

FRANCK BIYONG

The creator of the hybrid Afroelectric sound in pan-global pop.

Artist Biography by Thom Jurek

Early life and education

Franck Biyong grew up in Gabon, Nigeria and Ivory Coast. Franck and his siblings attended the National Institute of Arts in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. He originally studied piano but dropped it in favour of drums, percussion and eventually, guitar. Franck credits African-American Jazz guitarist, Wes Montgomery's "Canadian Sunset" as the song that piqued his interest in electric guitar. At age 14, Franck moved to the United Kingdom where he started recording demos influenced by his musical heroes Fela Kuti, Miles Davis, Kassav', Sun Ra, Manu Dibango and Frank Zappa.

1997-2002: The band MASSAK and B.L.A

By 1996, the Lumen label had picked him up and Franck began working as a session man and back up guitarist in Brighton. However, Fela's death in 1997 spurred Franck's return to France. He formed a twelve-piece band called Massak—a Basaa (Cameroonian tongue and tribe) word that means *music, trance and enjoyment through rhythms and sounds*—to pay homage to the legendary musician and his Africa 70 and Egypt 80 ensembles.

This would mark the beginning of Franck's career and musical experimentation. With his 4-piece horn section, drummer, percussionist, bass player, keyboardist, rhythm guitarist and female backing vocalists, Franck began to tour several clubs and festivals including SOB's in New York, Jazz Café in London, Montréal Jazz Festival, Hothouse in Chicago and FloydFest in Virginia.

Franck Biyong & Massak were then considered one of the best-kept secrets within the international Afrobeat Diaspora. Franck's first official single, *B.L.A* (which stands for Brain Liberation Army) was released as a 7" vinyl on Lenar/Soul Fire Records. The two-part jam greatly appealed to gritty funk and Afrobeat lovers across the globe.

2003-2006: *Live!* , *We Shall Overcome* and *Realms of Atlantis*

B.L.A's success hailed Franck Biyong as frontrunner in the Afrobeat revival scene. This led to new partnerships with independent labels and the release of a string of singles: *Live!* (2003), *We Shall Overcome* (2004), *Power of Brain* (2005), *E.P* (2006) and *Afrofunkydance* (2007).

With German label Melting Pot Music, Franck released *T&C / Junglectric*, a medley of two popular songs that were an integral part of Massak's show. This special rendition was recorded in October 2002 in Dijon where Massak opened for Tony Allen (Franck dedicated this song to the legendary Afrobeat drummer).

Ranging from Egypt 80-inspired Afro sound to new-age music pastoral pieces, *REALMS OF ATLANTIS* would become Franck's first full-length album. Released on September 2006, it was a collection of moods and atmospheres exploring a more relaxed and spiritual dimension of Massak's music.

2007-2009: Haiti Market, Spirits into Sounds and Rhythms of our Memory

Franck Biyong & Massak expanded their repertoire with the November 2007 sophomore release, *HAITI MARKET*. The album was an Afro pop trip to the underground world with generous doses of funk, jazz, folk, soul and lyrics sung in English, French, Pidgin English and Portuguese.

In 2007, Franck wrote an Afro-Opera called *KNOWLEDGE IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION* in honor of the great late West Indian poet Aimé Césaire. It was based on the history of African Diasporas living in France. It's Paris premiere created a great deal of controversy, while addressing the issues of French colonial history and the shapes of African Art forms to come.

From that point on, Franck was releasing a new album every year. 2008 brought *SPIRITS INTO SOUNDS*, an exploration of futuristic sounds in a unique blend leaning towards jazz-fusion grooves.

Franck's 2009 album, *RHYTHMS OF OUR MEMORY* was based on the first official celebration of the abolition of slavery in France. It featured fine orchestrations combined with the spirit of black jazz, and outer space improvised music.

2010-2013: Jazz & Africa, Ki I Ye Yi and 21.12. 2012 (Truth or Lies?)

Franck Biyong his band Massak travelled to Cameroon in 2010 to record fifth album, *VISIONS OF KAMERUN* that told the history and linkages of the African nation with France. It was an interrogative and perplexed glance over the present state of things. Franck's sixth album, *VOODOOLECTRIC GROUND* whose grooves spanned from the polyrhythm of Central Africa to the swinging beats of Congo Square, was shrouded in mystery and released in November.

