



Association Mélomane des Amis du Grand Orchestre National de Gondwana

Fresh sounds from ancient Gondwana



Photo: Fabian von Unwerth

Ages ago when Gondwana broke up into continents, those drifting irrevocably apart, the musicians of the then National Orchestra, the 'Grand Orchestre National de Gondwana G.O.N.G gradually lost touch. Millions of years later the dense mesh of advancing globalization brought them back together. They started exploring long forgotten music and to the delight of everyone helped it to a contemporary revival.

But alas, the years had gone by, not without leaving a trace. The tectonic turmoil in their minds seemed insurmountable and the common horizon was gradually lost in the haze of their stories and the music stopped.

But now, what a delight, former musicians of the GONG and other musicians found together to preserve and develop the legacy of the orchestra. As the newly formed 'Association Mélomane des Amis du Grand Orchestre National de Gondwana - AMAGONG ' they bring back to life, in a modern guise, long lost treasures from the collection of the orchestra - music for sore ears, balm for tired souls.





AMAGONG – band and music

Growing up with classical music, and later with jazz, Swiss cellist Martin Müller discovered 'African music' at the age of 20. The enthusiasm for the rhythmic variety, the sound of this percussive music, the incredible energy, expressed in the African dance, did not let go of him. In the early 90s, with the foldable travel cello in his baggage, Martin went on a long journey to Africa, which took him to Bobo - Dioulasso, these days the "musical capital" of Burkina Faso. The Burkinans quickly found a liking to his exotic instrument, offering him the opportunity to perform in concert with, among others, the nationally renowned ensemble " Artistique Biyéyé " and the " Frères Coulibaly ".

The resulting friendship with the innovative and virtuoso balafonist Sibiri Dougoutigui Diabaté laid the foundation for the afro-fusion band GONG (Grand Orchestre National de Gondwana) founded in 1996, with among others Ablo Zon and later on Wendlaviim Zabsonré. After several tours in Switzerland and one in Burkina Faso, with performances for instance at the Afropfungsten Festival Winterthur, the Jazz Festival in Willisau, the Centre Français Culturels in Ouagadougou and Bobo - Dioulasso, and after the second CD production the project came to a temporary end.

More than ten years later, the G.O.N.G found its continuation in the 2010 newly formed band AMAGONG, the 'Association Mélomane des Amis ' of GONG, around the two longtime friends, the master balafonist and singer Sibiri Dougoutigui Diabaté from Burkina Faso and the cellist Martin Müller as the driving force. Together with them is again Willy Kotoun, one of the most skilled Swiss percussionists, accompanied by the two internationally and as studio musicians working Hassan Dembélé (guitar) and Moïse Ouattara (drums), both from Burkina Faso.

The balafon and the voice of S.Diabaté are forming the sound of the band, while the songs contributed by the cellist make up the majority of the current repertoire. They are largely inspired by African music and they evoke the traditional music from the Mandingo area as well as West African dance grooves. At the same time they assimilate elements of jazz or of European classical music and they often display a melodic or harmonic turn which is hardly found in African music. On the other hand, the compositions of the balafonist and guitarist take up elements from pop, funk or Latin music. Thus the band creates rhythmic weaves of different texture and mood, with the voice of the jali (griot) lamenting and praising, while the guitar and balafon set to improvised flights of fancy. Thus, the band creates a new whole, fresh and diverse, sheer musical alchemy.

It is this idiosyncratic integration of traditions, influences and styles, the unusual instrumentation, the singing of the jail, the polyphonic backing vocals, the beautiful melodies, the original soloing, the abundance of different west African rhythms, it is all that, that gives to the band its distinctive sound and expression and that accounts for this captivating version of a contemporary afro-fusion.



Previous activities

2015

Release of album and video clip as well as concerts in Burkina Faso

The band got invited to the festival Jazz à Ouaga, the country's biggest festival of non-traditional music, where it played April 26th. Two concerts in Bobo-Dioulasso (Institut Français and Bois d'Ébène) the second largest town in the west of the country followed.

