

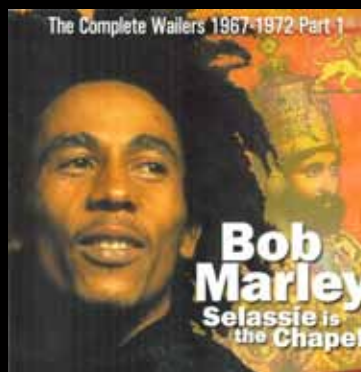


March 11  
to August 24  
2014

# GREAT BLACK MUSIC

Exhibition  
in the Cité  
de la musique

**PRESS KIT**



## Great Black Music

Michael Jackson, Cesaria Evora, Marvin Gaye, Billie Holiday, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Aretha Franklin, Bob Marley, Myriam Makeba, Salif Keita... These American and African artists have marked the history of popular music in the twentieth century. From the River Congo to Congo Square, and from the jungle of Harlem to the tarmac of Lagos, from Gorea Island to the shores of the Caribbean, through certain neighborhoods in London and Paris, a multitude of sounds, grooves and chants have little by little taken over body and soul, giving meaning to the expression of black music. In the 1960s, a group of musicians, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, decided to name this invented tradition "Great Black Music". It would boost a common - pan-African - identity that has spread for two centuries in numerous back-and-forths across the Atlantic Ocean.

## **Great Black Music** *black music across the globe*

Marc Benaïche, exhibition curator, founder of Mondomix

From the epic tales of Mandingo griots to the plaintive echoes of Mississippi bluesmen, from New Orleans dives to Manhattan clubs, from Yoruba rhythms to the birth of Afrobeat, from maloya chants to samba, from the outskirts of Kingston where ska and reggae first appeared to the vacant lots in the Bronx where hip-hop arose - the voice, breath, rhythm and soul of millions of slaves deported from the African coasts to the Americas have generated an exceptionally rich range of music. This saga is neither specifically American, African, Caribbean or European: it's all of them at once. After four hundred years of bondage in one of the greatest tragedies of humankind, racist oppression gave way to an immense explosion of creativity and freedom, one that music has never stopped expressing.

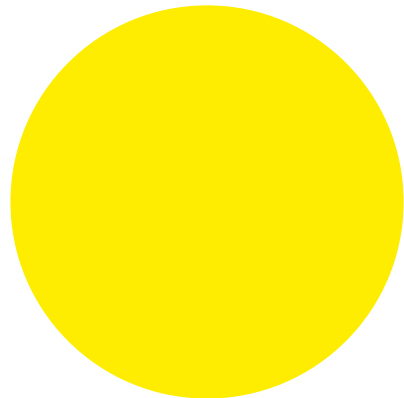
These black "musics" mold popular culture around the world and transcend all ethnicist or nationalistic ideas. With the *Great Black Music* exhibition, our goal is to tell, show and present this incredible musical epic that has crossed centuries and continents, and that continues to wow us, leaving each generation with its own collection of emotions and memories marked by an unforgettable tune, a vibration or a unique groove. How can such a vast story, how can these thousands of artists and songs that populate our memories be presented? Attempting to include everything would have been a vain quest. So we made a subjective choice: to create a sensory, immersive exhibition experience, organized by theme.

Geography and history are addressed through hundreds of sound and audiovisual documents, films and photographs, presented in a dramatic and interactive way. Our aim is to shed a new and joyful light on the incredible story of *Great Black Music*.

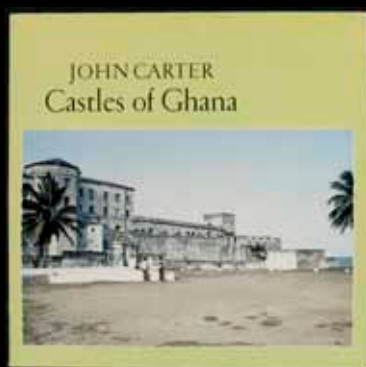
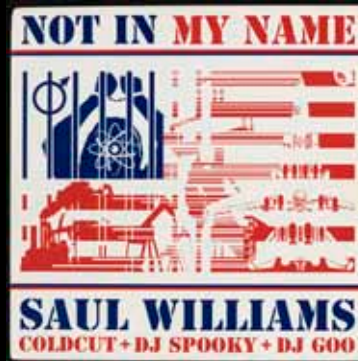


Coproduction Cité de la musique and Mondomix.

Covers reproduction with agreement of the collectors: Philippe Ducat, Nago Seck and Jean-François Villetard.





