

CHEIKH LO

Biography



Cheikh Lô looks like good fun from the off, attractive, unique, with Ray Bans glued onto a craggy face. An extremely slender frame enveloped by dreadlocks that mark out his membership of the Muslim sect Baye Fall; a wide-braided leather necklace, offering protection from the evil eye. Cheikh Lô has added a personal touch to this spiritual shield: embroidered tunics and a woven cotton frock coat complement the jeans, with their deliberate rips, finished off by sneakers with a pop art design. Sometimes, he'll be wearing a hat. He's swag.

These adornments provide a stage for the voice. And the voice of Cheikh Lô is unique, cosmopolitan, graceful, slender and high-pitched, pulsating irregularly. It can also switch suddenly to the bass line of Afro-beat, since the Nigerian Fela Kuti had left his mark on Senegal and Burkina Faso as well. And Cheikh also worked with the historical Afrobeat drummer Tony Allen in 2010.

Cheikh Lô has forty years of music in his dreadlocks. He started out as a drummer. *"From Bobo Dioulasso to Dakar"*, summarises the chilled-out guy. Born in 1955 in Burkina Faso's second city, where his father was a jeweller, this passionate Senegalese man took his first orchestral steps with Volta Jazz. The ensemble, one of the best in post-independence West Africa, revisited Cuban song, classics from the Congolese Tabu Ley Rochereau and created Creole-style dance pieces. There were twelve of them, behind the saxophonist and singer Mostapha Maiga, all ages, all ethnicities, all nationalities. Cheikh Lô is a child of this Africa - an enthusiastic, Sahelian creative.

Chapter Two

Having returned to Dakar in 1978 to work at the Cap-Vert Transport Company (SOTRAC), stopping off in Ivory Coast on the way, he experienced the unpredictable life of a session drummer when he lived in Paris at the end of the 1980s, working for a time with Papa Wemba. Spotted, as African music, by the producer Ibrahima Sylla, he recorded three albums on the Syllart Record label. At the same time he started playing the guitar and discovered other continents - Jamaican reggae, but especially funk, which he mixed with the Senegalese rhythms of mabalax and Ghanaian high-life.

A long time aficionado, Youssou N'Dour produced the album *Ne La Thiass* in 1995 on his Dakar label Jojoli, distributed by World Circuit, Nick Gold's record label. There was to be a second, *Bambay Gueej* (1998), before he broke with the godfather of Senegalese pop music. Staying with World Circuit, he went on to release *Lamp Fall* (2006) and *Jamm* (2010).

These days Cheikh Lô lives in Keur Massar, in the suburbs of Dakar. He has maintained an enlightened faith in the pathway taken by Cheikh Ibrahima Fall (1858-1930), founder of the Baye Fall, a branch of the Mouride brotherhood. "*Work as if you will never die, and pray to God as if you will die tomorrow*", said the man who established the *n'djajne* (dreads) as symbols of ardour to the task - "*He didn't have time to spend on his hair*" says Cheikh Lô rolling his wild hair into twists.

This enlightened form of Islam allowed the singer, guitarist, percussionist and songwriter to cope with the coldness of the French winter, Senegalese carelessness and the rigours of the music industry. The new album (Chapter Two / Wagram) "*returns to the importance of spirituality, at a time when hateful groups like Boko Haram are diverting Islam away from its humanist foundations*" he says.

In Wolof and Bambara, Cheikh Lô challenges the African heads of state, major purveyors of coups d'etat (*Doyal naniou*, with the voice of the great Malian singer Oumou Sangaré). Moreover, with a style marked by irony, and sometimes a touch of provocation, this man from Dakar puts two opposites, water and fire, against each other, as symbols of the dangers posed by everyday life (*Balbalou*, chatting, with Ibrahim Maalouf on trumpet).

Musically Produced by Andreas Unge, partly recorded in Sweden, the album develops a very clear sound and plays the cultural openness card even more strongly. By chance during a studio session, the Africans encountered the accordionist Fixi, whose musical conversation with the Jamaican reggae singer Winston McAnuff had been playing on stage and on the airwaves since 2013. They also met the Paris-based Brazilian singer Flavia Coelho, full of character and contradiction. Together they concocted *Degg Gui* (Truth), a track with an unstoppable melody, full of grace and single pitch, and where the accordion gently explores the other side of the Atlantic - something Cheikh Lô had already started with *Lamp Fall* in 2006 some tracks on which he had recorded in Salvador de Bahia with the group of afro percussionists Ilê Aiyê. For Cheikh Lô is curious - a quality that keeps his music forever interesting.

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3 track EP on 23 March 2015

Chapter Two

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