During the tour in Switzerland in 2014, together with swiss film maker Markus Baumann the band recorded a video clip to the song "le repos". It had been finished with regard to the concerts in Burkina Faso and is being broadcasted regularly by both channels of the national Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina (RTB) since then.

2014

Album release and tour in Switzerland

In 2013, the album «AMAGONG» has been recorded in Ouagadougou under adventurous conditions. It unites a diversified dozen of carefully arranged songs of the songbook of the band.

10–10–14: album release and start of the tour in Switzerland at the packed BeJazz Club in Bern – Liebefeld.

Tour in Switzerland from 10th October to 13th November with nine concerts (Rössli Stäfa, Festival JazzContreBand – Épicentre Collonge-Bellerive, Kulturprofit Steffisburg, KIFF Aarau, Kulturraum Thalwil, Kreuz Solothurn, Kellertheater Langnau, Theater Uri Altdorf) with enthusiastic audiences, delighted hosts and happy musicians. The band afterwards got feedbacks by email as i.e. from a host: „Hallo Martin Besten Dank nochmals für das schöne Konzert!“ (Many thanks again for the beautiful concert!), or an auditor: „Hallo Willy Ein Ohren- und Augenschmaus war das, Weltklasse!“ (That was a feast for ears and eyes, world-class!).

Response in the media

- Concerts had been announced in the relevant local newspapers (Berner Kulturagenda, Berner Zeitung, Bieler Tagblatt, Der Bund, Könizer Zeitung, Neue Luzerner Zeitung, Urner Wochenblatt, Zürichsee Zeitung), moreover in the kulturtipp (22/14).
- SOAS Radio, A World In London - Episode 129, 08-10-14
- <http://www.globalsounds.info/>; 31-10-2014: "Ein heiterer, abwechslungsreicher Melodienreigen, eine hörbare Freundschaft mit grossem Schmunzeln." (a cheerful, varied bouquet of melodies, a hearable friendship with a big smile).
- rsr la1ère, radio paradiso, interview with presentation of the new album, 15-11-14
- Radio SRF3, World Music Special 27-11-14 – album of the week; in the following program single songs have been broadcasted.
- Radio SRF2 some songs have been broadcasted in various programs.
- „**World Music Charts Europe wmce**“, **November 2014, 19th place** - „...the combination of cello, African voices and balafon is a winning one.“
- Since 04-01-15 on the playlist of Radio Swiss Jazz
- WDR 3 Musikkulturen, 22-03-15: „ ... entspannte, groovende Klänge...“ (relaxed, groovy sounds)

2010 - 2013

After having revived contact in 2010, the band got together in August 2011 in Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), worked out a program, made some demo-recordings and gave a highly acclaimed first concert at the «Bois d'Ebène».

The band then toured in Switzerland in October and November 2012. It turned out to be a successful experience due to enthusiastic and often dancing audiences. The resonance in the media was pleasing too, especially the talks and live gigs at rsr la1ère - radio paradiso as well as Radio RaBe. Following the concerts in Switzerland, the band was invited to the Festival Nyogonben in Bobo-Dioulasso where the audience was as enthusiastic and was dancing as well. One guest said after the concert: „Il est rare de pouvoir écouter un concert avec une musique aussi sophistiquée“ (it is rare to be able to listen to a concert with a music as sophisticated as this).

A rehearsing and recording session took place in July and August 2013 in Ouagadougou with Eliézer Oubda. Afterwards, the finalization, mixing and mastering had been done in Switzerland together with Oli Bösch.

Support

From 2012 to 2015 AMAGONG has been funded, in part several times by: artlink/SüdKulturFonds, City of Bern, Canton of Bern, Burgergemeinde Bern, Municipality of Köniz, Fondation SUISA, Swiss Cooperation Office SDC Ouagadougou, Schweizerische Interpretenstiftung (Swiss Interpreters Foundation) SIS.

