

# SPIN

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## Reviews

### Konono No.1

Congotronics

Crammed Discs



**Mind-melting noise-funk from the Congo**

In February the Motherland finally got its own MTV channel; *vive la révolution!* Sure, there may be just one TV for every 16 people in sub-Saharan Africa, but as a vehicle for boosting regional culture and pushing AIDS info, MTV-Base Africa is good news. And if its programming is anything like the Konono No. 1 video clip that intrepid blogs like the Suburbs Are Killing Us were linking to earlier this year, we suggest petitioning your cable provider immediately.

Alas, it won't be. Konono (full name: Orchestre Tout Puissant Likembe Konono No. 1 de Mingiedj) is a 25-plus-year-old street band based in the war-weary city of Kinshasa—in the Democratic Republic of Congo—that jams on thumb pianos and junkyard percussion amplified with crude DIY gear designed to whack through the city's noise like a machete. The resulting mix is a buzzing, frantically hypnotic sound-clash of ancient and modern: folk music beyond *National Geographic*, industrial music born of practical rather than metaphorical necessity. In other words, just the thing to send Western aesthetes into a frenzy,

Mingiedj, of Konono No. 1



though probably not the sort of mirror Africans will demand from their *TRL*.

Whatever. *Congotronics* is rhythmically red-hot, full of transcendent builds that DJ aficionados will feel in their bones, and it comes via the Belgian label that midwifed Mahmoud Ahmed's *Ere Mele Mela* (the mind-blowing '70s-funk comp that spurred the East African crate-diggers series *Ethiopiquest*), Bebel Gilberto's creamy novo bossa nova, and Zap Mama's Pygmy-inflected hip-hop soul. It may not do for African pop what Sunny Ade and Fela Kuti did in the '80s. But as Konono tour with Tortoise and get remixed by Björk's lapping pal, Matthew Herbert, it might do for Congolese folktronica what Diplo's *Favela on Blast* mix did for Brazilian baile funk—introduce a music to alien fans happy to dig it on its own art-brut terms. After all, MTV globalism ain't all it's cracked up to be.

WILL HERMES  
Grade: B+