



PERFORM! 002

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Capture the impalpable

PERFORM! is an itinerant cultural space for the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of performing arts from Africa and diasporas.

Online, PERFORM! will distill capsules of inspiration, incorporate historical reminders, and promote the celebration of talented artists who have either been forgotten, or lacked an opportunity for exposure.

On paper, a colorful, cultural journal will mirror the memory and serve as a transmission of performing arts. All dance, vocal, theater, slam, music, and circus performers will have their place in PERFORM! no matter where they conduct their arts.

Offline, we will organize meetings to see, listen, exhibit, and share what we've inherited from previous generations and still practice daily.

PERFORM! has no borders. We often speak French and English, but also converse in Spanish and Portuguese.

Let's PERFORM!

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PERFORM!



NYEGE NYEGE



From an East African Experiment to a Global Catalyst

By Gloria Kiconco

Photos by Sophie Garcia



How a five-year-old festival in Uganda is influencing the underground music scene around the world.

Over the past three years, the Nyege Nyege International Music Festival, held in Jinja, Uganda, has become one of the most anticipated and talked about festivals in East Africa and in alternative music circuits around the world. When it was first held in 2015, about 1,000 people attended; five years later the event drew a crowd of 11,000. But it's not just the attendance numbers that have attracted international attention, the four-day festival offers a novel experience for its Ugandan, East African and international attendees through the acts, by upholding its ideals of diversity and inclusivity, and by creating a space for experimental and hybrid music.

Before there was Nyege Nyege there was Boutique Electronique, a small project started by Arlen Dilsizian and Derek Debru. In 2015 they were throwing parties to showcase experimental DJs, music genres and other underground musicians in Uganda. Through their connections they invited five international artists to play in Uganda including LA's underground hip-hop legend, Riddlore, US/China's DJ Zhao, and Ghana's Fokn Bois. They realized they could use the opportunity to bring together people for a longer period of time to enjoy and experience the range of music Ugandan and international artists had to offer. Within two months, a small group of people had organized the first Nyege Nyege festival, led by Dilsizian, Debru, Teesa Bahana, Mark Pirani, Darlyne Komukama, and Kampire Bahana.

Considering Nyege Nyege as more of a grassroots effort, the organizers were out to prove it was possible to create a compelling musical experience without corporate sponsorship, even if it meant putting their time, effort, and money on the line. They didn't make a profit, but the festival was a resounding success by those that attended.

Their inaugural festival had proven that good music, an inclusive atmosphere, and an experimental, open platform were the keys to success. The location along the River Nile in Jinja, at Nile Discovery Resort, was an ideal setting to create a playground for artists and revelers. But they needed to get more organized. In 2016 they partnered with Talent Africa, which according to Nyege Nyege co-founder and co-director Arlen Dilsizian, "is one of the biggest events production companies in the country," who helped them to create a far more sophisticated and bigger event over the years.



They reached out to other organizations to fulfill different needs at the festival, often finding different partners each year to work on one aspect of the festival. The festival hosted London's NTS radio in 2017, partnered with Somerset's Kallida Festival in 2018, and hosted the Boiler Room in both 2018 and 2019.

But Nyege Nyege is more than a festival, it's a flagship event for a much larger musical project. Lesham Kenogo, the festival producer for 2019, said, "Nyege Nyege is not just trying to be a festival, it's trying to influence the global culture through East African music and African music in general... That motivation, that drive, that purpose behind it helps set it apart."

What happens during the rest of the year in and out of Uganda also feeds the festival.

As the festival grew in popularity, the organizers worked throughout the year to meet more new musicians and help them to build their careers. The first step they took, which may be one of the most important factors for rising East African artists, was to create The Villa: a studio space that also offers a residency for regional and international artists.

After creating the studio space, the label Nyege Nyege Tapes was launched, featuring artists like Riddlore, Otim Alpha, and projects like Disco Vumbi and Sounds of Sisso released on vinyl and classic cassette tapes. They also released tracks on Soundcloud, Bandcamp, and other online platforms. In June of 2018, they launched a second Label, Hakuna Kulala, with producer Rey Sapienz from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who also performs as part of the duo Poko Poko. The combination of studio space The Villa, the new labels and the festival launched the careers of many up and coming artists including DJ Kampire, DJ and producer Slikback, Nihililoxica, Sounds of Sisso and Otim Alpha, who have all expanded the definition of East African sound.

The next step was to take these artists on tour and this is where most of Nyege Nyege's energy is focused all year round. Over the last three to four years most of these tours were through Europe and North America, but every year, the directors





have created more south to south connections, not only to send artists to other music scenes in the Global South but to also bring more artists from the Global South to Uganda.

The most notable result of this effort at this year's edition of the festival was the presence of Chinese DJs 33EMY13W, Hyph11e, and Goooooose. Their presence was a result of a connection made when Slikback went to China for a residency with SVBCULT, a label based in Shanghai. During his time there, Slikback collaborated with these DJs resulting in the release of a split-label album with Hakuna Kulala and SVBCULT. The 2019 edition also showcased Gabber Modus Operandi, an Indonesian duo creating sound combining heavy metal, electronic music, and samples of traditional Indonesian music.

It's difficult to measure the success of the Nyege Nyege project as a whole, the growth of artists affiliated to the festival and the new labels associated with it. It is easy to see the exponential growth of attendees and to point to the growing international media coverage from small media platforms to larger one such as British newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Economist*. Financially, the festival is not the cash cow Ugandans imagine it to be, but rather a hub around which financial activity happens. It also has a significant impact on the community around it, explains festival producer Kenogo adding, "Nyege Nyege creates a whole economic hub that exists for about two weeks."

It has done the same for hotels in Jinja and vendors and service providers in Kampala, creating a demand for services and products on a scale that has never been seen before.

In response to its growing popularity and impact (potential and actual), the festival has come under increasing scrutiny from the Ugandan government over the past two years. In 2018, telecommunications provider MTN became a sponsor, attracting the attention of domestic media and the conversation quickly turned to morality. The atmosphere created by such an inclusive, experimental, and playful festival seemed at odds with the conservative face of Uganda. But what some Ugandans may view as immoral behavior is, to much of the rest of the world, just what happens at a festival.

Despite this scrutiny, the festival and the rest of the Nyege Nyege projects continue to move forward, widening the peripheries of our understanding of what music can be, what it can sound like, and what it can do to and for the people of East Africa and beyond.

"Increasingly international festivals are looking at Nyege Nyege as a very exciting pole," co-founder and co-director Dilsizian said adding, "very often, it's been mentioned that the curation of the festival is by international standards and the international acts we book are also not your usual suspects."

In a way, this year's edition, which was under heightened scrutiny, marks one of their most successful festivals yet, though the factors of this success aren't obvious.

