

Francophone African

Oral History

Interviewer: I am going to interview you in the relation to Francophone African Oral History project. Good Afternoon!

Interviewee: Good Afternoon.

Interviewer: Can you introduce yourself please?

Interviewee: My name is Coco Kanyinda, also known as *Vieux Cocson*, I live here in the UK and I have been a musician since back home.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Interviewee: I was born in Mwaka, DR Congo, on 02 February 1948. I did my studies until year 3 in Secondary School and then I started doing music; since then I never done anything else, only music, I started playing music in 1964-65 until today, I had started as a drummer.

Interviewer: What had influenced you to do music?

Interviewee: I am from a family of Griots, my family used to play traditional music at events, I grew up watching them play. I was also part of the Scout in my school, I was arranging the music and I interested most in playing the drum; if I hear the drum playing in the distance, I would go near to see. My cousin used to take me see different groups playing music at Bars, and I loved it; that is why I dedicated all my life to making music.

Interviewer: Among great Congolese musicians like Franco, Rochero, Kale etc. Who influenced you the most?

Interviewee: Honestly, I used to like all sort of music but I preferred OK Jaz and Kale's style of music. Kale's style was more like Salsa and Fiesta and OK Jaz's style was Odemba, a traditional style, I loved both.

Interviewer: When did you start your professional career?

Interviewee: Like I said, I started playing music when I was at School, the district commissioner had asked to recruit pupils to play at his anniversary. A senior of mine in the name of Domingo, he came from Lubumbashi with two guitars, he used to play together with my big brother, they would play trumpet and drum. Their trumpeter came to get me from School, my name (the used to call me Methode) was among those who were recruited to go to play at the commissioner's event.

One of friends, De Paulin also came with me, we went to get two guitarists and then we went to the Trumpeter's. The Trumpeter asked me "what instrument I would like to play?" and I told him that "I play the Drum", my friend used to sing. I warmed up the drum and then we had started the rehearsal; we started with the song, singing, "*Banda se Mobali na Nga*,

Likambo nini Yokowela Ngai na Yo eeee"; we played other song as well. I was playing the drum, other playing the Maracas and two guitarists playing guitars. We would play two styles of music, Rumba and Tsha-tsha-tsha.

Interviewer: What's difference between two styles?

Interviewee: Rumba is slow dance but Tsha-tsha-tsha is quite fast.

The Trumpetist asked me, "Where did you learn to play the drum?" and then I replied that I used to watch people play and from there, I started playing and he said that I was playing very good.

After playing at a Bar, the owner of the Bar told us that he would like us to be his Bar's Band, we would be playing at his Bar and he would pay us the salary; he paid us about 9 Franc each and we agreed to join his orchestra, since then I never return to school.

Interviewer: People say that Rumba is the Congo's Music. What is the origin of Rumba?

Interviewee: There is a confusion, Rumba is originally from the Congo, it sounds like swing, when slaves were brought to America, they took Rumba and made it modern, that is also where Salsa came from.

Interviewer: Where else in Africa you can find Rumba?

Interviewee: In Ghana, Ghana had high life as Congo, that music was played way before in Africa before slaves took them to America. I met with a Colombian woman, she told me that in Colombia, there is a tribe that came from Congo; Jamaica also has a tribe from the Congo; even Reggae music used to be played by Leon Bokasa, singing "*Clara Bayimwena Mwana Mwasi Abotamaki na Kini*" before Jamaicans took it, I used to hear this rhythm when I was younger.

Interviewer: How did you moved to Kinshasa?

Interviewee: When my friends came to take me to go play in Mwene Djitu, we had played at Kayembe Chetemba's Bar. The orchestra that used to play at that Bar, was Ori Jaz, I had asked the drummer to let me play for a while because I knew that I was better than him; when I played, everybody liked it and I was asked to stay play with them.

