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zita swoon group

wait for me







ZITA SWOON GROUP WAIT FOR ME

Stef Kamil Carlens was invited by Ibrahim Diallo and Dora Mols (from the Antwerp Zuiderspershuis) to travel to the West African Burkina Faso a couple of times in 2010, without, and later together with, his musicians. 'Africa had always intrigued me, but until I took this trip – and except for a collection of CD's- it had always been a foreign continent to me', says Carlens.

In Burkina, Ibrahim Diallo introduced him to the balafon player Mamadou Diabaté Kibié and the singer Awa Démé, the last two are griots, popular traditional West African storytellers. Stef Kamil Carlens listened to the griots' stories, observed and kneaded. During that introduction the ground was laid for *Wait For Me*, a duet between two traditions, a lot of improvisation and looking at what the day brings. *Wait For Me*, a meeting between West African griot art and Carlens' European blues background.

Stef Kamil Carlens 'Mamadou and I started playing, Mamadou on the balafon (a wooden West-African percussion instrument) and me on the guitar. The limitations brought on by the balafon- the musical scale starts with fa- were an asset because you could immediately exclude a few things. After that it all went pretty fast, looking for a direction together, writing and our first recordings.' The result is a predominantly acoustic play of Western and African instruments, the griots traditional lyrics and Carlens' Western response.

'Mamadou and Awa live in the city but they remain villagers who can neither read nor write. Most of their songs come from the griot world, and they are founded in folklore or philosophy that is passed on from mother to daughter, or from father to son.' The lyrics don't contain the biggest truths about the world, but as Carlens calls it, 'people person supporting ' themes. The subject matter is diverse and most importantly it is about the people: about honesty, lying, betrayal and the misleading of the people. 'But sometimes its about very specific actual themes like



ecology. The woodcutting in Burkina is massive to the extent that it is a threat to the eco system. There's a song that cries out to burn down less woods and cut down less trees.'

'Modernisation in Burkina Faso is slow. There's been a dictatorship for 23 years; there is the very dry sub-Saharan climate and cotton industry multinationals are killing small farmers. Mali and Burkina are the biggest cotton producers in Africa, but their production depends completely on manipulated crops, which don't produce their own seeds. Each year farmers are forced to buy these patented seeds from large multinationals and pay high prices for these. And we're not even talking about the monoculture and the amount of water it takes'.

Consequence: hunger overshadows growth, says Carlens. 'We talked nights on end. People talk about liberalism, in the sense of opening up the community. People also

think dictatorship has to go, and that women should have more rights, that education should improve. But at the same time, people wake up wondering what they're going to eat that evening. 'A man that is hungry, is not a free man', I heard that sentence so often.' Carlens travelled with the idea to follow the Burkinese life rhythm, 'not to get a complete image of the country. I spent many evenings with my fantastic guide Ibrahim Diallo and listened to his compelling life story and the stories of others.' He got to know a small group of people. Fascinating people who told him about their cultural traditions and social codes.

'I find the importance of social codes in Burkina Faso fascinating, the social rules the Burkinese employ with 'les étrangers' for whom they'll drop everything. As a stranger in Burkina, you're treated like a prince, regardless of who you are or where you're from. I don't believe we've ever had such codes in

our culture or genes. We can learn a thing or two from this.'

To maintain unity in the cultural and ethnical diversity- Burkina Faso counts about 60 different ethnicities- the community has built in security valves: the parenté de plaisanterie or the 'tease relationship'. 'It's incredibly intriguing, and you sense that in the community which is pretty peaceful', says Carlens. 'For instance, the Senufo and the Peul have closed an age-old pact which preclude that they will ever have disputes. Both groups can swear at and mock each other, but it can never escalate to a conflict. Though there are quite a few codes that are unknown territory for me and which are more cruel. Stealing is a deadly sin. If you get caught, you're a dead man. When that happens, everyone goes outside to kill that person on the spot, so the only place thieves are safe is the police station. The flipside of this hard method is that stealing hardly ever happens.'