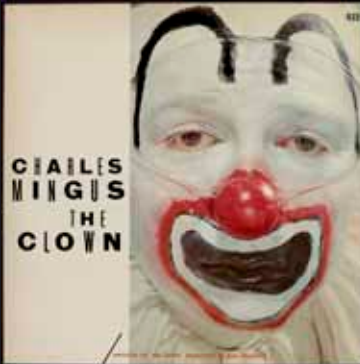


## What is black music?

It is impossible to draw a clean line between any of the forms of black music and "pure and authentic" African music forms. Yet the various musical currents of the African diaspora do have points in common. A particular use of short melodic and rhythmic patterns that make you want to get up and dance (the riff in blues, funk and afrobeat, the loop in hip hop), a clear penchant for rhythmic structures that emphasize a bar's off beat (syncopation, backbeat), the call and response technique, pentatonic scales, modified timbres that could already be heard in African instruments, which would become "dirty notes" in American music (the gravelly voice of bluesmen, the mute and the wah-wah of jazz trumpets, the saturation of electric guitars...). Furthermore, black music is intimately tied to the daily life of the communities that forged it: it has a clear functional dimension, whereas European music has patiently tried, throughout the centuries, to inscribe itself in the logic of art for art's self sake.

## Exhibition highlights

- This **multimedia exhibition** presents over 11 hours of audiovisual content, offering a genuine musical and sensory immersion.
- A **personalised, interactive device** accompanies visitors throughout and after their tour.
- An **illustrated timeline** shows the emergence of a pan-African conscience, often expressed through music.
- A **collection of rare instruments** (Victor Schoelcher coll.), conserved at the Musée de la musique, testifies to the cultural heritage of displaced peoples and the movement from one continent to another.
- **Games and educational modules** for children and families are featured throughout the exhibition and inspire the discovery of traditional instruments.
- **3 dance class booths** (hip-hop, disco and salsa) are available for use alone, as a family or among friends, allowing visitors to film, then watch themselves.
- **2 interactive juke boxes** offer
  - a selection of African urban music,
  - a selection of African instruments (traditional music and urban music).



# Recognizing the historical importance of black music

Joint interview **Marc Benaïche / Emmanuel Parent**

***The concept of “black music” is vast, and sometimes contested. How do you approach it in this exhibition?***

**Marc Benaïche** The exhibition presents music as the backbone of several centuries of history and political events. The destiny of black music is the greatest artistic adventure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This great current is nourished by an infinite number of tributaries that are difficult to comprehend from a single point of view. The exhibition was therefore designed as an assembly of fragments. Each one of these fragments raises certain questions and provides answers. It leads visitors to question themselves, their own lives. Certain fragments will ring a bell in relation to their own personal development, or help them expand the idea they had about this music beforehand.

An exhibition on music is always a challenge, because music is the ultimate vehicle of emotion. We aimed to keep the music truly central, to place it at the heart of a sensory experience. In order to keep the related commentary as accurate as possible, we sought to respect the place and the voice of the artist. And we were careful to maintain the accuracy of the historical and musicological commentary.

***The exhibition presented at the Cité de la musique is the result of a seven-year effort. Can you tell us about the key stages of the process?***

**M. B.** In 2007, Mondomix worked on the inauguration of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. That's when it became clear to me that a big exhibition on black music was absolutely necessary. The project was presented to Salvador de Bahia for the Year of France in Brazil, and attracted interest from the governor of the state of Bahia, Jaques Wagner, and Carlinhos Brown. This great Bahianese star had

just acquired an old warehouse at the foot of the Libertade favela, a magical place named Museu do Ritmo (Museum of Rhythm). That gave us the idea to start the Centro de Música Negra (The Black Music Centre). The organisers of the World Festival of Black Arts heard about the project, and proposed that Mondomix create a temporary version. This large international event, launched by Leopold Sedar Senghor in Dakar in 1966, and then hosted by Lagos, Nigeria in 1977, was to hold its third edition in Dakar in 2010, under the presidency of Abdoulaye Wade. We had the great fortune of being able to create the first multimedia, interactive exhibition focused on black music. For this event, one of our Brazilian partners, the architect-scenographer Pedro Mendes Da Rocha, helped to renovate the Douta Seck Cultural Centre, the national institution that was hosting the project. The exhibition was based on immersive, sensory systems for which technology was essential. It was important for us to bring Senegalese visitors a level of technical expertise that matched the standards of the best European exhibitions. The project is made for touring, and went next to the Creole world in Reunion Island in 2011, and then to South Africa, a country where black issues were particularly intense. To have been able to begin the adventure in Africa and see it come to Paris is, for me, a great privilege.

