



« Europe organised the slave trade and African kings and chiefs supplied it. » A crime against humanity that must not be forgotten. This implies an effort of remembrance and a duty of vigilance on all sides. Gorée is a painful episode that affects us all. Ultimately, if we can live with our differences and benefit from them, this will enable us to achieve reconciliation and peace.

Pierre Akendengue

GORÉE

The new album of PIERRE AKENDENGUE

« Europe organised the slave trade and African kings and chiefs supplied it. » In the introduction to this new album, the Gabonese artist's eighteenth, Pierre Akendengue lays his cards on the table: the record will be one long cry of protest. A subtle one, of course - neither the man nor his art are crude - but Akendengue has rarely seemed so emotional, so concerned.

The album comes at a fitting time, given the current French internal debate on the alleged benefits of colonisation. A coincidence? Most of these songs were written more than three years ago in Libreville, Equatorial Africa, where Pierre Akendengue has been living for twenty years. Yet in his way, the artist answers both the angry young people in France's sink estates and the country's politicians: over three hundred years and across three continents, the slave trade, slavery then colonisation produced a hugely complex situation, as far afield as Bamako, Saint-Denis in the Paris suburbs and Harlem, NY. The advent of independence in the various African nations barely fifty years ago has not been enough to dispel so many decades of domination/submission, rejection/racial intermingling, love/hate, black/white, as if by the wave of a magic wand.

So this new record is focused on Gorée, a small island off the coast of Dakar, from where countless slaves were shipped in chains. It is a symbolic place, of course, since there were dozens of Gorées in Africa, from the coasts of Mauritania to the shores of Mozambique. But the little door opening onto the sea in the House of Slaves is engraved forever in the memories of those who have seen it, along with the feeling that it all started from there. Cries, sobbing and fear... but also Michael Jordan, Gilberto Gil and Aimé Césaire.

« No, don't cry! Stop your crying, Gorée. Today, your name is a symbol of pride. » That is Pierre Akendengue's message in substance: to understand, we must not forget or deny the past (and he strongly criticises Africa and Europe for not teaching the history of the slave trade properly to their children). None of the factors that govern the

relationship between today's developed and developing nations can be grasped without looking back at the « triangular trade »; those three hundred years across three continents have left their mark.

Even once we know all about it, we must free one side of its feelings of guilt and the other of its sense of victimhood before rebuilding. As a doctor of psychology, Akendengue knows all too well that major neuroses cannot be resolved without long-term analysis. Yet to conduct therapy, the intellectual educated on the benches of a white faculty will swap his Western clothes for the loincloth of the great African forest.

« Strength, you're searching for strength. Forest, the forest of wild beasts holds that strength. » While for some, the forest simply means timber to be logged and easy profits, Akendengue draws all the (potential) energy of Africa from its depths. It provides him with the spiritual dimension that has been present in each of his songs since his career began. Far from the exotic scenes conveyed by films and advertising, the great equatorial forest forms the core of an initiatory world, where immortal spirits and multicoloured birds guard humanity's great secrets. When we cut down forests in Africa, Amazonia or Asia, we are not just damaging the world's lungs, we are destroying the very heart of a millennial knowledge before even understanding how important it could be for humankind. « Tell me to tell you / About the progress of stupidity / Strange strangers drive / The good Lord's pharmacists from the forest ».

Akendengue is delighted by the creation of many national parks in the forest of Gabon. Yet there are a number of pernicious effects too, beginning with the expulsion of the pygmies who lived there, whose presence is said to be incompatible with the protection of wildlife. Now lost in the savannah or, worse, in the city, where they cannot adapt, these pygmies rapidly forget their lore. The « University of the Forest » falls into decay to general indifference.

And God in all that? He is there, in spite of everything: Ta'Nzambe, to whom no temple is dedicated, but who resembles every god in the world (and undoubtedly the universe). In any case, people call on him every day, everywhere, and Akendengue is no exception to the rule: « I beg you, Father, don't grow weary / No, Father, don't get angry ». The Franciscan missionaries who educated little Pierre called it the vital force, while on Aouta, his native island, it is Ngoulou. What does it matter? In this Afro-European syncretism, God-Ta'Nzambe will recognise his own. . .