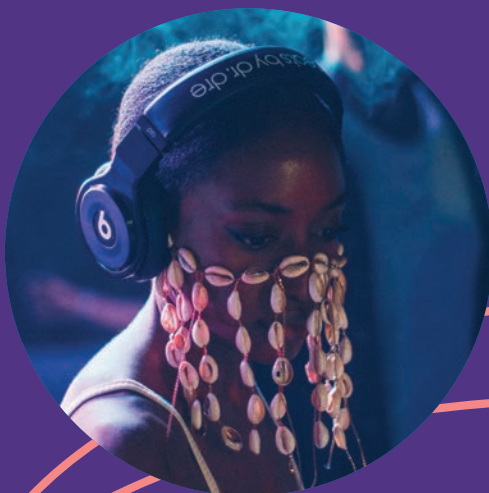
Last year, the festival featured 7 stages which were cut back to 5 in 2019 and there were fewer acts booked than previous year. These are not signs of devolution, but of adaptation, an effort to control the rapid growth of the festival and maintain quality performances. In relation to this the line-up showed the widest range of genres thus far and the most diversity in the countries represented. It also showcased more Ugandans and Tanzanians than ever before, a deliberate decision made by the organizers.

Dilsizian explained, "We definitely feel like the most exciting things and energies are happening in these two countries, by far. They're the most open musically. There's a real underground music scene."

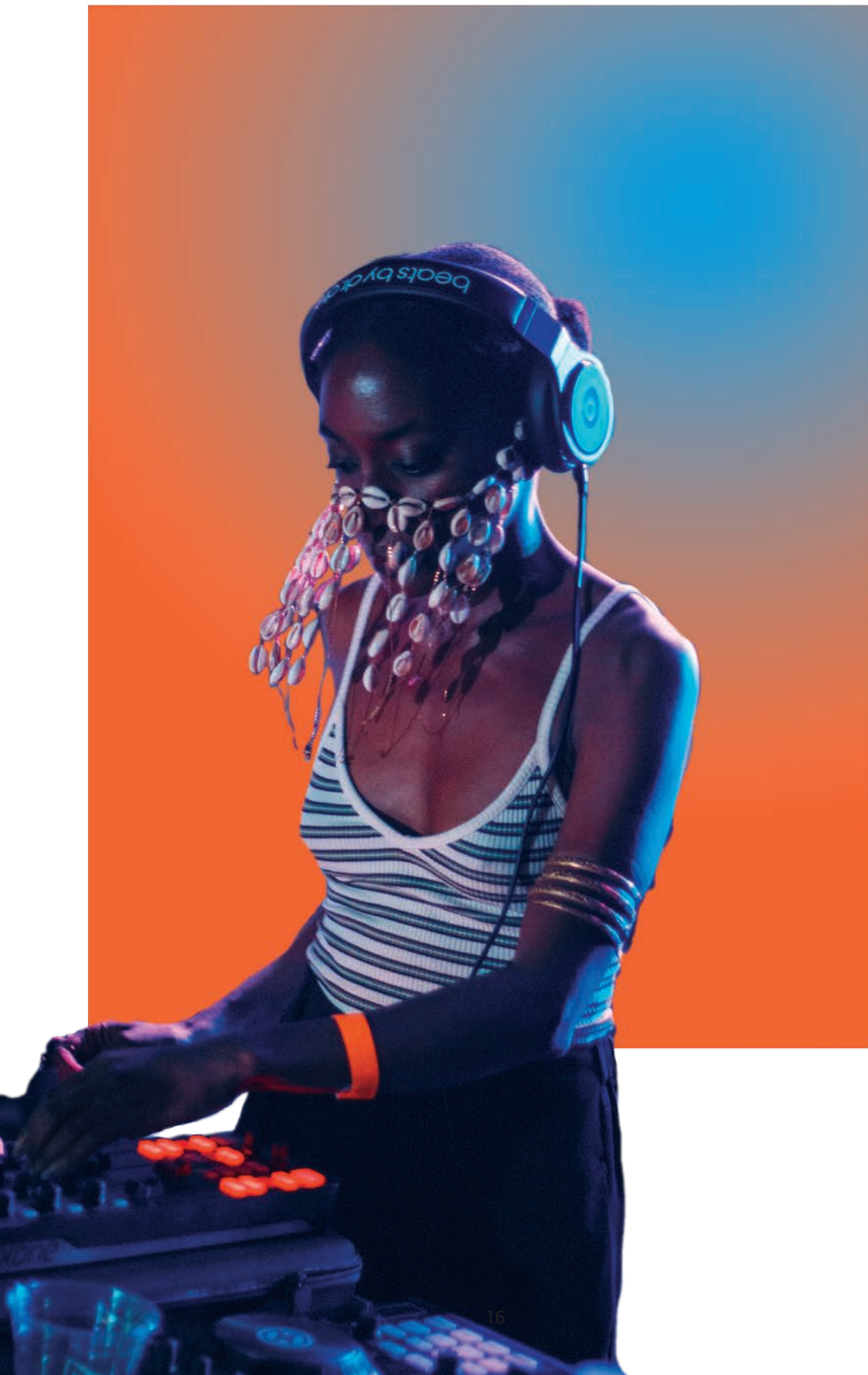
Most of the attendees were also East African, reflecting the festival's efforts to keep it affordable and accessible for its main audience and to resist being reduced to a tourist destination. In response, more and more American and European festivals are booking East African acts as demand for fresh, boundary-pushing music grows in those countries.

This year, the Nyege Nyege festival felt like one of the most ephemeral but lasting experiences to imprint on a person. Most of the year, Nile Discovery Resort, where the festival is held, is empty, but for those four days it was filled with endless crowds, a craft market, traditional dance, and electronic and experimental music from dusk until dawn at the Eternal Disco and Dark Star Stages. With five stages, it's impossible to see everything at once. Once you miss a moment, or an act, it's gone. Not even the internet can give you the feeling of actually being present at a live performance. But wherever you are, if you stick with an act or stay near a stage, you dive deeper and discover profound and inspiring moments as you watch, listen, and dance, most likely, until dawn.





DISRUPTING THE BOYS CLUB



Asna Aidara

SCULPTÉE DANS L'IVOIRE

Par Emilie Drugeon Photos de Tora Traoré

Elle est encore intimidée de croiser Damian Marley en coulisse ou de partager le même public que Burna Boy et Janelle Monáe. Asna Aidara fait partie des rares femmes DJ en Côte d'Ivoire. Sur son site internet, la trentenaire se dit " créative, dispersée et volontaire ". Dans le réel, on rencontre une femme engagée, pleine de ressources, et qui fait les choses comme elle les sent.