Burkina Faso is a religious country, in which the largest groups are followers of traditional religious practices like animism and the Islam. About twelve percent is Christian.

'I kept myself a bit at a distance. I'm not religious and a person who is averse to religion isn't appreciated. Yet, we have some songs that have a strong link to religion, like Allah Nomandi, which is about the inscrutability of God. It is a beautiful song that Awa, who is a very religious Muslim, sings solo.'

*From the interview with Stef Kamil Carlens by
Tine Danckaers MO* magazine*

Awa Démé, Madame Koita Allah is always close by', says the female griot Awa Démé who sings in duet with Stef Kamil Carlens. She fills in God like a higher power that guides her. She realizes that this isn't always an obvious choice for everyone. 'In *Allah Nomandi* I talk about how difficult it can be to believe in God. God embraces everyone's lives: those of the suffering and those of the fortunate. There are some who have an unlucky fate, they lose everything and everyone they cherish. And there are some who are predestined for luck, who have never had any problems. What they want, they get.' Exactly those differences in destiny and the question why those differences exist, makes the challenge to believe in God even greater, explains Démé.

Before Awa Démé stepped into *Wait For Me* she stood rooted in the ground of Burkina Faso and Mali, cultural twin countries. She was born into and grew up in the tradition of West African griots and never learnt another language other than the spoken word. Like many young Burkinese she thought about one day leaving the hopelessness of her dried up, hungry country. 'The people are tired of working, of fighting to get food on the table every day. It's an easy choice: leave, in search of a better life, food and drink elsewhere. Except, not everyone has that choice. And that's what *Wait For Me* is about.' She sings about the desire to leave in the beautiful duet *A Ni Baara*, in which Carlens describes the hard reality of labor immigration. A reality that also exists in Burkina Faso: many Burkinese are forced to work for hunger wages in the cacao and banana industry on the Ivory Coast to feed their families.

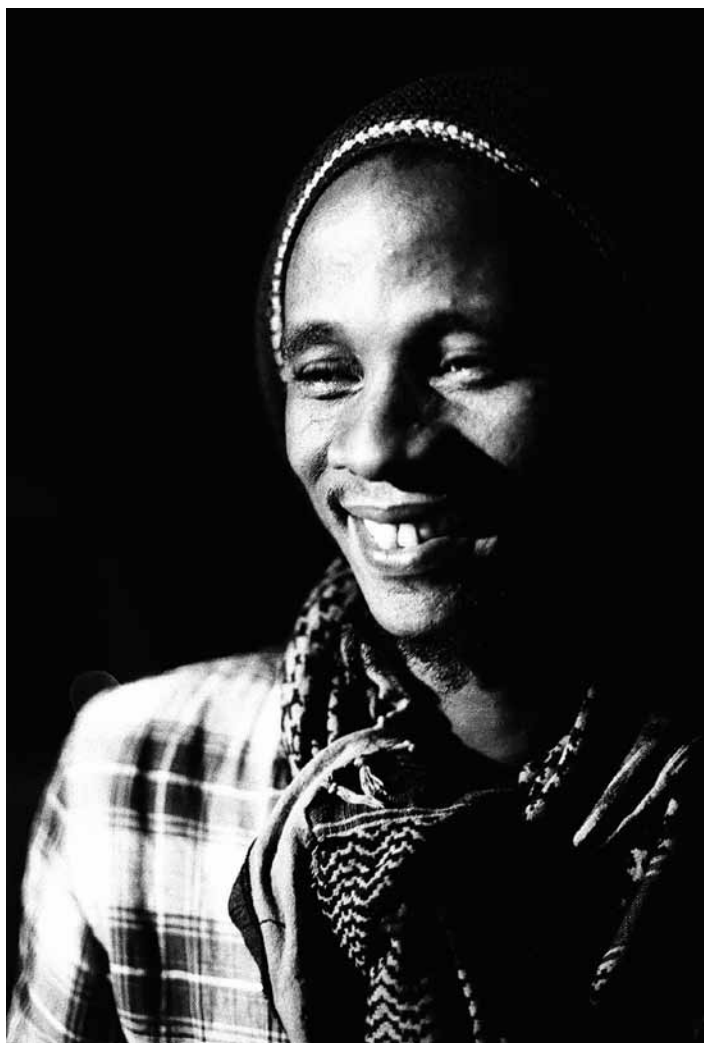
'I personally found a new opening with this project. This dialog with foreign countries