***For the Parisian version of this exhibition, the historical and anthropological dimension is accentuated by a timeline that highlights musical works and artist quotations. How was it designed?***

**Emmanuel Parent** First, I'd first like to mention that in April 2010, in Bordeaux, we held a conference on the theme, “Can we speak of *black music*?” At the time, I was following, on



the Internet, Mondomix's work on that exhibition, and I wondered if one day our paths would cross. Right from the first encounter with Marc Benaïche, we understood each other. Deep down, our thought process was the same, we just expressed it in different ways.

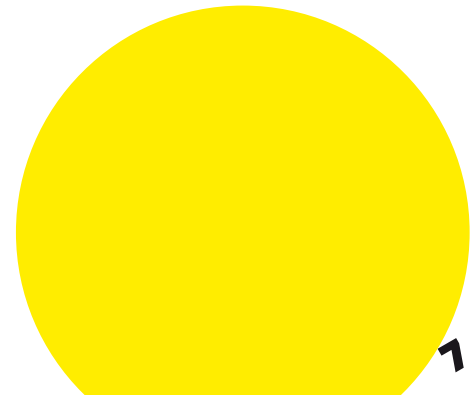
The exhibition design lays out a vast panorama of musical diversity, and I wanted to enhance it with a few anthropological tools. I used the timeline to showcase the historical importance of black music, starting from the black pharaohs mentioned by Senegalese historian Sheikh Anta Diop.

I also wanted to show that this pan-African idea of black music could not exist before colonial contact. Before white people arrived, Africans did not conceive of themselves as blacks. Black/White binary racial thought is a modern concept that precedes this contact. Black music had to be born out of the colonial space of the plantation, with all its racist ideas. After that, what's important is to see how black musicians managed to create the most beautiful music within this context. With the timeline, I wanted to give a voice back to these musicians, to show that they themselves, artistically, grabbed hold of history and commented on it. For example, if we think of the pyramids, there's the Afro-futurism of Sun Ra, who claimed to be a pharaoh from the planet Saturn. Leaving aside the juvenile aspect of this declaration, he was humorously and creatively questioning Western history, which places itself at the origins of universal History. The Haitian revolution is another example. The first victorious revolution of slaves – thanks to Toussaint Louverture, who managed to defeat the Spanish, British and Napoleonic armies, the latter considered the most powerful of the time - is a key element in the collective imagination of the black diaspora. This event was the source of numerous works, such as Charles Mingus' magnificent "Haitian Fight Song" in the 1957 *The Clown* album. Putting

the musicians back in the centre of the narrative process echoes the inversion that Marc Benaïche was describing. In the same way the exhibition began in Africa and made its way to Europe, the timeline gives a voice to black musicians, themselves intellectuals and historians.

***The originality of this exhibition also lies in its multimedia and interactive features. Can you describe the exhibition experience for visitors?***

**M. B.** Visitors will receive a touch-screen tablet that they can use to interact with all of the installations. They first enter into an immersive 800m2 space, where they are plunged into music. They can activate the audiovisual documents and have sensory experiences, in particular in the space reserved for trance music, *Sacred rhythms and rituals*. Any music they enjoy can be registered in a personal list that they can access later via the exhibition website. The possibility for visitors to own the exhibition in various ways is a response to very contemporary practices. The exhibition is organised in six parts, each room with its own audiovisual scenography. Some spaces feel very intimate, others are more open. I don't want to reveal everything... Visitors will discover it for themselves. The exhibition presents eleven hours of audiovisual content, so visitors will only see a part of it, unless they come back several times to try all of the different experiences that we offer through this epic tale of black music.



# GREAT BLACK MUSIC

## ***An interactive experience***

Upon entering the museum, visitors are invited to take a touch tablet (or smartphone) that functions with an application developed specially for the exhibition. Hifi earphones are supplied. The interactive tour is launched with one click, and is very simple to use.

This system allows visitors to interact with all of the exhibition installations and listen to the music in the best possible conditions. Throughout the tour, visitors can save their musical choices and created their own personalised playlist via the application.