Derrière ses platines, Asna danse. Elle porte, telle une amulette, un bijou de cauris en cascade sur sa bouche et du nez jusqu'aux oreilles. Il chaloupe en rythme. Ces coquillages, parure dessinée avec une amie, elle les revêt dès lors qu'elle commence à mixer : c'est un jeu avec le public. Asna Aidara, 33 ans et DJ depuis deux ans préfère le terme de music explorer. Elle s'inspire des années 60-70, de groupes de jazz et de rumba, d'une musique organique qu'elle fusionne avec l'électro.

De longs cils, les dents du bonheur, cette créative avec " 10 000 idées à l'heure " est une force tranquille. Avec ses pommettes hautes et constellées de grains de beauté, elle choisit ses mots, sereine et reconnaissante de ce que la vie lui donne. En réalité, on comprend très vite que c'est elle qui crée les étincelles. Asna Aidara va chercher, avec un bel empowerment, les matières inflammables nécessaires à son feu intérieur. Au Bao Café, à Abidjan, elle lance à son nouvel ami DJ Charles, qu'elle veut apprendre à mixer. " C'est là-bas que tout a commencé et où j'ai rencontré toutes les personnes avec qui je bosse aujourd'hui. " Très rapidement, on lui offre sa place sur le line up. Un set de 20 minutes qu'elle n'est pas prête d'oublier. Depuis, le collectif KamaYakoi a accompagné sa mise en lumière. Et Asna a creusé son trou au festival ABC au Burkina, à Afropunk, à Paris ou encore à l'Atlas électronique au Maroc. Elle joue avec les voix, les instruments, les sonorités du continent et toutes leurs ramifications, du Brésil à toute l'Amérique latine.

Carburant

" On a grandi avec Youssou N'Dour, Baaba Maal, Aretha Franklin, Bob marley... " Sa famille partage le goût de la musique, de la danse surtout. Les parents, Sénégalais (d'origine mauritanienne pour le père), sont tous deux médecins. La fratrie, deux sœurs et un petit-frère, s'est expatriée, au Canada comme en France, mais Asna, elle, puise ses ressources à Abidjan où elle reste basée. Elle tient son " sang nomade " pour responsable de ses déplacements constants. Fruit d'une génération digital nomad, la voyageuse est aussi graphiste. Avant la musique, elle a suivi des études en communication puis travaillé dans le domaine de la pub. La crise de 2010-2011 en Côte d'Ivoire lui laisse le choix de partir à Dakar ou de reprendre ses études. Asna choisit la seconde option et s'initie au graphisme. " C'est par là que j'aurais dû commencer. Dans la com', finalement c'est l'aspect créatif qui m'intéressait ; je ne savais pas à l'époque que j'étais plus " plastique ". Je me suis mise à mon compte. Créer, c'est réinterpréter son environnement avec une infinité de possibilités, de médium. C'est mon carburant. " En arpentant tout le milieu culturel et créatif, à la recherche d'un réseau, elle tombe sur le Bao Café. On connaît la suite.

" Ton oreille, elle sait "

Cette aventure musicale, dont Asna Aidara semble encore s'étonner elle-même, l'a conduite à la composition. Dans un autre registre. L'enseigne bien connue Vlisco, qui commercialise le tissu wax dans le monde entier, l'a contactée en octobre 2018 pour la première édition du festival Vlisco & co à Abidjan. Tout un réseau pan-africain de jeunes talents créatifs s'y est retrouvé. La composition de la musique d'un film a été confiée à Asna. " Je me suis dit : punaise, mais j'adore ça ! Faire parler les images,

créer tout un univers sonore en fonction d'elles... Cette expérience a ouvert une porte. " Dans la foulée, un documentariste américain lui donne carte blanche pour la BO de son court-métrage Girls (sortie 2020), réalisé en Côte-d'Ivoire. Un challenge dont elle sort galvanisée. « J'ai eu une période où je me sentais un peu dépassée mais maintenant j'ai pris du recul et je suis plus à l'aise. Pour cette bande originale, la personne avec qui je travaillais m'a dit : «je ne sais pas d'où ça te vient ni comment tu fais, mais ton oreille, elle sait.» Ça m'a beaucoup rassurée. "

Le monde de la nuit

" Il y a des décisions que j'ai prises en amont ". Asna refuse de mixer en boîte, ou au cœur de la nuit, face à un public « déconnecté ". C'est l'échange qui l'intéresse, " quelque chose de conscient et d'utile ". " Je ne suis pas là pour vomir de la musique ", ajoute-t-elle. Ce que la trentenaire souhaite par-dessus tout c'est d'être " actrice de la flore créative africaine ". Porter une vision, être utile, ambassadrice d'un « continent riche à tous les niveaux ". Et l'émissaire a des projets en pagaille. Kalaag, une marque de vêtements lancée avec sa sœur. Ou encore, une ligne de motifs de tissus imprimés qu'elle dessine à partir d'illustrations créées numériquement. Et tous les " dimanches en 15 ", elle se réunit avec la jeune scène ivoirienne, des influenceurs.se.s créatifs et " complètement décomplexés ", lors de La Sunday, soirée au sacré succès. Asna décrit un " truc qui a commencé de rien, dans un tout petit espace ", devenu événement inclusif, underground, empreint d'excentricité. Une fête aujourd'hui suivie par plus de 16 000 personnes sur Instagram ! " On se rend compte qu'on a touché quelque chose. Nous avons tous conscience de sortir des anciens schémas de clivage. "

Féminin sacré

Bientôt, Asna complètera son cursus par un master en recherche graphique. Vêtue d'un chemisier tout simple, noir et blanc, elle sirote un thé menthe-pétales de rose, avec un sucre. Elle ne porte aucun bijou. Ses cheveux sont tirés par des tresses qui montent en chignon. Assumée, heureuse, équilibrée sont les mots qui viennent pour mieux la révéler. De ses propres dires, elle est « en paix avec son féminin sacré ». Elle aimerait que toutes les femmes puissent être consciente de leur potentiel et se libérer des carcans limitants. " Je remercie toujours le ciel d'être née femme car nous avons un immense pouvoir. " Toutes des créatrices en un sens, puisque les femmes portent la vie. Elle n'en a pas conscience mais Asna pourrait aussi se revendiquer du courant écoféministe, en pleine ascension de par le monde. " Avec des amis nous avons monté Greendrinks il y a deux ans, une association qui organise des rassemblements une fois par mois avec des acteurs de solutions. L'écologie chez nous, c'est plus qu'alarmant. J'aimerais faire plus, cela me tient énormément à cœur. De nombreuses multinationales se comportent dans nos pays comme elles ne se comporteraient jamais dans leurs propres pays, en déversant leurs déchets ou avec la déforestation. Nous sommes leur terrain de jeu. A son niveau, l'association organise des actions de dépollution et de sensibilisation. " Pour Asna, " rien n'est impossible ".