Massak disbanded soon after the album's release with Franck going on to form new band comprising of young Cameroonian musicians living in Paris. The next album wove together Biyong's deep love of Jimi Hendrix, Davis, and modal jazz. The score *JAZZ & AFRICA* was issued in 2011 and came out an album filled with highly original renditions of songs by James Brown, Sun Ra, Manu Dibango, Ornette Coleman, among others.

Later in the same year, Franck released *MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE*, an album that kept to his trademark sound with a soft touch of progressive jazz arrangements, both backward and forward into electronic music, hardwiring it to modern Afro Jazz and raw urban funk

The eighth album *KI I YE YI* was a combined tribute to the great Manu Dibango and Cameroonian singer and trombonist Francis Ndom, with a variety of music styles and moods similar to the 1982 "Fleurs Musicales du Cameroon" compilation. *KI I YE YI* was billed to Biyong and the Diamane Bantu Messengers, issued with many long time collaborators in a wide variety of personnel settings with assistance from Paris Djs, who co-produced the album with Afrolectric Music.

Franck's final dalliance into Afrolectric was released in 2013: the *21.12.2012 (Truth or Lies?)* album, a pinball between classy Afro jams, psychedelic ambient sounds, avant-jazz, prowling beats and blissfully weeping guitar solos. Biyong then issued a 12" single cover of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's classic *I.T.T. (International Thief Thief)* and made it available on his website as a free download.

2015 – Present: New projects

International career

Franck Biyong believes that music is spiritual food for the soul. In 2015, he served a new offering with the release of single, *LIYOMBA*. The song heralds Franck's *Crossover Music* with Swahili lyrics over a rock and electro beat and is off Franck's upcoming 10th studio release, *MOONWATCHING* and is an experiment in Electronic Music, Rock, Trap, Afro-House and Psychedelics. It draws from the crucial role the moon plays in African culture, religion and spirituality. Franck also did tour with Ghanaian High Life legend, Ebo Taylor in summer 2014 and 2015 consecutively.

Africa & the West Indies

The highly energized troubadour shall launch two bands in 2015. The duo is borne out of Franck's sincere commitment to the original African sound and aesthetic. Conceived as a Congolese rumba revival, the *ORCHESTRE LIPOMBE JAZZ* will hearken back to the great African orchestras of the late 60's and 70's in fashion and musicality. This band shall fuse Franck's electric guitar genius with horns, dynamic rhythm sections as well as drums and percussion. It'll also expand into the territory of Afro-Caribbean grooves and Spiritual Jazz. The second band, *HILUN*, will explore Central African, Bantu and Basaa music with a focus on collaborations with traditional music ensembles. The goal is to simultaneously modernize and preserve these authentic sounds.

Other ventures

Franck is currently signed to the London based music distribution company, AFRICORI. As Music Director for the first two seasons of the African Music TV show *COKE STUDIO AFRICA* launched in 2013, Franck worked with Wyclef Jean, as well as Salif Keita, King Sunny Ade, Culture Musical Club, Seun Anikulapo Kutu, Fally Ipupa, David Correy, Tumi and Dj Boddhi Satva.

Discography

2006: *Realms Of Atlantis*
2007: *Haiti Market*
2008: *Spirits into Sounds*
2009: *Rhythms of our Memory*
2010: *Visions of Kamerun*
2010: *Voodoolectric Ground*
2011: *Jazz & Africa: Knowledge Identity Reconstruction*
2011: *Meeting the Basic Needs of The People*
2012: *Ki i Ye Yi*
2013: *21.12. 2012 (Truth or Lies?)*
2015: *Moonwatching Part 1*
2016: *Moonwatching Part 2*
2016: *Orchestre Lipombe Jazz*

Biography by Thom Jurek

(Thom Jurek was born in 1958 and grew up in and around Detroit. He has been writing about music since he was 15. His reviews, interviews, and articles have appeared in magazines and journals including Rolling Stone, Musician, Spin, Creem, American Songwriter, Paste, Interview, The Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, and Rock and Rap Confidential.)