## ***Extend the enjoyment!***

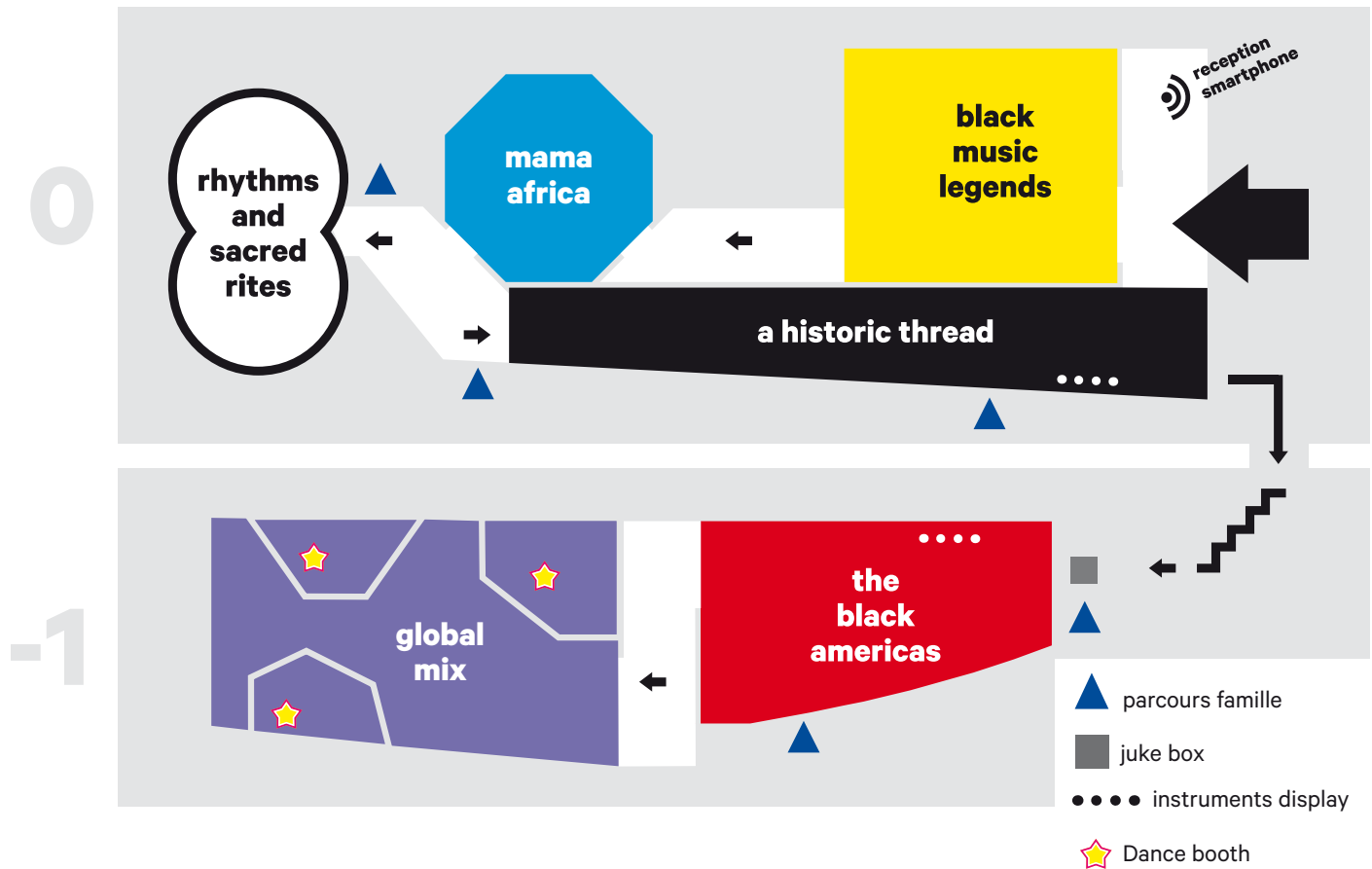


Once visitors have created a personal account via the application, all their data can be saved. An online interface then allows visitors to listen to their personal playlist at home. Social network functions have been developed, allowing the exhibition to be enjoyed as a family, with a few friends or as a group.



# The exhibition

The exhibition presents the epic story of black music through numerous musical and audiovisual clips. There are **six rooms**, organised by theme .



Scenography: **Olivia Berthon**, assisted by **Elise Kamm**  
Design: **Doc Levin** / **Hélène Marian-Srodogora**

## BLACK MUSIC LEGENDS

Committed voices, men and women who are free – the charismatic, international figures of black music perform and travel across the world. Since Bessie Smith's "Downhearted Blues", which sold 800,000 copies in 1923, the diffusion of black music on a very large scale has touched the lives of millions of people. A permanent fixture in our daily environment, these legends of black music have marked an era, a musical genre or historical events. Here twenty-one names are brought together representing this hall of greats, which counts numerous other artists on its roster. Familiar to the point of being our intimates, they play a role in the collective imagination of American, European and African societies today.

