions Ehue, Editions Djimbare, Echos du Bénin, Daho-Disco Ambiance, Melo-Disco, Les Editions Camou, Super Disco, Columbia, Vox-Star, Jer-nob International, Disque Africa, Editions Son d'Afrique, Editions Tchaaga, Echos Sonores du Bénin, Dekawowo, Etape du Voyageur.

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