PRETTY PRETTY THINGS

Darlyne Komukama, a.k.a DJ Decay, talks
Novelty, Aesthetics, and the Power of Aliases

By Gloria Kiconco

Photos by Martin Kharumwa



Darlyne Komukama is a Ugandan multi-disciplinary artist and a charismatic personality who can be both playful with her work as well as delivering a cutting-edge insight into topics that fall within the realm of pop culture, society and politics. She started out as a writer and photographer, an interest drawn from her love of film, but the self-taught photographer and installation artist wanted to create art that people, specifically women, could interact with.

"This was my dream," she said, "How can I get people to be in the photo?" Her answer to that was to create installations and situate people within an experience, a lived photograph. Her more well-known photography and installation work includes "Salooni", a collaboration on the politics of black women's hair, and "Penthouse" (2018) a room on a rooftop where Kampalan women could safely express their rage.

Being one of the Nyege Nyege festival organizers brought Komukama into close proximity with the music scene. This gave her the courage to become a DJ which enabled her to explore a whole new medium.

DJ Decay

Komukama, who called herself DJ Decay, would play at house parties and always enjoyed selecting the music, usually from YouTube, and while she wouldn't call that DJing, enough people enjoyed her selections, so she learned more technical skills so her sets became smoother.

"Mostly people were just complaining... People were like, 'Please, every time the song ends we have to stop dancing until the next one comes on'"

Being part of the Nyege Nyege team gave her access to studio space, controllers, and people eager to share their skills. Soon DJ Decay began appearing on more event posters and flyers throughout 2018 and became a crowd favorite.

DJ Decay organizes her sets around her own love of dancing. She describes her earlier sets as random selections of songs that made her want to dance. Now they have developed into what she describes as "organized chaos". That organized chaos is her way of communicating, of creating a feeling, bringing listeners in and keeping them there for the duration of the set, which is what she accomplished during her "Boiler Room" set at the Nyege Nyege Festival.

Cardi Monae

Nyege Nyege 2019 also introduced us to Cardi Monae, Decay's producer alias. The name is an homage to the different but equally influential female power that resonates from musicians Cardi B and Janelle Monae. Cardi Monae is a portal to

experimentation, allowing the kind of time needed to experiment and create, that DJing can't provide for Decay. She's currently experimenting with creating musical scores, voice edits, and song edits.

Cardi Monae may be a temporary alias, but she is one of many. Darlyne Komukama has more aliases than projects to attach them to, an indicator that the general idea of having aliases is more important. To Komukama, names are a way of morphing.

"I always feel a little constrained by my form," she said. "Since I can't change my face, or at least, I can't change it more than I do in the morning with makeup, I can change my name."

Time to Play

Decay has multiple aliases and multiple art forms, but what she maintains in her music and before an audience are elements of fun and play. For her, it's all about novelty and joy.

When asked about her intentions when creating, she says, "It is always joyful. It's always community based. It's always experimental. I'm driven by novelty. I like to do things I've never done before."

There are two sides to novelty in her perspective: one is that she gets bored easily and moves on to new things to stay interested, finding herself in a new creative field, and the other is that it encourages an endless pursuit of learning.

"You can't finish learning... I just go in as open as possible just to see what's going to happen, without any judgment; I'm not trying to make it great from the first pass."

Pretty Things, Profound Experiences

Like her desire for novelty and joy, aesthetics is a crucial element to how Darlyne Komukama creates in whatever alias she is at the time. It's evident in her make-up, hair, nails, and clothing; it's reflected in her installations and photos. Even if the subject matter is serious, it is presented in a visually pleasing and exciting form.

"I just like pretty things... and usually when I say pretty, people trivialize the word," she said. "It's not like beauty which can be overwhelming and make you feel outside of it."

And from pretty things come profound experiences, like the ability to stretch the boundaries of who you are or what you can do without the weight of other people's expectations.

The Evolution of DJ Kampire and the Power of Music as Communication

By Gloria Kiconco Photos by Martin Kharumwa



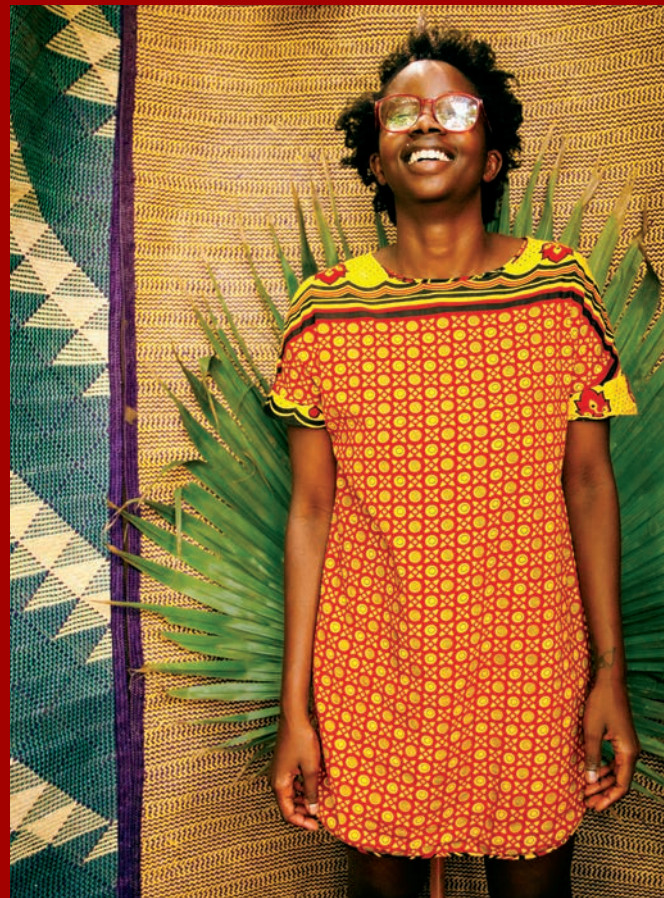
Kampire Bahana is a writer, installation artist, and DJ based in Uganda with the Nyege Nyege crew. She's also known as DJ Kampire, one of the most renowned acts affiliated with the festival. She started in 2016 and has since played more than 70 shows around the world. When we met up at the Nyege Nyege festival, Kampire told me she was on her way to a show in Mexico City which would kick off a brief North America tour. We sat down to talk about the evolution of her work and her approach to DJing.

PERFORM!: How has your style evolved and what has most influenced any changes along the way?

Kampire: I think when I first started playing, it was mainly because I loved all these old African songs and a newer global base like Batida & Buraka sound system and M.I.A, who take third world music and update it for the dance floor. Kampala is such a dancing city and I've been clubbing here for the past ten years and wondered why I wasn't hearing this music on the dance floor? I just wanted to hear those songs on big speakers. It evolved from there, being exposed to other DJs and artists, learning how to mix, and playing much more frequently. Now that I'm touring, I'm trying to be an ambassador for all the great music that comes out of East Africa.

