



The Interview

Birane Sarr is the founder of New African Production (NAP), an organization that specialized itself in producing, promoting and marketing African music and African musicians here in the United States. The past ten years, NAP has worked with many well known African music stars and organized many events to promote African culture.



((How all this started?))

I am from Dakar, Senegal. I have lived in the US for more than 16 years. From childhood I have loved music. Growing up in Dakar, I lived very close to a nightclub and I used to go with my friends to dance before it opened for the night. They use to let us dance early before the adults came in. So you can see, music has been a part of my life for a very long time. I chose this business because of that love.

((What motivated you to get in this side of the music business?))

Over the years wherever I have traveled and lived - Europe and the US, in particular - I have been involved with music in some way. It used to be very difficult, almost impossible, to find venues where we could hear and dance to our African music so we always had to organize our own parties. I wanted to hear and enjoy a good variety of African music in nice venues and that's how we started out. In addition there was a lack of good African artist representation and access to good venues for our African artists was very limited. This further convinced me that this was the way to go.

((How do you choose the artists you work with? Are you just looking for talent or are there other qualities you are looking for in an artist?))



First there has to be proven talent because to achieve success in this business requires talent that can withstand the test of time, as well as the tests of the business, rather than just for a moment. As they say here, you need to have paid some dues to show that you are serious about what you do. I look for artists who have a strong, positive work ethic, focus, determination, innovation, perseverance and so on and these are the qualities I look for. This is usually clear from the body of work they have and the presence that they have established for themselves. These qualities are necessary whether to pick yourself up when life knocks you down, or being focused enough to remain steadfast regardless of the distractions and the detractors that cross your path, or patience to understand that building a solid career is like building a house - one brick at a time. In summary, our artists must have built a name and reputation within their base and have a body of work that holds appeal.

((What was it like to work with international artists like Baaba Maal, Kanda Bongo Man etc?))

Working with this caliber of artist is always a good experience. I started working with the legendary Soukous Stars - Lokassa Ya Mbongo, Ngouma Lokito and Chico Mawatu and their young singer, Jirbo Ntunta back in 2004. We produced some very successful shows with them in New York. Through my relationship with them I connected with Lubangi, the manager of Kanda Bongo Man, another of our African legends. In 2006, I purchased Kanda Bongo Man's New York show which we produced at S.O.B.'s. It was completely sold out. Great show!

I consider Baaba Maal my big brother and a friend. You cannot talk about African music without talking about Baaba Maal who has accomplished so much and has moved our music so far forward in the World Music arena. I seek his counsel because I have great respect for his experience and knowledge.

((What is your contribution in fighting piracy?))

Piracy is a very difficult area. Unfortunately, technology makes it very

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((Do you have advice for people who want to become music producers?))

My advice is (a) love the music, (b) get a good understanding of the industry, (c) structure your business so that you have a corporate presence, (d) have patience because not every artist or event will be a breakout success however, every one provides an experience that you cannot succeed without. Always be mindful of your integrity and the reputation that you are building. This ties in with patience because not everything is good for your business or your artist so you need to have the patience to wait and act on the right opportunities as your reputation and integrity can depend on it. Finally, promote your business, not yourself. Success is making or elevating stars, not trying to become one.

((Do you have any project in the closet you can reveal today?))

Yes, we have several projects on the table right now. We are producing a documentary about African Dance in America in collaboration with my friend, Christian Thiam. Also, we have Yoro Ndiaye & Yoonwi touring in North America this summer.

Thanks to ABG Magazine for this opportunity. I always believe that a great network is one of the most important keys to our success.



simple for music to be pirated and very difficult to prevent without affecting legitimate downloads. On an individual level we can only hope to appeal to people's conscience by reminding them that by pirating or buying pirated music they are robbing the artists of their compensation for their hard work. On a larger scale, the various governments have to mandate stiffer fines and harsher punishments as a deterrent.

((Would you agree that African music is not well represented on the world stage? When you think about the origins of modern music and the relationship between Jazz and Africa, wouldn't you expect African rhythm and sensibility to be at a better place in the music industry?))

I think African music is well represented on the world stage in certain geographical areas. In Europe for example, (and this applies not only to African music) artists and different sounds are more easily exposed and embraced than in North America. In addition, and this is unfortunate, we have not had many Africans who have been willing to invest in our culture and this has limited our exposure. Unless we are front and center in the industry, the origins of our music and its influences will not be fully recognized. This is something all of us Africans in this business need to address by coming together in support of this common goal.

In answer to your second question, yes you would expect African rhythm and sensibility to be at a better place in the industry but the same answer applies. In North America, which has been the center of the music industry, new or foreign is not easily embraced. This is an uphill battle that we continue to fight.



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