

God-like bassist Marcus Miller graced the stage at December's festival in Dakar.



IN THE SENEGAL GROOVE

TPi REPORTS ON DAKAR'S THREE-WEEK MELTING POT OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION THAT SAW APG & STUDIO SEXTAN WORK TOGETHER TO PRODUCE STELLAR RESULTS...

Dakar is perhaps better known for the legendary annual off-road rally of the same name that sets off from Paris, but December 2010 saw the Senegalese capital hosting an event of a very different kind.

The third edition of the *World Festival Of Black Arts*, often known as *Fesman*, was held in Dakar from December 10-31. Over 6,000 artists from 60 African countries as well as the U.S. and Brazil came to perform in Dakar during the three-week celebration.

Inaugurated in 1966 by the then Senegalese president, Leopold Senghor, it was launched in the midst of the American Civil Rights movement and as Africa was striving to end colonisation, the festival was as political as it was artistic.

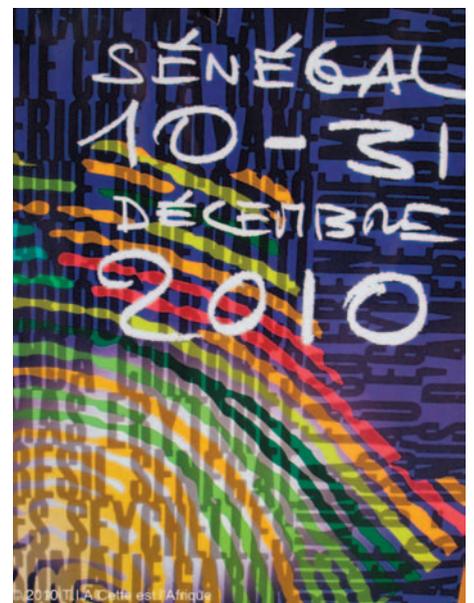
It brought together people from all generations and disciplines in order to make the rest of the world aware of the struggle and persistence of black peoples in the face of oppression.

The second edition was held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977, but it would take another 33 years to get around to the third edition in 2010, timed perfectly to close South Africa's highly successful *FIFA World Cup* year.

The 2010 *Fesman* conveyed a new vision of Africa as free, proud, creative and optimistic. Brazil, another country rich in artistic and cultural cross-pollination, was the guest of honour.

Although a wide number of disciplines were represented — dance, literature, cinema, sport, art, photography, fashion, gastronomy and many others — music clearly played a huge part in the festival, ranging from traditional African music to Latin rhythms to modern jazz, rhythm & blues, gospel, rap, hip-hop and beyond.

Artists included Marcus Miller, Stanley Clarke, Wyclef Jean, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, The African Jazz All Stars, Manu Di Bango, Hugh Masekela, Deep Forest, Chico Cesar, Angélique



Clockwise from below: The festival's starry entrance; a formidable view; Wyclef Jean entertains the masses.



Kidjo, Youssou N'Dour, Alpha Blondy, Ismael Lo, Khaled, Salif Keita and Akon.

Several stages were set up throughout the city to accommodate the vast number of events happening at any one time. Festival organisers called upon all of the biggest French rental companies to supply and manage the audio, lighting and power requirements for the event — Arpège, Black Out, Magnum, Melpomen, Stacco and Studio Sextan were all heavily involved. Indeed, the Senegalese government actually bought two complete APG sound systems from Parisien rental company Studio Sextan for the event.

The first was installed into the historic Daniel Sorano theatre, Dakar's national theatre and one of the major festival venues. It was completely refurbished for the event with a new lighting grid, new stage equipment and a complete makeover of the auditorium itself as well as the new APG Uniline line array system. Studio Sextan supplied and installed eight UL210s, six UL115Bs, a pair of TB218S subs and four DX12 stage monitors.

A second line array system was destined for the Renaissance Monument stage situated at the site of Dakar's massive African Renaissance Monument, unveiled last year to celebrate 50 years of African independence. The Renaissance stage, whilst not the biggest, was certainly one of the most prestigious music stages and welcomed most of the headline acts throughout the three weeks in addition to staging the closing ceremony in the presence of current

Senegalese president, Abdoulaye Wade.