P: Over the past two years people have been writing about you and looking to you as a pioneer female DJ in Uganda. What are your thoughts on this?

K: I guess there's not a lot of East African women DJs who are touring but since I started Coco Em and DJ Rachael have emerged. Catu Diosis is touring now so even in the time that I've been at it, I've seen the space expand. I think we're in a space and time where European and international dance markets are really interested in hearing something different and different perspectives and looking at themselves and their line-ups to see whether or not those line-ups are balanced. What are the barriers to access for people from the global south or for women or for gay people? I think we're seeing an expansion in the artists who are getting booked. Of course, there's always a backlash with some people saying 'oh women, Instagram DJs, or she's DJing with her boobs'.



P: Do people really say those things?

Kampire: People are rude about what women wear and they're rude about their skills, even very high profile female DJs like Nina Kraviz, who is one of the highest paid DJs in the world. People will buy tickets to go to her set and wait for her to make one mistake and then post it on the internet and trash her, and yet we've been listening to the same boring white dudes for like 20 years, many of whom are still coasting on careers that peaked 20 years ago. So, there's definitely a backlash against this expansion but I guess it means that it's working.

P: What kind of attitude do you have when you approach your work?

K: I'm just trying to do the best that I can really. I think that as an artist the beauty is in the work. You're not an artist if you're just talking about doing the thing, you just have to keep doing the thing. One of the cool things about having toured so much this summer and playing three gigs a weekend in different countries is that if you f&@k up you just have to [move on]; tomorrow is another day. Women especially are very precious about their work because we don't have as many chances to fail. We're expected to be perfect immediately and we expect ourselves to be perfect immediately.

P: Do you have an audience in mind when you create? If so, what experience do you want to give them?

K: I guess it depends where I'm playing. If I'm recording a mix to put online, then I'm definitely more interested in profiling the more unknown artists, that are from East Africa. If it's a mix online, then you can sort of play music that's not just dance, it gives you an opportunity to showcase the other stuff that you enjoy. But if it's 2 a.m. on a Ugandan dance floor, it has to be music that makes people dance.

P: DJ Decay made a comment that you play music to make people dance. Is this true?

K: Yeah and I always say that, and we play for dancers and I love dancers. I think that talking is so awkward and socializing is so awkward that it's really nice to have this way of communicating with people that is not so up here in your brain. You just connect with people and it's a beautiful thing. I think that dancing is not about skill or technique and I guess that's one thing I've learnt, it's just about your own expression and I love people who want to express themselves in this way.

GET LIFTED



Chabela on creating,
learning, and the ideal
audience
experience

By Gloria Kiconco

Photos by Sophie Garcia

Isabelle Guipro, a.k.a. Chabela is a DJ from Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast and a powerhouse on the electronic music scene. Hours before her set on a Sunday evening at Nyege Nyege, we sat down with her for an interview to learn more about her experiences as a DJ and event promoter and how she creates such a special experience for her audience.

PERFORM!: Tell us about your career as a DJ; where it started and how it has grown?

Chabela: It started in Abidjan and it was like starting from scratch. But, step by step I've been able to travel and see other festivals, like Africa Bass in Ouagadougou or festivals in Ghana. I would compare and listen to the music, even now at Nyege Nyege, to build my sound.

PERFORM!: How would you describe your music, your genre?

Chabela: It's house, deep house. Sometimes I go techno, but I also like to introduce African sounds, even Chicago house and I will mix it with drums.

P: How do you create your sets?

C: It comes from multiple things. When I create my set, it's like an interview, I will prepare and I have to know where the party or the event is to catch the vibes. I know how to prepare my set really quickly because I do the research before or I will ask the organizers what they want, and then I prepare because I listen to so much music and I like to play different styles.

P: What kind of experience do you want to create for the audience and for yourself?

C: I want them to discover music and also to discover my universe. I want people to feel lifted by the end of the set.

P: How has being at Nyege Nyege music festival, in Uganda, affected your perspective on your music and electronic music as a movement?

C: Nyege Nyege was an eye opener because I come from West Africa and it's hard to build the scene because people consider electronic music or alternative sound as white music. Here you can see that people are open to the experience so then as an artist you can dig into yourself and propose something because people will be open to the experience. That's what I love most about Nyege Nyege: people are there for the experience.

P: What do you find most exciting about your work as a DJ?

C: I feel so lucky to be able to work at something that I love... DJing for me is just the instrument and sometimes the connection is so present with the music, the crowd, the DJ; it's something you can't describe, it's so powerful.

P: Where do you see your career going? Or where would you like it to go?

C: I love DJing and playing music and sharing the experience with the crowd, but I have this previous life as an entrepreneur... I want to mix these two things by creating some space and bring people to Abidjan to discover more about electronic music. I would also like to organize some DJing courses, even covering production, I've already held one in Bamako.

P: What is the scene like for female DJs in Abidjan?

C: We are very few compared to Uganda and the East African scene. I believe you could count us all on one hand.

P: Hopefully that will grow as you create more opportunities.

C: Yeah, exactly and we open the path. I don't want to do this all my life, so when we open the path, we should open it to other female DJs, show that it's possible that you can make a living from it.

P: What do you see as your contribution to the music scene as a female DJ in Abidjan?

C: That's a tricky question. It goes deep because first of all, I don't want to stay labeled as a 'female DJ', I just want to be a DJ and play music. It's [already] hard to be an electronic DJ in Abidjan and as a female, maybe you are a 'curiosity'.

I don't see myself as just a female DJ but I like to organize events where I can invite another female DJ as a form of empowerment. As I said there are not many female DJs in Abidjan and with the guys, you have to be tough, you have to play and say 'yes I'm here and my time is now'. If you don't do that, they will crush you.



Catu Diosis: The Infection You Want to Catch

By Gloria Kiconco Photos by Yoti Gilbert and Sophie Garcia

If the Nyege Nyege Festival was to give an award for breakout artist of the year in 2019, it would have gone to Catu Diosis. Although this was her second year to play at the festival, she delivered an exceptional performance on the main stage that reverberated through many of the acts that followed.

Her set started out with the energetic dance-inducing music audiences have come to expect from her. Aesthetics are an important part of her presentation: she wore an elaborate but effortless Fulani-inspired hairstyle, face-paint by Rwandan visual artist Poupoute Tabaro, and a full-length, hooded robe Catu Diosis fashioned for herself. About halfway through the set, she threw off her robe to reveal a white strapless bikini top and black boy shorts, she then switched to a pre-mix.

When Catu Diosis started dancing on the open stage, the crowd went wild. It was nothing compared to the energy this class act threw back when four more women ran out on the stage to join in a choreographed set. They started out with hip hop moves blended with Ugandan dancehall moves that escalated into Lingala, a language spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It's also a popular Congolese musical genre accompanied by skilful hip-centered choreography. Lingala is loved across East Africa for its long, upbeat, dance tracks. The audience's reaction was a testament to how much Ugandans love dance, especially Lingala. Each woman got their own solo; each was dressed in their own fashion; a nod to their individual style and skills.