# LES LÉGENDES DES MUSIQUES NOIRES

Room 1

3D Scenography

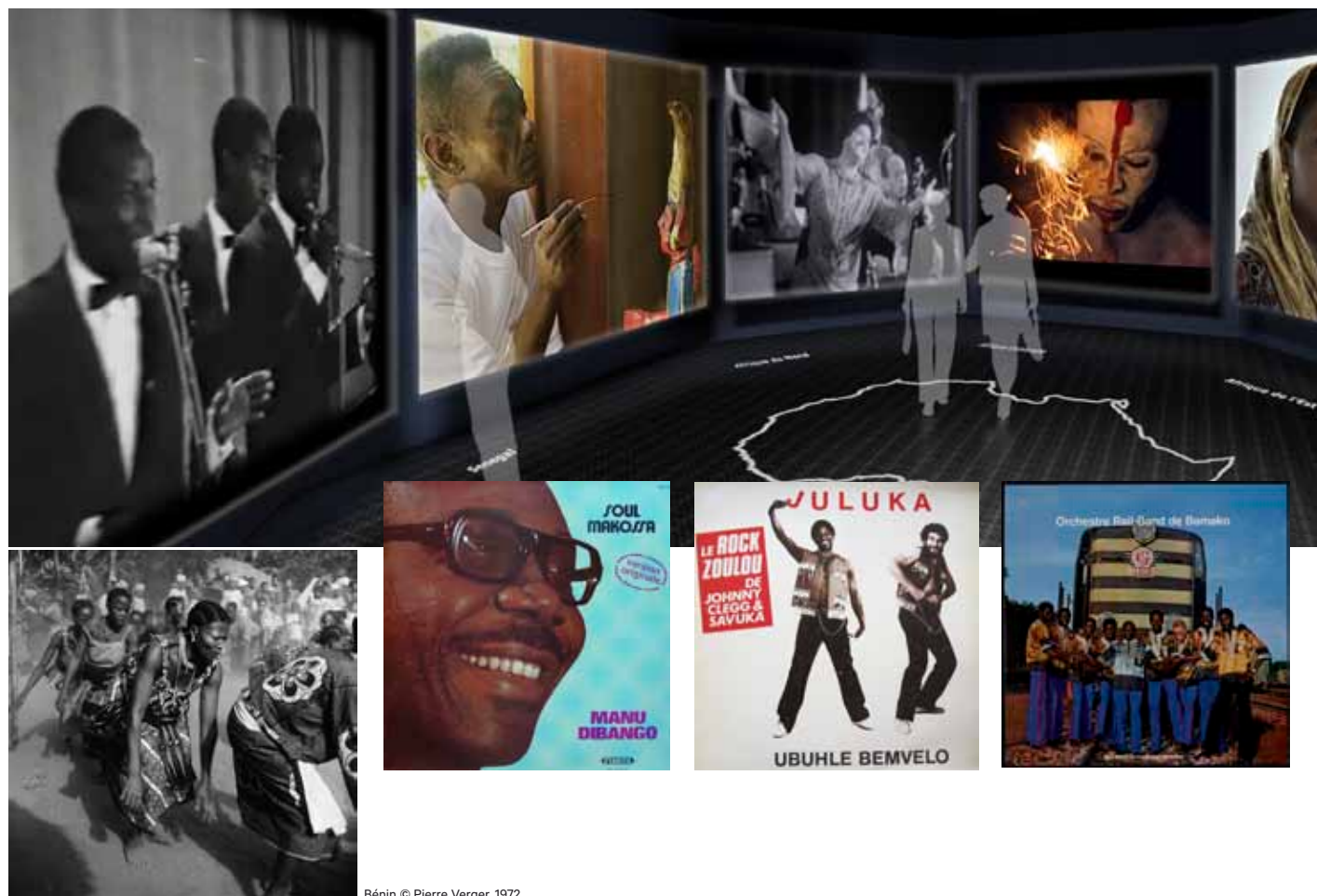


Billie Holiday © William P. Gottlieb, 1947 / Bob Marley, Oakland Paramount Theatre © Lewis Watts, 1977

## MAMA AFRICA

Africa, the so-called cradle of humanity and ancient civilizations, is often considered to be the “mother earth”, the continent of origins. It is a legendary place where, according to an once popular belief among the slaves of the New World, spirits come back from the dead. Yet the musical history of contemporary Africa is anything but trapped in the past. It continues to bear witness to a fusion of influences and lays bare an astounding modernity. Blues, jazz, funk, soul, rumba, cumbia, reggae, hip hop: the currents from America have intimately mixed with local sounds and ancient traditions. African music has then travelled around the world, renewing its dialogue with the lost children of the diaspora, the prodigal sons of Mama Africa.