has thrown open my world.' This dialog works both ways, says Démé. She gives and learns. She learns new codes and new languages, both formally as concerning content, with which she wants to enrich her knowledge and personality. At the same time she adds the immense cultural heritage she carries within her to the European musician's baggage.

'A griot is a living library', says Démé. She calls herself a vessel filled with stories about the past, the present and the future. 'It is my duty as a griot to tell these stories. That I can share these stories of the West African Mandingo culture across the border, that Stef is doing something with it, is a beautiful thing. *Wait For Me* has become a very open project, with musicians who really respect each other. We all support the result and you can feel that.'

An interview by Tine Danckaers





Ibrahim Diallo 'When I saw a Zita Swoon concert in Antwerp, it immediately became clear to me that I wanted to work on a project with Stef Kamil Carlens', explains Ibrahim Diallo, artistic partner of World culture center Zuiderpershuis in Burkina Faso. 'Stef has an amazing talent to relate emotions, to bond with other cultures and traditions, to make connections. He's someone who purifies music and brings it back to its true essence. At the same time I thought it was an asset that his group- a nest of Flemish musicians, Cubans, Africans, Mestizos- is a "truc bariolé".'

The collaboration has become a tribute by musicians from two cultural traditions. 'In *Wait For Me* every musician takes in an equal position on an open horizontal plane. You feel that Stef is there, that the balafon player is there, the bassist, the griot. The whole thing works through mutual respect and coherence.'

The texts and dialogs hit on the morale and problems in the Burkinese community. Diallo took Carlens to his country and gave him an introduction to contemporary Burkina Faso, not just on a cultural level but also on a political and social level.

Diallo, who has been affiliated to the Zuiderpershuis for seventeen years, founded the

cultural center Le Grenier Culturel in the Burkinese city Fada N'Gourma. It has become a central meeting place between West Africa and Antwerp.

'I dream of touring with *Wait For Me* through West Africa. Of course it isn't a political meeting, but you need to offer a dialog like this, so pure, the opportunity to flourish. It has become an honest and equal transaction between two cultures. You read the economic and political worries between the lines of the texts. You read what is wrong, what doesn't work.'

'I love my country; it's a beautiful country with honest people. I don't have a desire to leave. Why should I? I believe it's possible: that everyone will be able to bring food on the table every day. It sounds banal, but food is crucial for happiness. You can only start being creative when you can eat and are healthy. You don't need to build a 3-story concrete building to know the richness of life.'

Spirituality runs parallel with the lines of life for Diallo. 'Life is my guide and my inspiration. To be able to live a good life according to what the day brings, that is my goal.'



ARTISTS

Awa Démé • vocals

Stef Kamil Carlens • vocals, resophonic guitar, blues harp

Mamadou Diabaté Kibié • balafon

Kapinga Gysel • glockenspiel, pump organ, vocals

Simon Pleysier • Gibson SG, acoustic guitar, banjo

Amel Serra Garcia • percussion

Karen Willems • cocktail drums, vocals

Christophe Albertijn • bass guitar

A NI BAARA

I left my my home and I left my family
Went off to work in a foreign country
I been picking coffee beans for a long six years
Now I'm moving up north, man it won't be easy

A Ni Baara
Congratulations! You worked well!
Fasodennu
Children of the homeland
A Ni Baara
Congratulations! You worked well!
Ban ka fisa janfa ye he
*Never forget our values, refusal is more
honorable than betrayal*
Ho ! ho ! yafa n ma
Oh, forgive me!