There are two crucial factors that made this set such a success: First it was unexpected; DJs are expected to DJ, not dance. Secondly, it called forth dance as an art form to showcase, a reminder to audiences and performers alike that although artists are here to make people dance, it doesn't mean they can't dance. The energy was infectious.

When Catu Diosis played again at the Eternal Disco stage, people who weren't even in the crew jumped on the table next to her equipment to dance. Throughout the festival more and more performers were emboldened to bring dance into their sets.

Atim Catherine, a.k.a Catu Diosis is a DJ, producer, fashion designer, entrepreneur and dancer. Long before she started DJing she danced in high school and later for mainstream Ugandan artists like Grace Nakimera and Sheeba, who perform dancehall-based pop music in Luganda (the language spoken in central Uganda) and English. Part of the reason Catu Diosis showcased dancing in her set is because she felt being a DJ had taken some of that away from her. So, she took it back and fused the two together to create one of the most talked about performances of the Nyege Nyege festival 2019. Even she was taken aback by the audience's reception, saying, "I expected people to have fun, but I didn't expect people to be that wowed."

Though it exceeded expectations, the success of the performance didn't come about by accident; the crew had put in hours of rehearsing every week for over a month to get the choreography just right.

Catu Diosis knows all about rehearsing, putting endless hours of hard work into honing her skills as a DJ over the past three years. She learned virtual DJing through YouTube tutorials and she got her first DJ name while drinking Crazy Cock whiskey with friends. They christened her Cocodiosis (a disease common in chickens). She later attached her nickname, Catu, and became Catu Diosis, the infection that you want to catch.

Catu Diosis built a name for herself as a DJ around Kampala and practiced relentlessly, first with a small controller before she upgraded to the equipment

provided at The Villa, a studio space offering residency for regional and international artists based in Kampala.

In February 2019, in Germany, she was introduced to the specialized digital music player known as CDJs after her computer broke down the night before she was due to perform at the afterparty hosted by Berlin-based community radio station Cashmere Radio. By the end of June, she was using CDJs on tour at Summer Nostos in Athens, Greece, playing back to back with DJ Kampire.

As she expanded her DJ skills, Catu Diosis also started work on her skills as a producer. Although she only started music production classes at The Villa with producer Rey Sapiens in February, by September she had already produced 30 tracks, some of which she hopes to release in 2020. As a producer, Catu Diosis likes to pull sounds from her environment. One of her tracks, "East Africa Newness", mixes in voices speaking in Swahili from the Zanzibar Market and voices speaking in Luganda (the language spoken in central Uganda).

Whether she's DJing or producing, Catu Diosis is focused on the atmosphere and mood she's creating. "I'm trying to bring more happiness to people because there's already so much sadness", she said. "Sometimes I will [take on] a tough tone if I'm trying to bring a message about being unapologetic about who you are."

Her recent set on the main stage of Nyege Nyege Festival was unapologetic. According to Catu Diosis that was the aim, "to have these fierce African women fully express themselves and have fun but be unapologetic about being beautiful and talented."



Marina Wilson,

DE L'ENVIE À L'OVNI

Par Emilie Drugeon

Photo de Tora Traoré

Elle a adopté Paris et en a fait son terrain de jeu. Marina Wilson pense collectif et cherche continuellement à se surprendre elle-même, en embarquant dans son sillage toute la culture afro-contemporaine. Une touche-à-tout, une multipotentielle qui n'a pas fini de nous faire danser.

Ce jour de septembre, Marina Wilson annonce deux nouvelles sur son compte Twitter. Un, la sortie d'une première compilation *Trap Africa Tapes*, deux, son invitation à la *Sunday*, à Abidjan. " *C'est la première fois que je vais jouer en Afrique.* " Marina se dévoile volontiers, mais avec pudeur, sous le couvert de son chapeau kaki en feutre et de ses lunettes rondes, dorées, aux verres teintés. Cheetah, c'est dj Cheetah son alias, sa seconde peau, celle du guépard dont elle emprunte le nom anglais dès le collège, comme la promesse d'une vie future faite de *beats*, de danse, de créations ; un animal dont elle associe la vélocité à sa " *capacité à assimiler infos et compétences* " .

La trentenaire est au centre de projets qui poussent comme des champignons, via la *Black Brain Agency*, un collectif de cinq amis créatifs. Le média *Black Square* sort de terre en 2015. Il vise à promouvoir la créativité de la communauté afro-caribéenne. Le *Black Square Club*, lui, est une émission radio enregistrée une fois par mois dans les locaux de Rinse FM. Avec deux autres animateurs, Marina Wilson y partage ses coups de cœur musicaux, littéraires ou cinéma ; elle y parle mode, société et *lifestyle*. Et depuis février 2019, une simple playlist s'est métamorphosée en dj sets avec des artistes d'origine ivoirienne, gabonaise, camerounaise comme elle, ou encore sénégalaise. Les salles sont parisiennes : Alimentation Générale, Glazart, le Chinois, le Hasard ludique... Toute l'Afrique francophone réunie pour créer un mouvement autour des cultures afro-urbaines. Et montrer à quoi correspond la musique qu'on accole à ce mouvement.

Multipotentialiste

Jusqu'à ses 21 ans, Marina Wilson vit au Cameroun. Elle y suit un parcours en marketing international et digital, puis poursuit des études de commerce en France en 2010. De son pays, elle a conservé une forme de vigilance aux autres, " *ici tout le monde est très concentré sur soi, là-bas nous veillons sur chacun* ". Ses yeux scannent alentour, tout le long de notre entretien. " *Ceux qui me connaissent depuis le Cameroun ne sont pas surpris de ce que je fais aujourd'hui. A l'université, la danse, le beatmaking, le graphisme, le rap etc., étaient mes échappatoires à un monde académique empreint de compétition. J'ai toujours été un ovni car on ne comprenait pas comment je faisais tout ça.* " Marina est toujours en recherche de nouvelles idées. On imagine mal son cerveau turbiner sans cesse : elle paraît si tranquille ! En filigrane de cette émulation, son ambition est surprenante : " *Je voudrais que nous soyons moins spectateurs de notre environnement, je veux démocratiser la création. Si je peux inspirer d'autres personnes c'est tant mieux ; j'encourage les djs à lancer leurs propres soirées. Tout le monde devrait être dans l'action, tout le monde a la capacité d'être multipotentialiste.* "