3D Scenography



Bénin © Pierre Verger, 1972

Room 2

# MAMA AFRICA

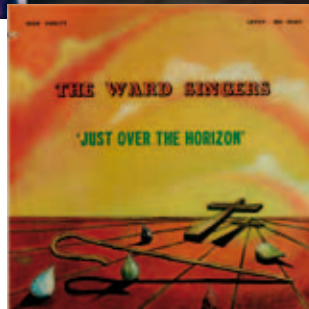
## RHYTHMS AND SACRED RITES

The victims of the negro slave trade were brought to the New World with nothing to their name, stripped of the objects and social ties that would allow them to create a cultural bond. Of all the African cultural practices, only music, dance and religion – immaterial arts – were preserved and reinvested with the power to bring people together. Cuban santería is a synthesis of Catholic rites and African religions. Voodoo rituals were an instrument of cohesion between slaves. Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* is a subtle mixture of African beliefs, Indian rites and Catholicism and denotes Brazil's amazing intermixing. The maloya of the Reunion island cultivates the memory of ancestors through music, while gospel and negro spiritual combine African beats and Christian faiths. Religion is one of the first places people turn in order to recreate identity and express themselves artistically in black America. It is still at the heart of musical practices in the early twentieth-century.

3D Scenography

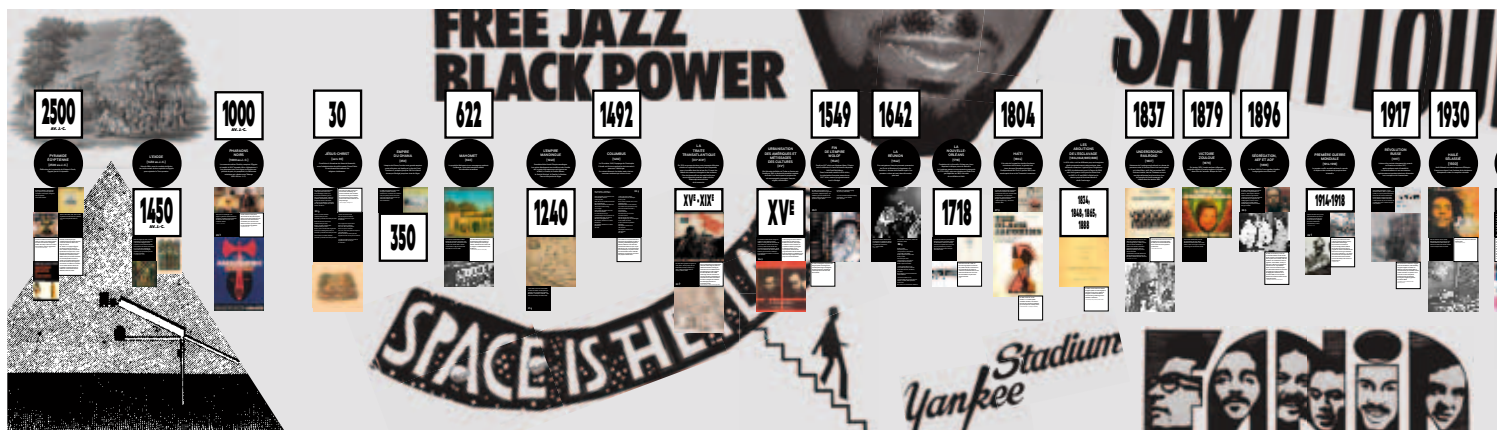
# RYTHMES ET RITES SACRÉS

Room 3



Servis Malgas © R.P. Savignan



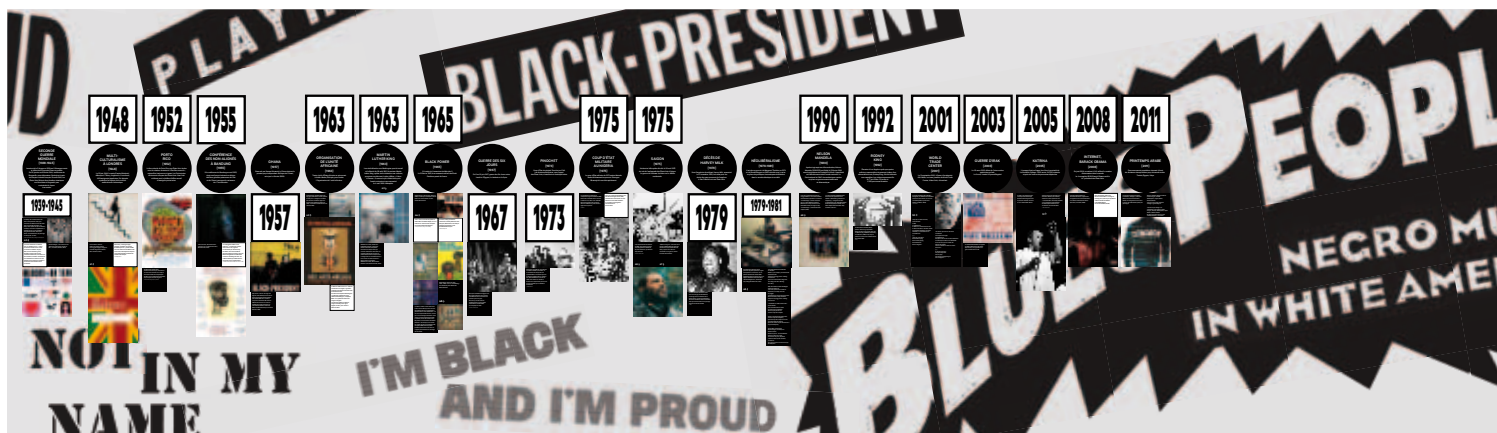


## A HISTORIC THREAD

Cheikh Anta Diop used to say that Negro-African civilization was the oldest in the world. Do the different forms of black music illustrate this? While in many respects they are indebted to the African continent, the transnational consciousness underpinning the notion of black music has grown out of America. Also, this chronology is not so much about black music itself as about an evolving pan-African awareness that has often expressed itself through music. Each musical or legendary event related to the diaspora has been the subject of musical commentary, either explicitly or indirectly. If this timeline goes all the way back to the black pharaohs of ancient Egypt it is because ever since the nineteenth century, when the first Afro-Americans travelled to the foot of the pyramids, these stories of civilizations from thousands of years ago have haunted the imagination of black musicians, artists and intellectuals of our times.

