

BAKWA

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Q & A with Mayembe Malayika on Pan-African Soul

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Samyra Manka'a discusses with German singer Mayembe Malayika, highlighting roots, influences and diversity



Mayembe Malayika (L)

You found out about your Congolese father when you were 25, is that right? What was that like and has this African side of you influenced your music in any way?

Oh yes! That's when we met for the first time; it was a super happy moment. I felt like having found the missing ingredient for my soup. Being myself, suddenly all made sense. I received a huge energy boost and got to know my brothers and sisters.

That was the seed of my Africanization, which is a major influence in my song.

What is your inspiration as far as music is concerned, what gives you that drive to keep making music?

My inspiration is to encourage and motivate people, as well as to address sociopolitical issues. A long time ago, it saved me to hear an elder proclaim that he's my African Uncle now, which gave me a sense of belonging – and I could move on with more confidence. Singing in Gospel Choirs taught me faith and deeply rooted me in the power of music to touch the heart and mind of people. That's why I'm also facilitating music workshops with youths from all over the world. Music bridges all differences.

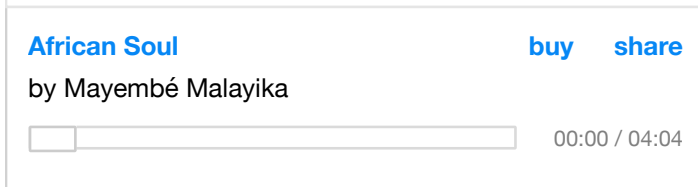
Your debut Album, *Pan-African Soul*, has found a place in the African and Western music scene. What can you say about the album?

I was working on lyrics a lot at night, meditating about the meaning of roots, culture, alienation and the role of multicultural people, while receiving a lot of news and history from various African countries. Then I had the chance to record an album with executive producer Fakoly Production (Mali/France), worked with their producer, continued in Germany and finished writing the songs with Friedemann Lück (Germany) and Keith R. Powell (Jamaica/Germany), who produced the music with his team. Eight songs feature the traditional drums of Aly Bayo's group Kaira Percu (Senegal/Germany). The song 'Rise' is a collaboration with Beelan Bull (Ivory Coast/France), the drummer of Tiken Jah.

You won the JazzOpen Playground contest and shared the stage with Katie Melua. Opened shows for Angélique Kidjo, Amadou & Mariam, Kymani Marley, and Dobet Gnahoré. What was the entire experience like for you?

Playing at the JazzOpen before Katie Melua was a good opportunity to present the album and also sell it to a completely new audience.

Of course opening the stage for all of these amazing artists was a blessing. Very exciting!



What kind of artist will you like to be branded as? Considering that your album *Pan-African Soul* is a blend of reggae, soul and afro beat.

I'm not a fan of labeling genres... but this is my definition: it's straight from my soul – in my case "African Soul".

What can you say about your live-performances? You must love feeling and the energy from the audience, as well as delivering raw music, don't you?

I love sharing the moment, yes. Whether it is just two guitars, the whole band, or being by myself. The magic is happening when you're having a good time, no matter how the audience reacts. Playing a quiet acoustic set in front of a hip-hop audience or jamming with a full band in an intellectual setting might not have the effect you wish for, but being fully in the music and enjoying it makes all the difference. People feel it, if you feel it.

How do you blend your audience, both foreign and African? You're part German, then there is the DRC audience and the English speaking audience. How do you make this diversity work for you and your music?

I embrace all of it. Sometimes I make an announcement in French, English, German or a few words in wolof, mandingue – I even had to test my few Portuguese words in an Angolan concert. Then I also sing in English, Swahili, and lingala...

Any upcoming projects you'd like to talk to us about? Future plans perhaps?

We're planning a new album for the future. More Soul, New Life...

Tags: [Aly Bayo](#), [Amadou & Mariam](#), [Angélique Kidjo](#), [Beelan Bull](#), [Conversations](#), [Dobet Gnahoré](#), [Fakoly Production](#), [Friedemann Lück](#), [Germany](#), [Interviews](#), [JazzOpen](#), [Kaira Percu](#), [Katie Melua](#), [Keith R. Powell](#), [Kymani Marley](#), [Mayembe Malayika](#), [Music](#), [Tiken Jah](#), [Unique Africa Artists](#)

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