Un souffle de nostalgie

Son premier matériel de dj, elle l'achète sur Cdiscount avec l'argent avancé par sa maman. Cette dernière vit quatre ans avec elle à Paris et partage toutes ses aventures. Ou tout ce que Marina laisse derrière elle : famille et... hip-hop, si important jusqu'alors. Pas facile de trouver un nouveau groupe. " *Il y a une blague qu'on aime bien faire : quand tu viens d'ailleurs et que tu arrives en France, il te faut au moins trois ans pour comprendre où tu es ! Les trois ans sont passés et je me suis dit que j'allais passer à autre chose.* " L'opportunité vient d'elle-même ! La *Black Brain Agency* signe un partenariat avec des amis, les organisateurs du *Black Movie Summer*, qui associe projections de films et dj sets. " *Ils m'ont demandé si je pouvais ramener des djs et j'y suis allée moi-même. C'était un pari, et ça venait aussi du fait que j'avais énormément de frustration à évacuer à cause d'une année un peu pourrie.* " Le son de dj Cheetah, à la Bellevilloise, organisateurs, exposants et public en redemandent jusqu'à la *closing*. " *C'est de là que tout est parti. Le djing, c'était la belle surprise de ces cinq dernières années.* " Mélange d'afrobeat, de kuduro angolais, de

baile funk brésilien, de dancehall, de gqom sud-africaine... Sa musique, c'est de l'afro-diasporique. De la trap remixée en afro. " Marina coupe son *flow* : par la fenêtre du café où nous nous trouvons, elle croit reconnaître un youtubeur et chanteur anglais. Et de reprendre, " *j'essaye de m'inspirer de la manière dont le hip-hop nous fait rêver. Comment les Afro-Américains ont réussi à diffuser une culture qui est devenue un lifestyle pour certaines personnes. Car généralement quand on parle de ce qui touche à l'Afrique, c'est toujours un peu vieillot (no disrespect !), la musique folklorique, etc. Ce n'est pas un problème, il y a un public pour ça. Mais tu as toute une jeunesse qui ne demande qu'à s'exprimer.* " Festival Afropunk, été 2019, dj Cheetah envoie des morceaux anciens de Coupé-décalé. Un souffle de nostalgie.

Culture afro-contemporaine

Ce monde de la nuit, Marina " *y est sans y être* ", comme elle aime le dire, énigmatique. Rapidement, la guéparder remarque qu'il n'existe pas de lieux estampillés afro-urbains à Paris. Elle est bien souvent la seule femme dj noire. " *Au début on te néglige, tu es un bouche-trou, mais à force de détermination, tu arrives à prouver que tu es douée.* " Veste en jean, bermuda, t-shirt et chaussettes orange, elle porte une simple bague qu'on devine chère à ses yeux.

Demain, Marina Wilson compte écrire un livre de recettes façon " fast-food africain ", organiser des masterclass pour partager des *tips* et des outils créatifs avec toute personne désireuse de se lancer dans une aventure artistique ou digitale, elle poursuit également son autre projet de média, *Afro FC*, sur le foot africain, avec événements et matchs ; reste aussi *Afrolexicon*, un livre valorisant les expressions africaines en argot ! " *Au Nigéria on dit red eye pour parler de quelqu'un d'égoïste, et au Cameroun, c'est avoir du sang dans l'œil !* " A n'en pas douter, cette assoiffée ne laissera pas non plus tomber *Break the beat*, une compétition de beatmaking qu'elle co-organise depuis quatre ans. " *J'ai pu observer que les beatmakers sont les plus mal lotis dans l'industrie de la musique, ce sont toujours eux qu'on paye au rabais alors que sans leur travail, il n'y aurait que des titres a capella.* "

Rétrospectivement...

Impossible de donner à voir Marina Wilson sans évoquer les créatifs qui l'ont accompagnée. De Pharrell Williams au designer Kerby Jean-Raymond, qui " *semble pouvoir créer ce qu'il veut* ", ou encore Virgil Abloh, le responsable design de Louis Vuitton. Le premier homme noir à occuper ce poste. Un dj aussi. Côté femmes, Lena Waithe, " *une hyperactive qui produit des séries et des films* ". Pour se ragaillardir parfois, Cheetah écoute " *Energy* " d'Iman Omari. Et regarde beaucoup de clips. Sur Instagram, elle suit des comptes qui touchent à l'éveil spirituel, la numérologie, la méditation, les cristaux. Celle qui " *compte sur les doigts de la main, le nombre de fois où [elle] a pris l'avion* " se revoit arriver en France il y a neuf ans. Elle se dit alors : " *C'est pas mal, j'ai envie de voir jusqu'où je peux aller. J'aimerais pousser à l'extrême ce qu'il m'est possible de créer, sur des terrains où on ne m'attend pas. C'est ce que je veux faire dans dix ans : continuer à me surprendre.* "



DJ Turkana

'IT'S PERSONAL; IT'S POLITICAL'

By Gloria Kiconco

Photos by Martin Kharumwa

Anita Kevin is a South Sudanese and Ugandan model. I first met her in 2016 as a curator bringing female visual artists and performers together at exhibitions hosted by her platform Okuki. The platform, which also hosted panel discussions for these artists, has grown to include a website to host similar content that reaches a wider audience through the site and social media. As someone who is open to the continual expansion of her knowledge, it's no surprise that she took up an offer to learn how to DJ.

In October 2018, Berlin-based DJ Sarah Farina hosted a two-day workshop in collaboration with Femme Electronic through their partnership with Goethe Zentrum Kampala. Femme Electronic was started by Ugandan veteran DJ Rachael to equip women with DJing and production skills through workshops and residencies, as well as providing platforms through events. Femme Electronic invited Anita to join one of their workshops and, despite her extensive work curating and creating alongside her college degree studies, Anita accepted.

It was a move that sparked an interest in DJing for Anita and from there she bought a small controller from friend and fellow DJ Catu Diosis to practice on. One night, after she had played an event following DJ Decay, Derek Debru, the co-founder of Nyege Nyege, invited her to The Villa, a studio space set up by festival organizers which offered residencies to musicians.

From her experience at the workshop and The Villa, Anita found a medium that suited her and DJ Turkana was born.

As she explains it, "You see people play the piano and it's their medium. So, this is it for me", she said "I'm going to express myself through this. It just felt really comfortable."

September 2019 marked her first appearance as an artist at the Nyege Nyege Festival. At 22 years old, DJ Turkana is one of newest and youngest female DJs on the scene in Uganda.

Anita describes her style as "hard dance", and though she doesn't believe she's formed a definitive sound yet, this is the closest description to the sound and experience she wants to create: dance music with an edge. This is evident in some of her selections, like M.I.A's 'Bad Girls', which got the crowd pumped up about 15 minutes into her set on the Eternal Disco stage at Nyege Nyege. She's drawn to musicians whose messages resonate with her own experiences, which is where it gets personal.

East Africans know Turkana as a region in Kenya, it's where Anita Kevin grew up in a refugee camp in Kakuma, a town in the Turkana county, in north western Kenya. As a child she grew up happy and unaware that Kakuma was a refugee camp. To her, it was just home. But as she got older she became more aware of where she was and what it meant.

