

AMADOU & MARIAM

Five years after *Folila*, their last energetic rock album where the cream of the future of pop music collaborated, the Malian duo Amadou & Mariam are back with one of their trademark sensual and highly danceable gems. The godparents of the Afrobeat and modern pop mélange, and the mix between traditional and electronic music, have a new album, *La Confusion*, produced by Adrien Durand. He's the orchestrator of the project Bon Voyage Organisation, mixing African and Asian influences, disco and electro and giving a new sheen to the concept of world music. "Boufou Safou", the first single, with its bouncy lyrics in Bambara and French, is a small gem of slow-paced Afro-disco, carried by Mariam's magical voice, gently poking fun at the nonchalance of African boys. This places the duo in the same electro-dance territory explored a few years back with producer Damon Albarn on *Welcome to Mali's "Sabali"*. It is a tribute to personalities such as Francis Bebey or William Onyeabor who, very early on, started mixing traditional music and experimentations. With remixes by Africaine 808, Fatima Yamaha, Henrik Schwarz and Pakem, Amadou & Mariam are back on the dance floor.

For the past forty-odd years, Amadou & Mariam have managed to joyfully combine their love story with a musical career while becoming, discreetly but surely, the most famous ambassadors for Malian music, and African music, all around the world; a golden status that they carry with brio and playfully challenge with each new album. Amadou & Mariam have collaborated with many different people and worked with producers that seem far removed from their universe, like Damon Albarn of Blur or Manu Chao. They have invited the best artists who are building tomorrow's pop music to play on their naïve and lively songs (Santigold, TV On The Radio, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs) and have had their tracks remixed by Yuksek, Vitalic, Henrik Schwarz, Miike Snow and Ashley Beedle, leading the songs to the dance floor and underlining their intrinsically danceable quality. They've played the world's biggest festivals, from Coachella to Glastonbury, and opened for huge bands such as Coldplay and the Scissor Sisters. Amadou talks about their status: *"It's always been our wish that African music be known like other kinds of music. That's why we're very proud of our album Dimanche à Bamako (their first international success), because it popularized our country's music. Our collaborations changed the way people see us. We're African, but our hybrid music opened a lot of doors for us."*

Flashback. Amadou Bagayoko met Mariam Doumbia at the Malian Institute for the Young Blind in Bamako in 1975, where they both played in the Eclipse Orchestra. They fell in love instantly and began a singular story of music and love. Mariam had been singing at family gatherings since she was six years old and Amadou, at barely 20, was a guitar prodigy. With his unique technique, finding inspiration in the roots of African music and in American blues, he played in one of the most respected Malian music bands of the 1970s: Les Ambassadeurs du Motel de Bamako. Amadou and Mariam married, became a duo in the early 80s and started their long climb to success and international recognition. For logistical reasons, they settled in the large city of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire and started releasing their first tracks on cassette tapes, as was the custom in Africa at the time. They performed all around Africa and eventually released their

first albums, *Tje Ni Mousso* and *Wati*, produced by French labels, offering them a new platform.

But the '90s weren't very open to genre-bending, and Malian music only appealed to a small demographic. At the time, even though they were big stars in Africa, Amadou & Mariam seemed destined for anonymity as soon as they left the African continent. Things changed in 1998 with their first performance at the Transmusicales de Rennes festival, following the popular radio success of their singles 'Mon Amour Ma Chérie' and 'Je Pense À Toi' (from *Sou Ni Tilé*), with their pop accents, and their career finally took an international turn. But they truly broke out with the huge success of their album *Dimanche à Bamako* (500 000 albums worldwide, 300 000 of which were sold in France), produced by Manu Chao. On this record, Amadou & Mariam seem to have really found their DNA. A magical recipe based on different collaborations with a wide array of artists, which they applied from then on. They chose Damon Albarn of Blur for their electro-pop *Welcome to Mali* (containing 'Sabali', an irresistible Afro-disco hit song). On the more up-tempo *Folila*, Amadou reunited with his love of rock (he's a fan of Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, AC/DC and Bad Company) and invited choice artists such as Theophilus London, TV On The Radio, Ebony Bones and Santigold, to bring their contributions to their music and, each in their own way, speak of a period of the couple's life.

Mixing traditional African rhythms with Western pop, using traditional instruments as well as beat boxes and synthesizers, playing rock, reggae, funk, soul and blues, mixing acoustic and digital productions, lyrics in French, English and Malian, Amadou & Mariam articulate the past and the future beautifully through their production, composition and collaborations that unite opposites and allow them to represent Mali across the world. But mostly, by enriching their Afro-pop with new pigments, by introducing to the world the richness and subtleties of African music, the duo has brought African music to the charts and to the dance floor. They've inspired many artists to mix Afro and electro sounds, such as MHD, DJ Mujava, Awesome Tapes From Africa, Four Tet or Jamie xx. This is proof that, if in the 80s certain crazy minds had fantasies of a *Sono Mondiale*, Amadou & Mariam are the ones who have made it a reality.