Since the 70s, when he was already said to be uncategorisable, the African musician has brought three inseparable dimensions to each of his albums: historical, cultural and spiritual. Of course, over time, the spiritual aspect has become important, but it is no disillusioned mysticism or renunciation of any kind. You have to see Akendengue, almost blind, direct a minutely-regulated band on stage to realise how resourceful and, at heart, incorrigibly optimistic he is. Land, my beautiful distant land. Distant goals for a determined musician, who has still not despaired of founding an artists' copyright society in his country!

Despite his impressive discography and a few striking successes - such as **Epuguzu** in the 80s or **Lambarena** (based on Bach) in the 90s - we have not yet discovered the full extent of Pierre Akendengue's true, great talent. So do not miss this opportunity: his new album **Gorée** is one of his best.

Jean-Jacques Dufayet



PIERRE AKENDENGUE - A BIOGRAPHY IN BRIEF

Akendengue is one of the grand masters of contemporary African music and has been for nearly four decades. Pierre Akendengue was born in Gabon and it was there that he acquired the culture of village music and festivities, and the sounds of the forest that have shaped his musical career ever since. At the end of the 60s in France, he professionalised what he saw as his essential nature: the art of music. For many young Africans struggling against the autocracy of recently-established political regimes in Africa, the former colonial power was a refuge where they could express themselves or simply exist.

Suffering from a serious eye disease, Akendengue arrived in Paris to receive treatment in the mid-60s, and was granted asylum amid the political turmoil of the time. For many young people, music was an opportunity for expression and protest, and in Paris, Akendengue found the right conditions to articulate his revolt and exercise his passion. He enrolled at the famous *Petit Conservatoire de la Chanson de Mireille*, where so many of the stars of 60s, 70s and 80s French song studied. There, he was discovered by Pierre Barrouh, the man who launched the careers of Jacques Higelin and Brigitte Fontaine, among others. In 1974, Barrouh released Pierre Akendengue's first album, entitled *Nandipo*, on his Saravah label. Two years later, the artist was awarded the SACEM copyright society's Young French Song prize for *Africa Obota*, a magnificent ode to Africa and

a remarkable success. With *Africa Obota*, Akendengue plunged his musical roots into the soil of France, his home in exile, gaining recognition from the French public in return, until he chose to return to Gabon in 1984. He went down in history as the originator, or courier, of the African music explosion in France at the start of the 80s, along with Touré Kunda, Xalam, Youssou Ndour, Salif Keita and many others.

Storyteller, warrior, sociologist and poet, Akendengue brings together different genres. With his poetic lyrics, subtle metaphors and apparently simple light melodies, Akendengue has established himself as a unique artist, one of those who brighten perceptions across frontiers. No rage or contempt distorts the beauty of his songs, a beauty we hope for in all artistic works at every moment. With *Gorée*, his eighteenth album, he continues to draw on the tradition of the Gabonese forest and the culture of eternal Africa with a force that is his alone, declaring: « Art must firstly be an instrument of liberation. Artists must not talk for the sake of talking or lie about the things they know. I believe that the few songs I've written and which have come to the attention of music lovers have always followed this line of conduct. Because, in the silence of their hearts, artists make a promise of loyalty to themselves. »



DISCOGRAPHY :

NANDIPO (1974) - Saravah
AFRICA OBOTA (1976) - Saravah
ESERINGUILA (1978) - Sonepran
OWENDE (1979) - Chant du Monde
MENGO (1980) - Ntye
AWANA W'AFRIKA (1982) - Ntye
MANDO (1983) - CBS
REVEIL DE L'AFRIQUE (1984) - Ntye
PIROQUIER (1986) - Ntye

SARRAOUINIA (1986) - Sepam
ESPOIR A SOWETO (1988) - Encore
SILENCE (1990) - Mélodie
LAMBARENA (1993) - Mélodie
MALADADITE (1995) - Mepa Gabon
CARREFOUR RIO (1996) - Mepa Gabon
OBAKADENCES (2000) - Romepa Gabon
EKUNDA-SAH (2004) - Romepa Gabon
GORÉE (2006) - Romepa Gabon / Lusafrica



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