

Boubacar Traore biography

Boubacar Traoré said Kar Kar is a harmonious contradiction, a musician whose art and biography are striking less due to balance, more due to extremes. In the 60's, an idol for the whole west coast of Africa, forgotten in the 70's, rediscovered in the 80's and on extensive tours of Europe and America in the 90's, those are the rough data of his career. He has been compared with a number of greats in pop music. Elvis Presley had to act as a comparison as did Robert Johnson, Johnny Hallyday or Chuck Berry. And his music is titled as blues – all of these are comparisons which indicate that it is practically impossible to define Kar Kar's songs. Above all, such comparisons are used by us Europeans or Americans to make an artist who is a musical world of his own understandable.

If we in the western industrial nations hear the term « blues », we also immediately hear hundreds of examples battling with one another in our memories – but that's not the music that Kar Kar makes. He is also not funky like the Godfather of Soul James Brown, with whom he is also compared from time to time. These are all status indications showing the extent to which he is revered in Mali by fellow musicians and compatriots. His music sounds completely different. If you do not take « blues » as a form of music, but as a description of a feeling, you get quite a lot closer to the heart of the matter.

Kar Kar does what he always wanted to do : music. For him, they are melodies, songs, to which his instrument sings the second vocal part. « The guitar has a magic attraction for me », he tries to describe his relationship to his instrument. He does not hear the blues chords of his musical kindred in the southern states in his guitar, no, his guitar pearls like a kora. In addition, the blues from Mali does not have structures like the ones we know from the American version. Blues is used as a generic term and as an explanation for us, because Kassonké, the musical tradition in which he grew up, would hardly be any use as a comprehensible description.

You can hear his origins from the west of Mali : Kayes, home and yearning all at once. The love of this home country and its inhabitants is great, even if he does sometimes criticize its administrators or his compatriots with harsh words. Forty hard years of living with plenty of deprivations are woven into the calm stories of his songs, but warmth and love make up the fundamental tones.

Kar Kar is a story-teller and his refusal to explain these stories, to interpret them does not make it easy for us who are hungry for pictures to understand their sense or background. He tells of African traditions, the symbols and exoticism of which often remain closed to Europeans. He sings about love with all its human and tragic facets, the love of his deceased first wife, of his children without the pain of the tragic fate making his songs heavy or suffering.

Boubacar Traoré is not a musician whose songs you can explain, whose images and moods you have to analyze, you have to expose yourself to them. Perhaps then you will experience an Africa beyond clichés and prejudices.

Jodok Kobelt

Discography :

- 1990 Mariama – Stern's UK
- 1991 Kar Kar – Stern's UK
- 1995 Les enfants de Pierrette – Revue Noire
- 1996 Sa Golo – Label Bleu
- 1999 Maciré – Label Bleu
- 2003 Je chanterai pour toi – Marabi
- 2004 Je chanterai pour toi DVD – Harmonia Mundi
- 2005 Kongo Magni – Marabi / HarmoniaMundi