## UN FIL HISTORIQUE

Room 4

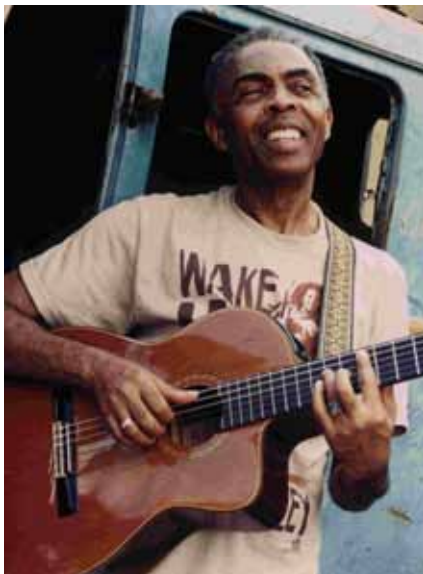


## THE BLACK AMERICAS

From Salvador de Bahia to Porto Rico, to Cartagena to New York, the music created by black populations on the American continent has significantly influenced modern music. It is now a part of our common and universal heritage. Generated in the humility of slavery, this music created a freedom that black people did not yet possess. It made the poetry of being “invisible men”, of the humanity denied them, resound like Louis Armstrong’s trumpet. Through a curious reversal of the situation, it came to embody everything that was new and original to come out of America. For what the mixing of cultures spawned was unpredictable and unprecedented. Black America left the world with the creative force of creolization.

Room 5

# LES AMÉRIQUES NOIRES



Gilberto Gil © Priscila Casaes Franco



Tommy Potter, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Max Roach, Duke Jordan © William P. Gottlieb, 1947



Os Mutantes © Philips

## GLOBAL MIX

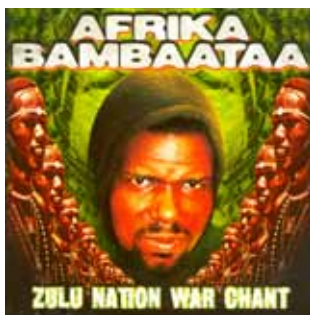
How does Great Black Music, which marked the twentieth-century, perpetuate itself today? How does the Pan-African consciousness that bore it stay up-to-date and renew itself? Music allows us to track this evolution as new genres, from the *coupé-décalé* of Parisian nightlife to the *booty shaking* of zouglou style, appear. These new musical currents, supported by the upsurge of digital culture, have undeniably been a game-changer. From the vocoders of Jamaican dancehall to hispanophone reggaeton, the ambiguous notion of “mix” runs right through contemporary black sound. The electronic beats of hip hop have established a new benchmark for popular music around the world, while African towns have never ceased, right up to the early twenty-first century, to mix vernacular traditions and international influences.

