

# YOUSSEU NDOUR

*Africa Rekk!* (Africa and that's final!): Youssou NDOUR wants the world to stop haggling over the wealth of Africa, a continent where Senegal plays a leading role. Six years after the reggae campaign and his Bob Marley cover on the *Dakar-Kingston* album, the Prince of the Medina of Dakar has been back in the recording studio. While he was serving as Minister of Culture and then Tourism in the government of President Macky Sall (elected in 2012), he put his artistic activities on hold, but his current status as 'Minister Advisor to the President' has given him more leeway. "In Africa, there's a dynamic movement driven by culture. Africa needs a smile on its face and must show its strengths. Senegal is a strong, pacific country with deep roots. It is developing a very civic coexistence between its 95% Muslims and 5% Christians – the community of Leopold Sédar Senghor, the Christian President of a Muslim country."

With his Senegalese audience very much in mind, Youssou NDOUR started by publishing a 5-track EP in Dakar. It immediately rocketed to the top of the iTunes downloads charts. The next step will be the world release of *Africa Rekk* on Jive/Sony Music, announced for this fall. The album was recorded in Dakar at the Studios Prince Arts, "which belongs to my brothers and sisters". It was produced by his younger brother Prince Ibrahima NDOUR and mixed in Paris by Jack Lahana.

"It's a Pan-African album," explains Youssou NDOUR, "the first of its kind since *Egypt* in 2004, when I showed that Africa was one, from the Cape to Algiers and as far as Cairo. *Africa Rekk* is Africa celebrated by Youssou NDOUR, with all its modern and traditional compartments." It features Mbalax, the Wolof beat, but as part of a blend: "for instance, with rumba and other rhythms. It's an umbilical cord that links all of Africa."

To weave his tapestry with all its fine details of music and sound, Youssou brought in a number of young people who had created an amazing urban music – a sound of the street. They included Nigeria's Spotless, brother of the star Tekno Miles, and producer Hakim, born in California and living in The Gambia. The credits also feature Fally Ipupa, 'the Kinshasa Di Caprio', "who embodies that Africa where tradition and modernity meet," an Africa where keyboards and machines merge with tama, balafon and djembe.

For that is the crossroads that Youssou NDOUR wishes to portray. Already circulating all over the social networks, the video of the song *Serigne Fallou* illustrates his message perfectly. In the clip, Youssou NDOUR honors the memory of Fally Mbacke (1888-1968), second caliph of the Mourides and son of the brotherhood's founder, Cheikh Amadou Bamba, to whom Youssou had already paid tribute on *Egypt*. 'You' has swapped his boubou tunic for a motorcycle helmet. He rides fast but carefully, finally joining a group of young dancers in a chic, modern Dakar. "I'm carrying a torch and when I turn around, I see young people behind me. In this fast-changing world, I give them advice. *Be Careful* is a message for girls in particular, encouraging them not to trust insincere promises of love and boys who are just playing with them. In fact, the condition of women really must change." With its keyboards and female vocal responses, *Be Careful* shows that Youssou's voice is as powerful as ever.

“I’ve always used my songs to put across messages,” continues NDOUR, businessman head of Futurs Medias and a champion of humanitarian causes since his first album, *Immigrés*, in 1984. Now 56, Youssou gives an example: the song *New Africa*, an anthem to an upbeat Africa rid of its darker side. In it, he namechecks the continent’s heroes – those figures who constructed its modern aspect: historian Cheikh Anta Diop, Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, the South-African activist Steve Biko, murdered by the forces of apartheid, and naturally Nelson Mandela. *New Africa* was recorded in 1992 for the album *Eyes Open*, which was released on the 40 Acres and a Mule label that had only just been launched by African-American movie director Spike Lee.

Extending the bridges that Youssou NDOUR is keen to build between diasporas, *Africa Rekk* brings us *Song Daan*, a duo with rap and R&B star Akon, who was born in the USA and raised as a child in Senegal. Akon, who is close to Barak Obama, has launched an ambitious project: Akon Lightning Africa, which plans to provide solar-generated electricity for millions of Africans. Akon and Youssou NDOUR are on the same wavelength. On *Song Daan*, Akon sings in Wolof for the first time: a whole new horizon.

*Credit: Véronique Montaigne*