Some get lucky and some they venture
Into the darkness of the northern countries
Some make money and send it home to the family
Some get only trouble and misadventure

A Ni Baara
Congratulations! You worked well!
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Children of the homeland
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Congratulations! You worked well!
Ban ka fisa janfa ye he
*Never forget our values, refusal is more
honorable than betrayal*
Ho ! ho ! yafa n ma
Oh, forgive me!

The beauty of a man is the work he can do
But I been travelling so long I got holes in my shoes
Not a penny in my pocket and a rumble in my tummy
I'm feeling worn out and the future seems gloomy

Tungan ka gwelen le mama!
Mother, the adventure is strenuous
Tungan ka gwelen sa !
The adventure is really strenuous
Tungan lataga ka gwelen le papa!
Father, going on adventure is really strenuous
Tunga lataga man di deen bee ra!
Not all children pluck the seeds of adventure
He! Ho! sa va pa! ho!ho!

My daddy died young from working too hard
He was strong as an ox and fed 12 sons and daughters
He moved here fleeing from hunger and war
He had a sparkle in his eyes and his hands full of scars

Tungan ka gwelen le mama!
Mother, the adventure is strenuous
Tungan ka gwelen sa !
The adventure is really strenuous
Tungan lataga ka gwelen le papa!
Father, going on adventure is really strenuous
Tunga lataga man di deen bee ra!
Not all children pluck the seeds of adventure
He! Ho! sa va pa! ho!ho!

He!he! soriwo!
Cry for attention
Nne be jigi le barikala
I respect hope
N be kanu barika la
I respect love
Kanu mogo man ca tugunin he!
People who carry love within are rare
Ladiriya mogo lu dogoyara
Honest people are the minority
Nne be jigi le barikala
I respect hope
Nne be bonùe barikala he ! he !
I respect honor

My mamma is an old woman but she's still working
on the field
She got sick many times but every time she healed
I think of her at home cooking sauce on the fire
Me and my brothers with sticks and motorbike tires

He!he! soriwo!
Cry for attention
Nne be kanu barikala
I respect love
N be jigi le barika da
I respect hope
Jigiyamogow man ca
People you can trust are rare
Konfiyansimogolu dogoyara
People who you can trust are fewer and fewer
Nantanmogo la (ka) jeli t'i diya
The griot of a greedy person finds no fulfillment
Nne be bonùe barikala
I respect honor
Nne be jigi le barikala, he ! he !
I respect the hope of my fellow man

Now I finally found work doing a dangerous job
Slaving long days in the stink and the throb
We're working 12 hours a day and they're paying Low wages
My partner's really ill I hope it ain't contagious

In the heart of my country there's a time bomb ticking
People been hungry for too long and it's the leaders
they're sick off
They're marching for change in villages and cities
Seems like there's no way back, they are determined and gritty

A Ni Baara
Congratulation! Your work is well done!
Fasodennu
Children of the nation
A Ni Baara
Congratulation! Your work is well done!
Ban ka fisa janfa ye he
The refusal does you more credit than the betrayal
Ho ! ho ! yafa n ma
Oh! Forgive me!



QUOTES

“The project makes it clear how much different cultures have to offer each other when there is a dialog. That Manding music has become a huge inspiration to Carlens and Co. is obvious, but it's even more interesting to see what happens to African music when you don't approach it from its own circular perspective but from the Westerner's linear view. Traditional Manding songs, with their repetitive structure, transform thanks to the Zita Swoon treatment they get in thought out, catchy pop songs with a beginning and an end.”

**** *De Volkskrant* - Menno Pot

“In one sentence: A concert that, despite the often serious content of the songs, burst with vitality and joy of life and confirmed that music bridges all cultural and verbal gaps.

