



Montparnasse Musique — Archeology

Archeology private streaming/download link: <https://s.disco.ac/pbrvdggbpkad>

NO AIRPLAY UNTIL 07 October 2022

(except released singles 'Bonjour' - 17 August and 'Malele' - 23 September)

Underground to overground. Forest to metropolis. North Africa and South Africa, meeting up, digging down, finding gold in the seams. Here, at the intersection of club floor and ritual, of electronics and ceremony, are worlds both ancient and modern. Otherworlds, where inhibitions fall away, dancers shakedown and trance takes you out there, and far away.

This is *Archeology* – the astounding debut album from Montparnasse Musique, a duo whose recent self-titled EP, out on the new Real World X imprint, had critics waxing ecstatic.

“A hint of [the duo’s] vast and ongoing experimentation with pan-African musics,” declared Resident Advisor. *“A winding path that connects dots around the world.”*

Wrapped in striking visuals and released on the mothership Real World Records label, *Archeology* builds on the foundations of that tyro project, in which the live rhythms of traditional and urban Africa – particularly, that of Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo - meets the programmed beats of modern Johannesburg. It expands the pair’s already distinctive sound, making it wilder, more nuanced, even more pan-African.

“Africa is such a huge continent that people in one country almost never witness music from another,” says Algerian-French DJ/producer Nadjib, who formed Montparnasse Music following a chance encounter at Montparnasse-Bienvenue, a Paris train station, with internationally celebrated South African house DJ, Aero Manyelo.

“Francophone Africa rarely has anything to do with English-speaking Africa,” continues Nadjib, sitting in his home studio in Tourcoing, northern France, surrounded by vinyl records, analogue synthesizers and the vivid mosaics and large-scale paintings created by his late father, visual artist Mahjoub Ben Bella.

“Manyelo and I imagined an ethnological musical adventure running from North Africa to South Africa and meeting in the middle, in Congo, a country whose contemporary art and music are linked, and as strong as each other.”

To his left, on the cusp of returning home to Jo’burg, Manyelo nods. *“I have travelled throughout Africa with previous projects, to Kenya, Uganda, Burkina Faso,”* says the South African innovator. *“But finding these raw sounds and art from Congo over a decade ago opened up my brain, my eyes and my software. I would listen every day in my car.”*

Aided by Michel Winter, the veteran global music manager behind such seminal Congolese acts as Konono No.1 and Mbongwana Star, Nadjib and Manyelo were accompanied into recording studios in France and Belgium by a hot list of Congolese musicians. Among them, notably, was Cubain Kabeya, a lynchpin of sprawling collectives including Kasai Allstars (itself a collection of five different bands),

and a performer whose ability to captivate (whether singing, freeform dancing, wielding self-made instruments or slinking into the crowd while wearing a tribal mask) is evident during Montparnasse Musique's live shows.

"Eh, mama, you are not tired, you can dance all night, every night," Kabeya sings in Lingala on 'Muparue', an original Mbongwana Star track dedicated to the increasingly liberated Congolese woman. On 'Plowman', an interlude, he and Nadjib recreate the spirit of the Kasai forest region in central southern Congo using flute, beats and metal likembe thumb pianos while hailing *l'arbre de l'authenticité*, the tree of authenticity: chop down forests in the Kasai, sings Kebaya, and floods, storms and misery ensues.

Whether created in situ or reworked and edited later ("Nadjib and I learn from each other's musical tastes and archives all the time, even when we're chilling," says Manyelo), each of *Archeology's* 12 tracks is distinct. Many are issues-based. All are trance-inducing. Ten have guest features: Kenya's Projekt raps in Swahili on 'Mwangaza' ('Light'), a track named for a community project in Nairobi. *"Nairobi to Kasai we can relate,"* he spits. *"Let's join hands and uplift lives, together we can move forward into the light."*

'Malele' and 'Makonda' present Mengu Waku, singer with Konono No.1, while 'Kamoulan' finds free-spirited vocalist Muambuyi of the Kasai Allstars singing, in the minority Tshiluba language, of the animals and birds of the Kasai, accompanied by guitarist Mopero Mupemba of Basokin and – privately – the ritualised animal-and-bird dances intrinsic to the region.

"We wanted everybody's involvement in the project. Konono and Basokin happened to be touring Europe, so with Michel's help we got the musicians into the studio; Mbongwana Star have disbanded but we got a track of theirs from Michel and worked on it with Cubain, who lives in Paris," says Nadjib, who created 'Chibinda Ilunga' – a track dedicated to the great civilizing hero of the Chokwe people of central and southern Africa – with Manyelo.