# GLOBAL MIX

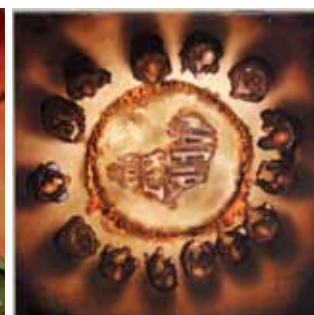
## Room 6



Max Romeo © Alex Troesch, 2011



Cold Crush Brothers © Joe Conzo, 1981





A collection of rare musical instruments is presented by the timeline. All of these belong to the Musée de la musique collection, and were brought back from his travels by Victor Schoelcher (1804-1893), an ardent defender of human rights and an abolitionist. The Gambian harp-lute, the Mandingo drum, the small Haitian rattle and the snare drum from British Guyana are an outstanding record of this painful period in the history of oppressed peoples and their cultural identity.

# LES INSTRU- MENTS



Harpe-luth kasso,  
Sénégal, before 1848



Lamellophone sanza,  
Gambie, before 1848



Luth banza, Haïti, before 1840



CONCERTS *African Remix*

TUESDAY, APRIL 15

8PM - CONCERT *Kinshasa* - 18€

(Democratic Republic of Congo)

**Basokin Ensemble**

Basokin's music belongs to a movement called "tradi-moderne" in the Congo, showcased in compilations like the *Congotronics* series.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

8PM - CONCERT *Lagos* (Nigeria) - 25€

**Bands presented by the Shrine**

**Femi Kuti**, song, artistic direction

Shrine was the name of the club founded in the 1970s in Lagos by Fela Kuti, who performed there with his musicians. Femi Kuti, his son, put together this exceptional evening programme bringing together various artists particularly close to his heart.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23

8PM - CONCERT

**Ouagadougou** (Burkina Faso) - 18€

Opening act

**Debademba**

A duo formed by Ivorian singer Mohamed Diaby and guitarist-composer Abdoulaye Traoré from Burkina Faso, who met in 2002.

Main act

**Victor Démé**, song, guitar

A popular figure in Burkina Faso, Victor was forty-six years old before he recorded his first album, *Victor Démé*. His intimate Mandingo romances, deliberately infused with blues or salsa, have already travelled the globe.



Ensemble Basokin © D.R.



Femi Kuti © Youri Lenquette

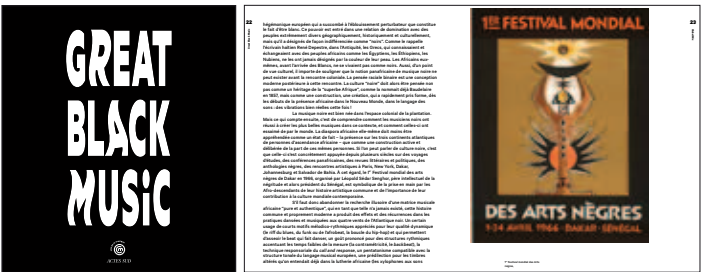


Victor Démé © David Commeillas

Exhibition catalogue

Edited by **Emmanuel Parent**

This book compares and contrasts the perspectives of various African, European and American specialists, and presents several great musicians through interviews, songs and original texts. Presenting a new, original timeline, this is the first book to present such a wide panorama on the "continent of black music".



238 pages. 200 illustrations. Coedition Cité de la musique / Actes sud. 36€

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION



## GREAT BLACK MUSIC

March 11 to August 24, 2014

## HOURS

Tuesday to Thursday from noon to 6 p.m.

Open late Friday and Saturday until 10 p.m.

Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Extended opening until 8 p.m. on April 15, 17 and 23.

Closed May 1st.

## ADMISSION

### Exhibition admission

including access to the Musée de la musique permanent collections: **9 €** • Discount rate: **7,20 €**

Under 26 years: **5 €** • Unemployed: **4 €**

Persons with disabilities and attendant, children under 6: free

**Concerts** from 18€ to 25€ • under 28 years: 9€

## RESERVATIONS



**01 44 84 44 84**

Reserve your priority-access ticket online  
[citedelamusique.fr/greatblackmusic](http://citedelamusique.fr/greatblackmusic)

## GETTING HERE

**221, AVENUE JEAN-JAURÈS 75019 PARIS**

Metro - Tramway - Stop: Porte de Pantin

Follow us on  and .

## CONTACTS PRESSE

**Émilie Quentin**

**01 44 84 45 78**

[equentin@cite-musique.fr](mailto:equentin@cite-musique.fr)

assisted by **Gaëlle Kervella**

**01 44 84 89 69**

[gkervella@cite-musique.fr](mailto:gkervella@cite-musique.fr)