We travelled to Lubumbashi, after that I joined another orchestra "*Norvela Jaz*", alongside my friend *King Keki* who now lives in Tanzania. But we were not progressing as I wanted. One of my friends told me "let's go to Tshikapa to join a group *Africa Rhythm* of Mudjembe; when we arrived, I asked them to play and I join their orchestra. The leader of the orchestra would play Saxo, we also had Soloist, Bass guitar and two trumpets; it was a full orchestra.

Interviewer: There was no drum at that time?

Interviewee: No, there were no drums, Rochero is the one that started using drums in the Congo's modern music. Before that, it was more of Jaz style of music and Senior Kale used to play an instrument called *Timbales (Oval fom)*.

Interviewer: After Tshikapa?

Interviewee: After that, a group came from Kikwi, *Super Fiesta*; they asked me to join them, at that time I was only interested in music, so I would leave my family and follow my music because I wanted to learn more about the music. When we arrived in Kikwit, they brought me to orchestra's president, Pepe Ndombe, I slept over and then we went to rehearsal the next day.

There was a drummer but he was not really good, so I had to take his place. After 2 months, Pepe Ndombe went to see his sick mother in Kinshasa, and sudden, we heard that Pepe Ndombe has join AFRIZA. Me and my friend Pascale Ngombo (Pascale Poison) had decided to leave Super Fiesta and go to Kinshasa as well.

In Kinshasa, the first orchestra I had joined, was Niko's, in Limete, but I did not really feel comfortable around them, they had conflits between administrators, I was standing outside and some of the fans came to me and said that "Let's take you to Bombenga's orchestra"; we went there, I saw Suzi Kaseya, Senior Bosme, Senior Silis etc.

Senior Bombenga asked me "What do you play" I replied, "I play drum". We took Combi and went to the rehearsal, we started with the song singing, "*barabaroba mpero mpiii*" and then I asked them to let me improvise, I took the drum and started playing "*tintindi-tindi didi*" and everybody loved the way I played; that is how I had join *Vox Afriz*.

Interviewer: Why did you left Vox Afriz?

Interviewee: The salary was not good enough, I could not continue with the them; one day I wrote a letter and made up a story "someone has died in my family, so I have to go". I went to Senior Bombenga's house, I gave the letter to his wife, Bombenga gave me 15 Zaire and his wife gave me 5 Zaire, I felt like I had Millions, I took taxi and that's when I left the orchestra.

Me and Petit nikko went to Papa Noel to join Bambula orchestra and then we went to see Niki Singa to ask him to give us instruments, which Senior Bikunda and Senior Ajevedo were using, we took the instruments; we were all instrumentalists but we did not have a singer, so I gave the idea to ask Pascal to join our orchestra as a singer. We went to see minister Senga, he sent us to Samangwana; he gave us the complete instruments, clothes, shoes and paid us some money and then we started rehearsing. Samangwana had a complete orchestra, we became reserve musicians, I said to Petit Niko, "let's just stay here as long as we have the salary"

We stay in the group but we were not playing at the concerts, until one day we had a concert in Ndili, the lead drummer was not there, so I had to play; I played and everybody liked it. After a while, they cut the salary, we went from 15 Zaire to 10 Zaire; we went to see the Secretary of Minister Senga, he asked Samangwana to provide the Payslips but he could not provide them. The Secretary gave the responsibility to Guvano, and Samangwana did not appreciate it, he left and joined OK Jaz. One day, the security guy who used to keep the money, gave us some money and influenced us to leave the orchestra.

Interviewer: You had left the instruments as well?

Interviewee: Yes, we left the instruments, to Guvano.

Interviewer: Where did you go after that?

Interviewee: I went to orchestra called *Cercule Jaz* of Mamadu and Franclin Bukaka from Brazaville; after the death of Franclin Bukaka, Mamadu took refuge in Kinshasa due to political problem in the Republic of Congo.

Interviewer: Does Rumba is played in Congo-Brazzaville in the same way is played in DR Congo?

Interviewee: Yes, we are just the same country, Western people had separated us but we are the same people.

Interviewer: How did you leave the Congo to the UK. What was your expectations when you arrived in Europe? And What have you done so far?