With the blessing of Michel Winter, then, a baton was passed to Montparnasse Musique.

"We're taking care of Congotronics," say the duo, referencing the electro-acoustic Kinshasa scene with its intertwined ideas and inspirations. *"We taking the music to its next phase."*

Unleashed on the West in 2003, Konono No.1 grabbed fans of rock and electronic music by the scruff. Here were echoing vocal lines and looping ancient-to-future rhythms played on ringing guitars, pinging likembe and percussion made from hub caps and other junkyard cast offs, delivered through megaphones and enormous *lance-voix* ('voice thrower') speakers. Konono's blend of avant-rock and traditional trance (an adaptation of Zombo ritual music originally played on elephant tusks) was a testament to DIY ingenuity. As the music's popularity grew, winning over A-listers including Björk and Questlove, it became a gift to western acts in search of inspiration.

Later, while Manyelo was in Jo'burg, digitally melding kwaito, techno and electro-gqom, collaborating with everyone from Idris Elba to Mahotella Queens and vibing in his car to Konono No.1, Nadjib was working with Algeria's Gnawa brotherhoods (think pentatonic rhythms, call-and-response chants,



all-night *lila* healing ceremonies) as well as acts including Gnawa Diffusion, Africa Express and most recently, Les Amazones d'Afrique. Ever-experimental, he remixed a track from Congotronics and, at an African music night in Paris featuring Mbongwana Star, handed it to Michel Winter. Who, on listening, was blown away.

Soon after, over coffee with Winter, Nadjib laid out his vision for a project in which collaboration was crucial, where artwork, images and visuals would flesh out the story. Renaud Barret, director of *System K*, the lively and unsettling 2020 documentary about Kinshasa's incredible roiling art world, came onboard: the videos that accompany 'Panter' and 'Makonda' are phantasmagorical visits to Congo's giant capital city, where bright configurations of colour daub a multitude of surfaces and fashion-based collectives such as Bakoko reinvent the legendary La Sape movement in ways that honour the ancestors.

Archeology's cover art – a visually arresting shot of a section of the Kasai region, its river an impossible blue, its vegetation an electric magenta - comes courtesy of acclaimed photographer Richard Mosse. "I used to run a gallery, and am connected with many photographers around the world," says Nadjib. "I went to an exhibition of Richard Mosse's work at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, these massive photos of the war-and-mining-torn Kasai region. I was very touched.

"Mosse uses discontinued Kodak infrared film that was developed by the US military in the 1940s to detect camouflage, find hidden enemies," Nadjib continues. "He makes us question what we are seeing; at first it seems dreamy, like paradise. Then we realise it is actually about people in the middle of conflict and strife, trying to survive."

Just as raising awareness through collaboration is central to the Montparnasse Musique remit, so too is taking pride in achievements both local and global. The track 'Luendu' featuring Muambuvi and Mopero Mupemba, is a Lingala-language paean to newly independent children, while 'Badarou' is a tribute to French-Beninese keyboardist Wally Badarou, an inventive composer, prolific session musician and one of Nadjib's heroes.

Then there is 'Bonjour' and 'Bonsoir', respectively good-natured plays on the salutations and nighttime wishes long bestowed upon Michel Winter by his Congolese colleagues — "*Good evening,*" sings Muambuvi, "*we greet you and are moving forward little by little with Michel*").

There's more. Much more. Each listen to *Archeology* unearths new textures, uncovers fresh mysteries, take us through yet another magic portal.

Heightening intuition. Offering inspiration. Promoting healing.

"Montparnasse Music came together through a shared love of trance," says Nadjib. "Whether it's electronic trance played by club DJs or traditional acoustic music played during rituals, for us it is the same energy.

"We are bringing the two worlds together. We're making music that speaks to the body."



Manyelo smiles.

“And we’re sending peace, love and good vibrations across Africa,” he says.

ENDS

Text by Jane Cornwell

***Archeology* by Montparnasse Musique is out on 07 October 2022 on Real World Records and is available to pre-order on CD and LP from 17 August 2022. The first single, ‘Bonjour’, is available on all digital platforms on 17 August 2022.**

Pre-order/listen: <http://lnk.to/RW247>

www.montparnassemusique.com
www.realworldrecords.com