Studio Sextan was responsible for all the PA, lighting and backline, including the Uniline line array system and DX12 and SMX15 stage monitors from APG, as well as an Sy48 digital mixing console from Innovason.

UNIQUE

Sextan's Vincent Mahey, who engineered for many of the 62 bands who played the Renaissance stage, and 'babysat' for many others, recalled what he described as a unique experience.

"For me," he said, "Fesman was an incredible demonstration of the vitality of Africa and its people, and their appetite for culture and exchange. The festival was the object of much criticism and skepticism during its preparation, but earned nothing but praise and admiration from all concerned once it was under way. It was clearly an unforgettable experience for everyone who participated, either as a professional or as a member of the audience."

Mahey was equally pleased from a technical point of view. "We were fortunate in that the two venues we were asked to equip and manage [the Sorano theatre and the Renaissance Monument stage] were both highly symbolic and clearly designated as 'prestigious', so we were given *carte blanche* to provide the highest quality service, which of course included equipment as both systems were purchased by the Senegalese government.

"I'm aware that our choice of APG FOH and

"Visiting engineers were impressed by the extremely natural 'feel' of the Uniline system..." Vincent Mahey

Below: Marcus Miller, a bass master at work with APG monitors. Bottom: APG's Uniline line array system.



monitor systems along with Innovason consoles is not necessarily a common international standard, but knowing both systems as I do, and indeed the artists and technicians that we would be working with, I was totally confident in my decision," continued Mahey.

"APG's Uniline system offers incredibly subtle musical qualities that are ideal for demanding acoustic performances such as the likes of Stanley Clark, Hugh Masekela, the Miles Davis Tribute Band, Will Calhoun, Manu Dibango and many, many more."

Mahey recalled that the Renaissance Monument stage was quickly dubbed 'the open-air auditorium' by artists and local press alike who unanimously hailed the venue for the quality of the sound.

He commented: "Visiting engineers were impressed by the extremely natural 'feel' of the Uniline system, especially in the mids, but I particularly enjoyed Dennis Thompson's comment — 'that's a f***ing great sound system!' It says it all really. And coming from the man who has engineered over 10,000 gigs with [amongst others] the Rolling Stones, Bob Marley and now Marcus Miller, that's quite a compliment."

Some old habits were knocked for six when Mahey introduced APG's SMX15 and DX12 monitors. He smiled: "After 15 years of working with Marcus Miller, we finally chose *Fesman* as the ideal situation to offer him the SMX15 instead of his usual choice. The result was more than convincing, given the speed at which he whizzed through his

soundcheck and his ear-to-ear grin after the show, and this from someone who is particularly fussy about his sound.

"Monitor engineer Frederic Bailly, who is a regular on major events working alongside the likes of Youssou N'Dour, Papa Wemba, Charlelie Couture, Victoria Abril and many others, was equally impressed by the amazing linearity of the DX12s and their great feedback response despite the battery of very sensitive microphones we had on stage [DPA, Neumann, Schoeps, Audio-Technica] that were necessary for this kind of music. We had absolutely no feedback issues at all."

ACHIEVEMENT

There's no doubt that a festival of this kind was a massive undertaking for a country like Senegal, but the general consensus is that it was a huge success. Abdou Diouf, the festival's technical director, can be proud of his achievement.

Despite what appeared to be all manner of insurmountable obstacles in the run-up to the event, the festival went ahead as planned and all of the technical difficulties were overcome. The artists played their part, taking last-minute program changes in their stride, and all were delighted with the extremely high quality of the audio production.

The final word goes to Sindiely Wade, one of the chief festival organisers and government delegate. "The third edition of *Fesman* has generated much excitement," she said. "We have received many messages of thanks from the artists, who wish to return to Senegal to perform. The image of Senegal has benefited hugely from the festival and enabled us to showcase the cultural riches of Africa in a positive and optimistic and light. It's been a wonderful experience for us all."

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