



# GANGBE BRASS BAND (BÉNIN)

## BIOGRAPHY / E

The Gangbe Brass Band was created in 1994 when 8 musicians, all from Cotonou-Benin, came together. These young jazz musicians had been playing in different groups, before creating this unusual fusion of traditional styles.

Gangbe Brass Band's option is to promote the originality of the music of Benin. The result is definitely both modern and traditional, as it mixes jazz and traditional Benin idioms.

They take traditional rhythms, and invigorate them with jazz harmonies. The fusion reveals as much as possible of the musical tradition, while giving a western tone, to link the past and future.

They sing in vernacular language about life in general, political injustices and the tribulations of women.

Through the word Togbé, the band salutes the music on which they build their sound. The first meaning of the word is « ancestor », the band's way of paying homage to the range and quality of the rhythms they created. The second is a reference to age, highlighting the ancient roots of the music they play. The Gangbe Brass Band's musical approach is respectful of tradition, and in harmony with their ancestors and culture.

From 1994 to 1997, the Gangbe Brass Band have worked mainly in Benin. They began their career with the help of Andre Joly, director the French Cultural Center of Cotonou. They took part in several creations, and created the soundtrack for Camille Amouro's movie « Ciel, ma francophonie » presented at the sixth Sommet de la Francophonie, in Cotonou. In 1997, their career really took off when they opened for Angélique Kidjo, and also played at the « Festival du Théâtre des Réalités » in Bamako (Mali),

A year later, in 1998, their association called « The Union of Wind Instrumentalist of Benin » took part in the « Atelier Nomade » of Alougbine Dine, a very famous artistic director. They composed a piece called « La Fuite ». This meeting was very important as it enabled them to draw up artistic and political guidelines, and think about the values they really wanted to defend, things they want to talk about and the projects they could put in place. During this year, they played many concerts such as the « Jazz à Ouaga » festival, and again at Bamako's Festival du Théâtre des Réalités » where they met the French group Lo 'Jo Triban. Thanks to them and to Yves De La Croix, they recorded their first album called « Gangbé » and began an international tour of 35 concerts with them in 1999, playing Europe and Canada, and another tour in Nigeria. They received an award at Benin Golden Awards, and took part in the first Nomad's meeting, in Cotonou, and the Pan African of Jazz in Accra (Ghana). In 2000, still supported by Lo'Jo Triban, and André Joly, they play on international stages, such as the Womad Festival in London, Jazz in St Louis (Sénégal), the « Cote d'Opale » festival at Boulogne sur Mer (France), and Lille 2000.

At the same time, they developed cultural projects for increasing awareness about Beninese culture, their main concern. The first one « Voodoo's rhythms box » received the support of the Benin Ministry of Culture. It consists of a collection of all beninese ceremonial rhythms for a CD, and later a CD ROM, in order to be distributed in European art schools, and cultural institutions. The second one, called « Horizon 2001 » concerns regional, continental and worldwide cultural exchanges. It's a European-African network for the organisation of concerts between the Gangbe Brass Band and other guest artists. The Gangbe welcome their guests, and then tour with it. The Gangbe Brass Band began working with Contre Jour in Brussels in 2001, recording their second album called « Togbe ». During the Summer, they promoted it through a new tour of 45 concerts, including high-profile festivals such as « Musiques du Sud » in Lebanon, « Couleur Café » in Brussels, the « Sfinks » in Antwerpen, Pop Kom in Köln, and « Musiques Métisses » in Angoulême (France).



The ten musicians of the Gangbé, also gave their own definition of rhythm, that of Black Africa, quite difficult to understand for persons who don't know it well. What is clear, is that it has nothing in common with our current understanding of rhythm, which is what makes the Gangbe Brass Band so interesting. Between jazz-like improvisations, and excesses worthy of a fanfare, the Gangbe succeeded in their first Lebanese mission.

*Festival des musiques du sud*

An unusual fusion where jazz and traditional inspiration blend in a way that is unique, as much by the musical pulse and African dialects, as by the sparkling suits. A drunkenness full of gaiety and energy, a real treat that the audience will savour.

*Liberation (champagne)*

All dressed with traditional suits, they are screaming, singing, and dancing as their ancestors did during funeral ceremonies. These young Beninois have chosen to link traditions and modernity to give an original touch to their compositions. Voodoo rhythms and popular songs get married in a unrivalled style with the tone of their brass.