Links to video and audio

www.amagong.com

Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Amagongband>

Audio - Teasers of the album, purchase and download
[cede.ch](http://www.cede.ch)

<http://www.cede.ch/>

[amazon.de](http://www.amazon.de)

<http://www.amazon.de> – Music-CDs & Vinyl

<http://www.amazon.de> – Music - Downloads

itunes-shop

itunes.com/amagong

<http://amagong.com/>



Photo: Anouck van Oordt





The members of the Band

Sibiri Diabaté aka Dougoutigui chromatic balafon, vocals Bobo-Dioulasso

Deeply rooted in the West African tradition, S.Diabaté at the same time has always been interested in expanding his musical horizon. He comes from the great griot-musicians-family Diabaté and belongs to the people of the Siamou in western Burkina Faso (Orodara). In the middle of their musical traditions are the pentatonic balafons and also the doundoums (bassdrums). The balafon becomes his main instrument. Soon his extraordinary talent is being recognized and he doesn't go to school but already as a child accompanies social events in the whole region. In 1985 he wins for the first time a first prize at the 'Rencontres Culturelles' of Bobo-Dioulasso. As a balafonist, at countless national contests he thereafter takes the first place due to his musicality and virtuosity. He teaches himself the Guinean diatonic balafon and introduces it to the music in Burkina Faso. He is a member of several traditional groups, during a couple of years notably of 'Faso Foly', the group of the late Tidiane Coulibaly, the best known singer in Burkina Faso at this time. 1993 he is on tour in Switzerland with the group 'Wountey' from Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). He works freelance in the studio and live, such as in 1998 on a tour with Lassina Dembélé in Ivory Coast. He is founding member of the group G.O.N.G. He is touring with quite a few of the most respected musicians of western Africa, such as

2001 on tour in Switzerland with a group from Senegal around Ismaël Lo
2002 on tour in Belgium with Mamadi Keita, Ali Wagué and Pierre Vaiana
2004/06 on tour in Italy with Amity Meria
2008 tour of ten concerts at the West African ,centres culturels français' CCF
2009 gala concert at the CCF in Bobo-Dioulasso with Cheikh Tidiane Seck
2014 regular concerts on Thursdays at the Bois d'Ébène (Bobo-Dioulasso) with his own traditional band.

As he always did in his own groups, with his characterful, punchy voice he is assuming the lead vocals for AMAGONG, be it in his mother tongue Siamou or in Jula (Dioula). Since 2002 he devotes himself to the work with the chromatic balafon that he had built according to his requirements, so that today the use of the other balafons is obsolete and he can explore thus far unheard territory. After having played the n'goni time and again for years, he starts 2004 to seriously study the kora and uses it now during his concerts too.

Hassan Dembélé guitar, backing vocals Ouagadougou

Like the two other Burkinabè musicians in the band, Hassan Dembélé comes from the west of the country which is part of the greater area of the mandingo culture. At the age of 13 he starts playing guitar. Subsequently he is a member of various groups of different styles, African, Reggae and Jazz, as for instance 2005 of the Jazz Orchestre du Burkina. He studied the possibilities of bringing together past and present in music, like traditional string instruments as the N'Goni and the guitar or the possibilities of modern arrangements in traditional ritual music. He collaborated with countless musicians and can be heard on recordings of many of them (e.g. Alif Naaba, Bil Aka Kora). He has been touring in Italy, Romania, Belgium, Togo, Ghana, Mali, Ruanda; the following concerts belong to the outstanding experiences of his musical career:

1993 with Wountey on tour in the Netherlands and Switzerland
1997 with Sami Rama at the 'jeux de la francophonie' in Madagascar
2001 with Solo Dja Kabako at the festival 'Jazz à Ouaga'
2002 with Bil Aka Kora at Jazz à Ouaga
2008/09 on tour with Alif Naaba at the ,centres culturels français CCF' in Bissau, Cotonou, Niamey, Alger, Ouaga among others.
2009 Festival 'les invités de Villeurbanne', France
2010 Festival Globalfest, New York
2011 with Alif Naaba in Guarajanto, Mexiko and Villeneuve-les-Avignon, France
2013 with Geoffrey Oryema at Jazz à Ouaga

All these experiences have made him a full-blown guitarist who has been called a "giant of strings".