Anita explains why she chose the name Turkana: "I thought I should really use something that is connected to me," she said, "It's reclaiming that whole experience of being in a refugee camp and overcoming it and being powerful, not being limited by what you've experienced."

Her chosen DJ name holds political tones that resonate in East Africa because it speaks to a region that is rarely considered. The music Turkana selects is her way of highlighting this area and her experiences.

She brings consciousness into her work through "music that addresses political issues because of my experiences," she explains. "I feel like I want to fuse that with sound and create a vibe that is like a war."



But beyond that, she said, "I want to tell my story. I feel like my mom didn't get to tell [hers]. I want to be vocal about things through music as a medium."

DJ Turkana's sets and her other art forms draw a lot from her experiences and how they affected her. She explores her need to return to those experiences in an effort to answer questions such as: What is belonging? What is home? Is home an experience?

If home is an experience, then Anita has found one as DJ Turkana in Kampala and within the Nyege Nyege community, which she describes as very generous with their time and knowledge. She notes how DJs Decay, Catu Diosis, and Authentically Plastic showed her "love, genuine support, and care", reminding her that she can be anything.

"I kept thinking about how I got to play Nyege. Who pushed me? Who supported me? I keep going back to those faces", she said.

What's personal is political and DJ Turkana's music reflects that. Wherever her work as a DJ, producer and her other art forms take her, she hopes it all remains grounded in her experiences; that it stays personal; that it stays political.



Drag Race legend Bebe Zahara Benet talks culture, choirs and Cameroon

By Sofian Aissaoui Photos by Adam Meyer

Drag is an art form in which performers present a heightened version of themselves to an audience.

For a long time, drag was hidden and protected, only known by a few, an underground form of art. However, drag has now entered mainstream media and millions of people tune in to watch men playing with gender on hit U.S. show "RuPaul's Drag Race." It's a powerful watch and makes us wonder what gender actually means. Over a decade, the show has become a cultural phenomenon.

Bebe Zahara Benet was the winner of the first series of the show in 2009. Born in Cameroon, people used to call her Nea Marshall Kudi back then. But the boy had something within him that he desperately needed to express.

"Music was my refuge. I sang and directed the church choirs. I found the stage wherever I went," she said.

Now, her stage is the whole world.

I sat down with the drag performer and singer to talk about cultural representation and all things drag

PERFORM!: As some of our readers are not familiar with drag culture, could you explain what drag is and how it works?

Bebe Zahara: Traditionally, it described a man dressed as a girl; however, that definition, originated by Shakespeare, I believe, has expanded so much in modern times to include cisgender women, the transgender community and the gender nonconforming community. Different artists have different ways of expressing their drag, be it through stage performances and theatre, fashion, music, art installations or even activism. Drag is for everyone and can't really be defined by any one person.

P: When did the little Nea Marshall Kudi realize that he had that kind of artistry within him?

BZ: It was early on. I had always been connected to music, but I didn't know it would lead me to becoming a drag entertainer. I loved performance and art and music, but I hadn't put the pieces together just yet. I was super energetic, as you can imagine. I was also always getting into everything all the time and very artistic. I was very bold, talkative and had a desire to stand out from the crowd. How I am now is how I was then.

Music was my refuge. I sang and directed the church choirs. I found the stage wherever I went. I'd look at amazing stars like Diana Ross and Whitney Houston and Grace Jones in magazines and on TV and feel a connection to them. I didn't know what that was then, of course. When I began modeling, I was able to express myself in a different way. I didn't start doing drag until I left Cameroon. At that time, drag was not really something you'd see someone do or hear anyone talk about. After moving to the U.S. in 2000, I really found my way in the Minneapolis scene and it changed my life forever.

P: Why did you choose the drag name BeBe Zahara Benet?

BZ: I chose Zahara because I wanted something that connected me to my roots, as well as Benet. Cameroon is a dual language country and I speak French. BeBe is a name that I thought was very cosmopolitan and sophisticated. I put all those elements together to create my name.



P: As an African artist, what does it mean to you to be crowned the first Queen of the American show 'RuPaul's Drag Race'?

BZ: It was an incredibly humbling experience. Back then, I saw it as another pageant, and I came to win. To have that stamp of approval from RuPaul, someone I had looked up to for so long, meant a lot to me.

When we showed up to shoot the first season of the show, we weren't told much about the show. We were asked to bring four suitcases of our fiercest drag and be ready for anything. It was exhilarating not knowing what to expect. We were all so hungry to win and that season had so much heart.

P: Why is it important for you to remind others where you come from?

BZ: Representation matters. It's as simple as that. I come from a place where this art form isn't celebrated like it is in America. I don't take that for granted. My culture and my upbringing are incredibly important to me and it's always been crucial to me to infuse my work with it. I've been told throughout my career to tone it down and move away from my roots and sometimes I've listened to people who would prefer me to be generic. But I kept going back to my roots, because they are integral to who I am as a person, an artist and entertainer. Now, it's about finding new ways to show off my culture and how I can bridge where I'm from with where I am now. Africa is home. I grew up there and it's where I learned so much. I fell in love with music there and got to know myself as an entertainer and a creative person. I have a big family and I have great memories of being raised in West Africa.

P: Is there any drag scene in Africa?

BZ: There is, but it's very underground to the point that I am not familiar with many that participate in the scene there. I am hoping that changes soon. There is such a wealth of beauty and talent there. Patriarchy and homophobia are powerful barriers. I'd love to go back and perform with others and break down the mystique surrounding the drag art form. It's going to take time and patience. It will also take someone going out on a limb to push the boundaries. I can feel it coming and I can't wait for the scene to become more established there.

P: Do you feel like African culture is under-represented in the United States?

BZ: Absolutely! I feel like there is a resurgence now and there have been bursts of it over the past decade or so, but African culture is typically seen as one thing here. Africa is a continent and not a country and I enjoy people who take the time to express different facets of the homeland. It's not just about savage beauty or being wild, Africa is such an opulent place and it's rich in culture, customs and inspiration. I challenge myself to show that diversity in my drag, as well.

P: When did you move to the United States?

BZ: I came here in 2000 to complete my studies and advance my work as an event planner. Back then, I had no concept of drag as anything other than dressing up. After seeing a show in Minneapolis, everything changed for me. I knew I had to be a part of this art form and I did. It was very liberating and I felt like the puzzle pieces really came together after I settled in the U.S. There was a freedom that I felt here. Expressing yourself isn't so taboo and I wanted to live that American dream.



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NYEGE NYEGE

DISRUPTING THE BOYS CLUB
featuring:

DJ Asna

Decay

DJ Kampire

Chabela

Catu Diosis

Cheetah

DJ Turkana

BEBE ZAHARA BENET