Interviewee: The songs that I made in Bumbola orchestra were interpreted by Pepe Kale, Dindo and Tex, and soloist *Beli*, they were rehearsing those songs egg: singing "*Soki na Maloba nayo nayoki Somo, soki nalandi nde na zoki beli ya ba mbanda, bayemba ba yemba yo pote oyebana, bolingo ezali eloko elinga motema bako sombaka te*". They would sing those songs perfectly like angels. We had recorded about 4-5 songs and went to give them to the owner of Wayi kiki Bar, he was friend of Senior *Simaro*.

Interviewer: Where *Simaro* was playing at that time?

Interviewee: *Simaro* was in OK Jaz but his friend was Business man, the owner of a Bar, he wanted to promote musicians; we gave him songs and I asked Lutumba *Simaro* to listen to them and he liked it but Lutumba told him that we had played Fiesta style, we should change the songs to OK Jaz style. I did not want to do the work twice, so we did not work together.

Interviewer: Those songs never came out?

Interviewee: I recorded those songs when I did my first orchestra *Mangelepa* in Kenya, other musicians interpreted them. I had a contract with Indians to record those songs. At that time, you record a song today, and tomorrow it's out. I made two albums with *Mangelepa*, we had a lot of success.

After *Mangelepa* has terminated, we had formed another orchestra *Virunga* in 1982 in Nairobi/Kenya, alongside Samba Makwangala.

Interviewer: between you and Samba Makwangala, who went to Kenya first?

Interviewee: We came before him, we had a lot success with *Virunga* orchestra. I met a girl from London, she loved our music, we became friends, and when she was about to go back to London, I ask her if she could get us production contract to come and play in Europe. She went back to London, less than a month, she wrote me a letter saying that she had got us a production contract to play at *Africa Centre*; I gave the letter to Masamba (The Leader) and Mamitsho (chief of the orchestra). Masamba did not like the idea of the orchestra coming to play in Europe, he thought that I had a plan to allow musicians stay in Europe, so they kicked me out of the group.

Because I had my own songs and editors knew me, I had formed another group, *Kanzako* and I made a new disc, I recruited new musicians. We contacted cultural centre in of Rwanda, we went to Rwanda to play at French Cultural Centre, we had sold out, we played twice and made quite a lot of money. We took plane to Goma, Kinsangani. From Kinsangani, we went to Bungi, Cameroun, Lome to join Samangwana.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Interviewee: In 1983. When we get to Cameroun, the Bassist got a girlfriend and left the group; we had met Emile Soki, Seben Show, Carlito, Jonal at the Hotel. We took the train to Buta, Nduba, Ngasu and we entered Central Africa; we stayed in Bangui and met some other guys.

Our soloist who had played, singing “Eee Fidelee Eee Fidelee” he was staying in Cameroun, he asked us to join him in Cameroun but we did not have money to travel all together, we had decided to go one by one, I was the last to go to Cameroun; I told the car driver that I was going to see my Brother who works in the Embassy in Cameroun and I will pay him money when we get there; halfway the engine broke, the driver left me in the middle of a village, I stayed with the village people almost 2 weeks, then the driver came to repair the car and took me to Yaoundé. We went to the Embassy but we did not see the person I was looking for, I could not pay the driver his money, we went to his house, I slept over.

One day I was going to the Embassy, I saw my friend Fidele from the distance, I run toward him, we had some money and we had decided to rent a house.

In Cameroun, Congolese music was not played in the radios, it was played in Bars. I told Kaloji Zola, the Pianist to join us and we had formed an orchestra called *Les 3 Z*, I made a song for Papa Micho, he was a business man, we sung for him and when he heard the song, he said that he going to sponsor us, and paid us 500.000 Franc CFA, we went to Embassy of Lome to get the visas, they told us that Zairois do not need visas to go to Lome, we bought tickets, when we have arrived in Lome, they refused us entry, we have to get the plane to Ivory Coast; when we arrived in the Ivory Coast, they refused us the Entry because we did not have visas. We stayed two days in Airport waiting for a plane to go back to Yaoundé.

