

hop we



To visit London and catch the Titanic exhibition at the O₂ arena. Hundreds of original items from the ship's ill-fated maiden voyage are on display and several of the rooms have been recreated. The exhibition is open until May 31

Out of Africa

The dilemma of the emigrant, driven by poverty to seek an often elusive better life in the West, is the theme of a new album from Senegal. Kate Thomas talks to some of those involved



The Somali-born Muslim rapper K'Naan sings about money transfers in his contribution to the *Yes We Can* album. Florian Seefried/Getty Images

It is midday in Dakar and a long queue snakes behind the American embassy. Smart Senegalese women clutch patent-leather handbags and folders of neatly filed paperwork. A young man wipes beads of sweat from his forehead and switches off his iPod. A short way off, in the bustle of Sandaga market, Dakar's busiest, American-inspired hip-hop blares from shoddy speakers. But here there is silence.

For some Senegalese, the American embassy is a place where miracles are performed, where new lives in New York and Chicago are stamped into passports, where chronic unemployment is traded for a better life elsewhere.

But for those who do make it – by air, land or even wooden pirogue – to Europe or America, life is not always better, according to Rose Skelton, who

put together the music compilation *Yes We Can: Songs about Leaving Africa*, which has been released by Out Here records in the UK and other countries. "I wanted to put together a compilation that talked to young African emigrants about the tough things they experience," says Skelton, who included tracks from big names of the African hip-hop diaspora, such as K'Naan and Awadi, as well as music from mainstream Africa-based groups like Daara J Family. The result is a soundtrack for African migrants who have crossed deserts and oceans only to encounter a new set of problems outside their home continent.

Yes We Can brings together free-style rap, traditional hip-hop outfits and even *coupé décalé* from Ivory Coast – a frenetic musical movement conceived during that country's conflict, when artists shook off the shackles of war and headed for the dance floors of Paris and Marseille. The album opens with *Money Talk* by the Nigerian-born, Berlin-based Rapturous. "Gimme the glitz, the glamour, the fame, the fortune, that euro, that dollar, that Dolce & Gabbana," he raps. But the bubble quickly bursts. "I see my future when I follow my dreams, but things don't always look the way that they seem."

The theme of money is also present in the offering from the internationally acclaimed Muslim rapper K'Naan, who was born in the Somali capital Mogadishu and taught himself English, partly by listening to American hip-hop, before joining his father in Canada. His track, *15 Minutes Away*, talks to anyone who has ever made or received a Western Union transfer to or from Africa. "It felt so good when she said... write down these 11 digits," he raps, going on to talk about how tough it can be to live on a desperately low income in an African city. "Sometimes when I'm in a meeting

and everyone else is eating, I feel so awkward asking so I pretend like I am fasting," he intones.

For people coming from Africa, the reality of life in Europe can be hard to cope with, as the Dakar-based Daara J Family can attest. Earlier this year the duo, comprising Ndongo D and Faada Freddy, were refused visas to travel to London, where they had lined up a concert at the Jazz Cafe and an interview on BBC Radio 4.

"We really don't know what happened," says Ndongo D. "We've gone through the visa process hundreds of times. But it's becoming more complicated, maybe because we're asking for longer-stay visas as our international tours get longer. But we have also had people pretend to be us to secure visas in the past; that's how desperate some Senegalese can be to get to Europe."

He calls African music the "spice" in international music. "Africa has given so much to the international music scene," he says. "But if the visa situation continues like this, artists can expect a lot of problems. Europe needs the African music scene."

Daara J Family are something of an exception in that they have no desire to be based in Europe or North America permanently. "We belong in Senegal," says N'Dongo. "That's what we're all about – staying close to home, being part of the community, making music about issues that affect people in this part of the world, not about how much money we can make or how famous we can become."

Fame has, however, given the pair a political voice, and they have spoken out on issues that affect and shape the future of Senegalese society. But it's their music that really talks to West Africans, whether

it's the unusually soft Wolof language on their hit *Bayi Yoon* or the Sufi influence and old-school griot rhapsodies of *Temps Boy*. "Music is stronger than politics," says N'Dongo.

Daara J's track on the album, *Unite 75*, is named after the credits needed to telephone Senegal from France. It addresses the issue of keeping in touch with family and friends back home and the enormous pressure on emigrants to send money home via instant money transfer. Skelton says she wanted to put together a compilation that spoke to Europeans and Americans as well as to African migrants. "I wanted to help people in the West understand that the reason people are washing up on the beaches of the Canary Islands is not because they are just after flash houses and a fancy lifestyle, but simply that they are often trying to provide three meals a day for their kids back home."

Many people, particularly men, who work in Africa's towns and cities, support their extended families on their wages. For some people this can be as many as 20 people, leaving them very little to spend on themselves. Little wonder then, that the lure of a well-paid job outside Africa is often too much to resist.

Skelton says she also wanted to dispel some of the myths about the kinds of music people listen to in Africa. "African music has become very popular in Europe and the United States," she says. "But most young people in West Africa aren't up dancing to the likes of [the Beninese singer] Anjelique Kidjo." Instead, she says, they are moving to the beats of American-inspired hip-hop, including material from, for example, the Nigerian rapper P Square as well as K'Naan and Daara J Family.

Not everyone harbours dreams of making it in the West. "Illegal immigration ... I know that you're destroying my continent, you empty us of the best people, to feed the depths of the Atlantic," is a line from the mellow Senegalese outfit Capsi Revolution on *Yes We Can*. A track by the Cameroonian Martin Pecheur is inspired by the sappers of Congo – a movement that sees a hip set of young men spend relative fortunes on 1940s-style designer clothes – while the Cape Verdean singer Kedjevara Ize addresses the issue of homesickness.

Yet all over Africa, queues still form outside the embassies of the United States, Britain and other European countries. "Stand for days at the American consulate, they randomly push back your interview date," raps the Ghanaian artist Wanlov on the album. "*C'est la vie mon ami*, ask Uncle Kofi, maybe he's got connections at the embassy. He used to be with this lady from Tennessee... if she says the word, hello NYC."

Visa applications are knocked back daily, while a lucky few receive green cards and permanent residency permits, only to find themselves serving coffee, cleaning floors and working round the clock to send money back to Africa. Perhaps Wanlov says it best: "We fought to get out of the slaveyard, now we fight to get us a green card. Why do we work for this stuff so hard?"

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Rose Skelton

the to do list: 8:11:10

Celtic concert

The Fridge's excellent concert series is brought to a close by Next Flight Out, a Dubai-based best Celtic band. The set go beyond trad to include modern music, and even some meditative elements. Doors 7.30pm, concert 8pm, The Fridge, Al Quoz 4, Street 26, Dubai, Dh50 (under 18s free), info@thefridgedubai.com or 04 347 7793.



Emirati-Swiss Art

A contrasting collection of work, with pieces by five Emirati painters and a mixture of pictures, mosaics and designs by five Swiss artists. However, there are some common themes as all 10 of them live in the UAE. Daily until November 15, Shangri La Qaryat al Beri hotel, Abu Dhabi, 02 509 8300.



Realising the Ecological City?

Baltimore may be known to many as the gritty setting for the popular US drama series *The Wire*, but it is also a city that has been keen to embrace green living. Dr Mary Cadenasso and Dr Julie Sze will look at how successful it has been and talk about how eco-friendly our cities can be in the future. 7-9pm, Al Mamoura Auditorium, Abu Dhabi, free entry, nyuad.institute@nyu.edu or 02 628 4334.