Willy Kotoun

percussion

Zürich

Willy Kotoun has studied afro-cuban percussion at the Istituto Superior de Arte in Habana, Cuba. Nine further study visits in Cuba follow, as well as two in West Africa, in Guinea and Burkina Faso. It is his concern and joy to competently shift in very diverse musical surroundings. He plays Flamenco during his six years stay with Nina Corti, and since 1991 he is, among many other projects, member of the Stefan Kurmann Strings. From 1998 to 2001 he is member of the group G.O.N.G. 1996 he develops the training course "Körper & Rhythmik" (Body & Rhythm), that teaches rhythmic and body oriented understanding of African influenced music. Parts of the program are being used in numerous schools and academies of music. He teaches percussion at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts as well as at the Zurich University of the Arts. As a member of a great variety of bands and as a freelance, from latin to afro, from jazz to fusion, he has played around the world, as for instance in China in 2009, 2011 and 2012 with the group 'Sonic Calligraphy' and in the USA with the fusion group 'Journeys' (2014). He has been involved in innumerable recordings such as: Stefan Kurmann Strings, Co Jazz Plus, Alice Day, Alvin Queen & Stepko Gut, X-ing to, Peter Schärli. Deservedly so, he can be called one of the most full-blown and high-profile percussionists of Switzerland.

Martin Müller

electric five-stringed Cello

Bern-Köniz

Classically trained he turns to jazz at the age of twenty and gathers any input that makes him find his way in improvised music. He takes advantage of stimuli in the teachings of Muneer A. Fennell and Martin Schütz, during five semesters he follows courses in harmonics and rhythm at the Swiss Jazz School SJS in Berne, and he takes lessons in African dance and percussion in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Switzerland. From then on, African music hasn't let him go. In 1989/1990 he goes on a half a year's trip through North and West Africa with his folding travelling-cello, he plays Jam-Sessions and concerts with local bands such as the 'Frères Coulibaly' in Burkina Faso. Since 1983 up to now he is regularly gigging with jazz groups (as for instance 'Unic-Horn' at the Gurtenfestival 1993) as well as with world-music groups. 1993 to 1998 he plays countless concerts with 'Inspiracion' (Rhumba flamenca) and participates in two recordings. From 1996 to 2001 he's heading the musical encounter Switzerland – Burkina Faso of the group G.O.N.G. with four tours in Switzerland and one in Burkina Faso, with two albums and a video by the 'télévision nationale burkinabé tnb'. He is a member of the group 'eam – electronic acoustic meeting' (2010 CD 'raft' at unit) and plays currently with the Flamenco group 'FlamencAsia' of Roman Wiedemar (2012 CD La Voz Del Tiempo).

Moïse Ouattara

drums, backing vocals

Bobo-Dioulasso

Growing up in the Mandingo and the Bwaba traditions, he starts singing Gospel-oriented music and playing the drums in church at the age of thirteen. Rapidly, he develops a broad interest in a great variety of musical styles such as Gospel, Mandingo, Rock and Jazz. In 2007 he wins the competition 'Métronome Vacances', in 2008 he takes the second place at the contest 'jazz performance' at the festival 'Jazz à Ouaga'. He studies further at workshops with artists from Mali, France, Germany and Switzerland. In 2008/2009 he gives concerts in France, Benin, Niger, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Ivory Coast. Together with Hassan Dembélé he plays 2011 with the group of Alif Naaba in Guarajanto (Mexico) and Villeneuve-les-Avignon (France). During autumn 2013 he is on tour in Belgium with 'African Protocol', in December he plays the gala concert with Cheik Tidiane Seck at the Institut Français in Bobo-Dioulasso. In 2014, he is touring and recording with Rokia Traoré as well as touring with Afrikan Protokol in summer of the same year and in 2015. He already participated in the recording of a dozen of albums, such as Yiki by Alif Naaba (2013) and new album of Rokia Traoré (release in 2016). With such a track record it isn't surprising that he is considered as one of the most talented young drummers of the country. He transmits his know-how and his passion at a music school in Bobo-Dioulasso and in workshops, for some time regularly in Bamako (Mali), too.

