



**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Orchestra Baobab**

## **'Made in Dakar' (WCD078)**

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Africa's perfect pop group are back! Five years on from the best-selling 'Specialist in All Styles', Orchestra Baobab return with 'Made in Dakar', an album that celebrates their roots in one of the world's most explosive musical cities – which updates their classic mellow sound with a new edge and a new energy for new times.

Orchestra Baobab are Africa's soul survivors, a great iconic band who have come through nearly four decades of dramas and disruptions with their classic 1970s line-up largely intact and their uniquely diverse cocktail of styles and influences sounding as fresh and relevant as ever. In 2001, the Senegalese band returned to recording and performing after a 16 year career hiatus, establishing themselves as one of the world's most enduringly popular live acts and earning unanimous critical acclaim – along with two Radio 3 Awards and a Grammy nomination – for 'Specialist in All Styles'. Recently, following on from this period of intense international activity, Orchestra Baobab made their return to the club scene in their home town Dakar – an experience that has fed directly into their new album. Combining the gritty lo-fi feel of their early recordings with dynamic new arrangements that reflect the realities of the Senegalese capital today, this is an album that could only have been Made in Dakar.

Westernmost city on the African continent, former capital of France's vast West African empire, Dakar – like New Orleans, Havana or London – is one of the world's great musical port cities, where African, European, Islamic and Latin American influences meet in one seething multi-cultural melting pot. Orchestra Baobab kick-started a musical renaissance here, enabling a whole generation of younger stars – including Youssou N'Dour, Baaba Maal and Cheikh Lô – who have given Senegal as high a musical profile as any country in Africa. But Orchestra Baobab are the ones who started it all. They're the bridge between the old Africa and the new. And no one has got more of Dakar's diversity down on disc than Orchestra Baobab.

Centred around singers Rudi Gomis and Balla Sidibe and visionary guitarist Barthélemy Attisso, this band of rugged individualists came together in 1970 as the house band of Dakar's swankiest and most exclusive nightclub – the eponymous Baobab. Their broad range of influences – from Afro-Cuban and Portuguese Creole to Congolese rumba, high life, calypso and American soul as well as a whole gamut of traditional Senegalese styles – fed into a blissful African pop sound which set the template for the period when Senegalese pop found its feet.

Yet as a tide of younger, brasher musicians led by Youssou N'Dour came to the fore with the heavily percussive mbalax style, Baobab found themselves sidelined in the musical revolution they'd helped create and disbanded in 1985. A huge groundswell of international interest led to their triumphant reformation in 2001 and Orchestra Baobab are still very much in business today.

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Beautifully recorded in Dakar's Xippi studios, 'Made in Dakar' continues the story, building on Baobab's renewed activity on their home turf, where they've undertaken their first Dakar club residency in nearly 20 years with hugely successful Saturday night sessions at the Just 4 U club. 'Made in Dakar' takes the Baobab sound back to its roots, reflecting the realities of Dakar's rapidly expanding, demographically exploding urban environment. In particular, there's the increased use of the sabar, the hard-cracking drums that provide the signature rhythm of Senegal's dominant pop sound, mbalax.

'Made in Dakar' unveils a string of beautifully crafted new songs together with reworked gems from their 20 album discography – some previously only available on poor quality and impossible-to-find vinyl or cassette, which the group felt deserved to be heard again in versions and with a sound which give a clear idea of their original intentions.

Far from diminishing with time and age, Baobab's stylistic reach feels wider than ever. The storming '*Colette*', dedicated to guitarist Attisso's wife, blends a quasi-ska rhythm with a driving 70s cop-show feel that betrays the influence of Jimmy Smith's Hammond organ instrumentals. On '*Jirim*', the cracking sabar beats take on a cha-cha-cha-like rhythm, while Attisso's guitar-playing harks back to his adolescent love of country & western. The glorious '*Aline*' sees Gomis and Sidibe trading husky vocal lines over rippling guitar phrases that are inspired by 1950s Congolese rumba, but sound one hundred per-cent classic Orchestra Baobab.

But the album's standout track must be the show-stopping '*Nijaay*', a brooding paean to the joys and responsibilities of marriage, written by Laye Mboup, the late-legendary Baobab singer who was killed in a car crash in 1974. This is one of the great Dakar songs, in what will become its defining version, with Assane Mboup and Youssou N'Dour holding forth with the invocatory fervour of old school praise singers over a magnificently, melancholy chorus and extraordinary off-the-wall, wah-wah guitar from Barthélemy Attisso. The barnstorming '*Sibam*' features Medoune Diallo's rich, vibrato-laden and very Cuban-influenced baritone in full flow, with knee-trembling rhythm-work from sabar drummer Thio Mbaye – regarded by Youssou N'Dour as the world's finest percussionist. '*Beni Barale*', meanwhile, is Baobab's tribute to the great Guinean orchestra Bembeya Jazz, built around a deliciously hypnotic and typically Guinean guitar groove.

The personalities of the six lead singers each shine through and the album is drenched with the extraordinary playing of one of Africa's great guitarists, lawyer by day, Barthélemy Attisso.

These are iconic songs that have the significance in the Senegalese consciousness that the Buena Vista repertoire has in Cuba or the Great American Songbook in the U.S. And the beauty of it is that they're played here by the very musicians who created them in the first place.

This is the latest chapter in one of the world's most heart-warming musical stories – the saga of a group of musicians who have wowed audiences in stadiums, festivals and concert halls around the world, but who have retained the warmth, the spontaneity & essential humanity of the truly local band.