We arrived in Yaoundé, our visas expired and we were refused entry in Yaoundé as well; we contacted our Embassy and they told us to go back to Kinshasa; we could not get our luggage, we had only small bags, and we went back just like that.

When we arrived in Kinshasa at Ndjili Airport, they arrested us and put us in jail in the city centre, where they used to put Politicians. Luckily, it was during the presidential period, Mubutu was the only candidate. I had an idea to make a song for Mobutu, we started singing the song and the security soldiers heard us singing, they called us, we told them that we made a song for the President and we are ready to record it at Verkys’s studio when we will be out of Jail. We sang for them again, went back to Jail and the day after, we were released from the Jail, we asked them our luggage but we were told that luggage was taken by soldiers, we had to make a choice between being released from Jail or getting our luggage back; we chose to get released.

We had left the country for so long, we did not know where to start. After a while, I join the orchestra *The Best*, in Intercontinental Hotel; sometimes, I would go to rehearse at Verky's Veve Center.

We were chosen to play at the 5th Anniversary of the President Mobutu and Bobila Dawa, we played at Nsele; we started playing in the room but it was warm, so we went to the boat and continued the event.

The next day we were invited to Camp Tshatshi, where Mubutu used to live, he paid us around 350.000 Zaire, he said "this is just a Tip; Madiata will get his money after". We brought the money to Madiata, he just gave us 5000 Zaire each, we were so angry about that; our drummer, Esoke, I think he's still playing at Intercontinental Hotel, he got really angry and Madiata add 500 Zaire to each of us.

Interviewer: How did you arrive in London?

Interviewee: After the disagreement with Madiata, I went to Lusaka, I joined a group over there and then we came to England for the first time in 1986, we went back to Lusaka and came back to England in 1987; they salary was not good, they would pay us just £50 per week but we were playing a lot of concert. The first concert was in Derby, I met a white woman after that first concert; she had brought me drum and other materiel to bring to Africa.

I went to Kenya, I met one guy, he had a production contract from Japan, he asked to form a group to go to perform in Japan, I agreed to the offer, I took three musicians from Tanzania, we got visas and went to Japan. Friends who stayed in Zimbabwe were surprised to hear us being in Japan, they could not believe it. After nine months in Japan, we went back in Kenya, I made another album, "*Africa Jambo*".

My girlfriend that I met in England, joined me in Kenya, we got married, she came back to England. I got another production contract to Japan and after that I joined my wife over here in England.

Interviewer: You had a place to stay when you arrived?

Interviewee: Yes, I arrived in Bristol, there were not a lot of Congolese, I had formed an orchestra with Caucasian people, a Gambian guy and an Australian woman.

Interviewer: Do you have pictures of your orchestra?

Interviewee: Yes, I do have it; we had played five times at Glastonbury in Jaz tent, we also played at Avalon, three to four times. We used to play Afro Funk style, not Rumba. My songs used to be played at Jaz FM. I also worked with the group that Papa Wemba played at, alongside Peter Gabriel, I taught them drum. I went to Spain, Caceres, Helsinki, Germany, 9 states in USA, Australia, New Zealand. In 2009, I have received Bronze medal in Italy, we met with Youssou N'Dour, Bob Marley's Son and some other musicians.

Interviewer: How have you influenced the Congolese music?

Interviewee: As they say, "the experience made me a wise man" I used to play only drum but today I can sing, I am the lead singer of my orchestra "*All Star*" my music is more lyrical, with

a deep message to educate people, compare to nowadays Congolese music. I am playing OK Jaz and Afriza Style; my new Album “Bo ko Pakata”, has those old style, it’s different to what others play. I need marketing to get the Album reach the large audience.

Interviewer: Who still keep Luambo Makiadi’s style of music? Among Congolese musicians.

Interviewee: Most of Congolese musicians are using Fiesta style, only Ferre Gola the one who is using OK Jaz style a little bit.

Interviewer: We are at the end of our interview, thank you very much for your time.

Interviewee: Thank you