‘Wait For Me’ was a success in every way: an organic project with profound meaning, Stef Kamil Carlens once again shows he doesn't shy away from an artistic challenge...and it's the result of a warm dialog between two cultures, a creative alliance based on mutual respect.

It was at once obvious, during the instrumental openers, how naturally the circular play of the Africans blended with the still recognizable Zita sound. The music had a natural flow to it, and proved to be flexible and lively. Even though the songs often dealt with serious social, ecological or moral problems, you couldn't tell from the positive vibes.

With the swinging ‘Sababu’, singer Awa Démé, dressed in traditional clothes and with a voice like a bell, also appeared on stage. She alternated her vocal contributions, in her own language, with Carlens' English verses.”

Knack Focus - Dirk Steenhaut

“Bringing Western and African music together is no easy task. But Zita Swoon does it with verve. The result stands like a rock. On stage, not too many musicians, just six Belgians and two Africans, balafon player Mamadou Diabate and singer Awa Démé. On the program only new work, sung in English and in the local languages from Burkina Faso. The songs are always introduced with a brief summary of the content. You sense that this crossover, which isn't evident, was intensely prepared and thought through, and complete.”

**** *De Standaard* - Peter Vantghem

“A concert like a sunrise.

It was beautiful to see how attentive the audience kept listening for an hour and a half. While the collective worked itself to a climax, the enthusiasm in the audience grew and the applause kept getting fiercer.

Carlens opened the concert with his dobro guitar and introduced a first guest from “the other world” that he had discovered. Mamadou Diabaté Kibié is a master on the balafon (an African version of the xylophone), rooted in the traditional manding music of West Africa. A subtle dynamic immediately occurred between the two, which also completely flourished once singer Awa Démé joined the colorful group. With her hoarse and loud voice she stood preaching on stage and sang about her country, conquered loves and god's inscrutability. Stef Kamil completed this traditional word play with English lyrics. A reinterpretation like no one else can make: thoughtful, a little wailing. The rhythm varied from dancing and intense to peaceful and calm.”

**** *DeMorgen.be* - Wim Wilri



WCC ZUIDERPERSHUIS

WCC Zuiderpershuis is non-profit organization and an art center with a sharp inter-cultural profile. Cultural exchange with artists from different continents through artist in residence and consignments is important to us. It was a milestone when Stef Kamil Carlens accepted to collaborate with us two years ago because of our connection, mainly to West Africa. Stef Kamil stated “If I do it, I want to do it good.”

And a long and exciting journey started. Stef Kamil worked with endless dedication, curiosity, patience and understanding for *Wait For Me*. It wasn't an obvious task for Mamadou Diabété Kibié and Awa Démé to live up to Stef Kamil's and the Zita Swoon Group's high professional demands.

Mamadou, whose genial musical career we've been following for years, told me several times: “Stef Kamil is great, really he's one of the greats.”

We experienced for ourselves how Stef Kamil and the other musicians relentlessly worked on a project with 18 new songs. A project in which the artists maintain their individuality and place within the collective.

For the World Culture Center Zuiderpershuis, “*Wait For Me*” is a statement by a great and multi faceted artist with a big heart for the world.

Text by Dora Mols, director World Culture Center Zuiderpershuis

WOLVIN VZW AND ZITA SWOON GROUP

Vzw Wolvin was started in the '90's as a legal framework for the band's artistic activities. The emphasis is on protecting the status of the involved artists and the organization takes care of all the aspects of the stage activities on home turf and abroad.

With the work of vzw Wolvin Zita Swoon Group with Stef Kamil Carlens as artistic director has developed itself throughout the years as a group and a collective that remains loyal to his artistic driving force. This results in experimenting with various instruments, different stage settings, collaborations and fusion with other art forms. Together they form a new lab for scene productions of hybrid performances. In that same lab new songs are born.

The arts organization is always in motion thanks to the work of a small team.

The non-profit Wolvin is supported by the Agency Arts and Heritage of the Flemish community and sponsored by web architects Edge in maintaining the website. **www.zitaswoongroup.be**

