

Global Vision

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global vision — AFRICA

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■ **TURMOIL TO TRIUMPH** MICROFINANCE IN RWANDA ■
■ **DAMBISA MOYO** AUTHOR OF DEAD AID ■ THE **TEACH AFRICA**
PROGRAM ■ **AFRICA** ON THE HUDSON ■ **AFROPOP** WORLD-
WIDE ■ **A MEDITERRANEAN UNITY**



Twenty Years of Afropop Worldwide

Radio show **Afropop Worldwide** (www.afropop.org) celebrated its 20th anniversary recently in New York, inducting Harry Belafonte and Angilique Kidjo into its hall of fame at an entertainment packed gala. The evening of music, food, and dance, included live performances by the Mandingo Ambassadors and the cast of the Off Broadway hit *Fela*. The global radio program, which is now broadcast on over 100 stations in the US, Europe, and Africa, was the brainchild of current Producer, Sean Barlow, and showcases music and culture of Africa and the African Diaspora.



THE MANDINGO AMBASSADORS

Global Vision attended Afropop's 20th Anniversary gala and caught up with long time host, Georges Collinet:

GV: So Georges, did you ever think *Afropop Worldwide* would come this far? How do you see the program changing in the future?

Collinet: Well, actually no. When we started I had bet Sean Barlow a bottle of champagne that we would not last a month. Then at the end of the month, I bet him another bottle we would not last six months. Then I bet him a case of champagne we would not last a year. And 20 years later we are still going strong. There is no reason for us not to get better and better. Moving forward we are always looking at ways to create a more in depth format and we are looking at doing more with video and Youtube.

GV: So how do you define *Afropop* as a musical term? How has that definition evolved over the span of program? I know there's been some dispute over how to label music of Africa and the Diaspora. Some say *Afropop*, some say world music. Some have problems with both.

Collinet: Well, *Afropop* is a name that sings and is something good. The term

went from being a name of our show to a classification of a musical genre. It's even been used to classify African music by the New York Times. We've had some problems with people in media using our name for their own branding. *Afropop* as a way to define certain African music has always made more sense to me than world music. World music could be anything coming from another country. Would people in Africa call music from the U.S. world music?

GV: In terms of the music coming from sub-Saharan Africa what are some trends you've seen over the last 10 years? What do you like, dislike? I know you've expressed some reservations about the non instrument based hip hop and DJ type styles.

Collinet: Well, I don't have a problem with hip hop or rap, per se. Rap started in Africa with origins in the griot traditions of West Africa. There's also a region in Senegal where the fisherman would come back from their work and would use a rap style to tell the stories of their day. In my village in Cameroon there were people who would go around and tell stories using a rhythmic form. So it's not hip hop or rap that I have any problem with. Whether it's instrument

based or not, I just get tired if everybody is doing the same thing. With certain rap forms, from Johannesburg, to Tokyo, to the Bronx sometimes it seems artists are just copying each other, and not really creating anything new or drawing on their roots, just because they think it's the only thing that will sell. I think African artists should not forget what musical foundations make them uniquely African and not forget to find new ways to integrate that into their music.

In terms of music coming from Africa, the quality has improved a great deal and it's moving right along. Still, I would like to see more big stars coming out of Africa. We've seen people like Youssou N'Dour, but we need more African artists to break out, establish themselves in the world, and pave the way for others.

GV: What about music of the new African Diaspora here in the U.S.? New African immigrants seem to be everywhere, from Little Senegal in Harlem to communities in Washington, DC and Atlanta. Have you seen any new trends, fusion, or musical styles coming from this?

Collinet: Not really yet. Most of the African musicians I've seen in the US want to perpet-



MEMBERS OF THE MANDINGO AMBASSADORS AND THE OFF BROADWAY SHOW FELA!



AFROPOP WORLDWIDE HOST GEORGES COLLINET

uate their own music. I've also noticed that often African musicians and American musicians have a hard time playing together. There's a different body language. People say American music is a square and African music is a circle, in the way it moves. Perhaps with more collaborations and some more mixing of African and American musicians, we could see something new come along soon.

GV: *With MTV Africa, their awards show, and success of some artists such as Akon and collaborations of Nigeria's D'banj in the U.S., do you see a possibility for more African artists breaking into the American pop music scene?*

Collinet: I think there is always the possibility, but African artists need more support and organization in terms of production, managers, writers, and arrangers. There are a lot of tremendous talents out there, but it takes more than just that to break onto the American pop scene. Someone would need to find a way to get more African artists and songs on commercial radio in the U.S. Perhaps one of these days, someone could come along and be like Chris Blackwell was to Jamaican music to African music. Someone who can package and manage the talent and carry African musicians into American music circles.

GV: *After all these years covering African music, what are some of your personal favorite artists and genres past and present? What is your most memorable performance?*

Collinet: Well in terms of genres, I really appreciate it all. There have been memorable performances with Afropop. We've had a lot of good stuff. One that comes to mind was when we covered the Houston International Festival, with 10 venues of music and they built an Afropop stage. There was so much energy there and you felt literally like you were walking on mu-

sic. Still, my most memorable performance goes back to when I was seven years old in my village in Cameroon. There was a traveling musician who came to the village to play music with my uncle. There was a big fire. The entire village joined in with singing and drumming and dancing. It went on late into the night, and it was out of this world. And I don't have any idea what happened to this guy, but makes me remember there are still a lot of musicians like that in Africa. They are not famous, they may get a few coins, but that tradition is the foundation of African music.

BY JAKE BRIGHT



HARRY BELAFONTE AND ANGELIQUE KIDJOX



SEAN BARLOW AND HARRY BELAFONTE