

*"The fantastic Batida."* **Guardian**

*"Slippery guitars of classic African dance-band music and a touch of pumping super-modern bass."* **The Telegraph**

*"Mpula's work can be held up to the light at many angles"* **The Wire**

*"It may well be a game-changing 21<sup>st</sup> century electronic African dance album"* **Songlines**

Batida means "beat" in Portuguese, but it's also the name of a lot of the pirate compilations that circulate through the streets of Luanda. New ones come out every day, directly from the Musseke (ghetto) into the hands of all the Kandongueiros (taxi drivers). These compilations are mainly dedicated to Kuduro and reveal, more than local radio, the sound that is pumping on the streets.

A distinctly modern and vibrant project with its feet firmly rooted in the past Batida is the creation of Portuguese-Angolan DJ Mpula aka Pedro Coquenão. Batida combines samples from old 1970s Angolan tracks with modern electronic dance music. Music is the starting point but through dance, poetry, graphics, photography, radio and video, Batida expands, taking in politics and social commentary but always bringing it back to the party.

What originally started out as a radio show designed to promote new African music has slowly evolved into a collaborative project crossing continents, a full on live show with dancers, DJs, MCs & visuals, and to the eponymous debut album released through Soundway Records in 2012.

Whereas nearly all of Kuduro (Angolan electronic music) has no links with its country's musical heritage, it is deeply engrained in Batida's music. Sampling tracks from 1970s Angola, Batida is a reinterpretation of Angola's musical past, bringing it firmly into the modern day.

Batida started when Pedro proposed a radio show in 2006 to Portuguese national radio around new African and Afro-influenced music, looking for artists who were drawing on influences from the past but giving it a modern twist.

It was during a trip to Luanda, Angola in 2007 when he was visiting his family and friends that he got the good news that the show had been commissioned for a weekly, one hour slot on national radio.

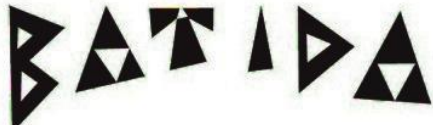
Pedro quickly discovered a worrying lack of the sort of music he was hoping for his new radio show, explaining in a recent interview with Soundway. *"I was finding lots of new urban electronic stuff, but not much that was embracing the traditional elements, like hip-hop artists do, such as rapper Baloji who sample traditional Congolese sounds and rhythms. Conductor, MCK's producer and Conjunto Ngonguenha are doing similar things in Angola, but in the electronic dance music scene there was a huge gap between the traditional and the new"*

As he used Ableton Live anyway for the radio show Pedro started working on his own tracks, mixing old Angolan samples with contemporary electronic production. Working on the tracks in his loft, Pedro began dropping some of them into his radio show. Unaccredited at first, this was his attempt to fill the gaps in his radio show. The reaction to his tracks was so encouraging he began to contemplate the idea of making a record. *"My friend Beat Laden started dancing with every track I showed him. He was my main supporter during that process."*

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Ten years prior to the radio show Pedro had started a collective called Fazuma in Lisbon. Designed to help and promote African and Afro-Portuguese musicians he would try to find them labels for the artists and even release them himself. Over the course of these ten years he met like minded artists who he asked for “*precious contributions*”. Pedro would send out instrumentals to rappers in Angola and Lisbon, giving them a rough theme dependent on the mood of the track.

Pretty soon the vocals started coming back to him. Inevitably, coming from Angola and working with artists who still live there, it was impossible for Pedro not to bring some elements of social commentary and politics into his music.

*“Being half Angolan, half Portuguese gives me the chance to try to translate the countries to each other, on a small scale of course. It’s impossible now a days to live in Lisbon and not to talk about crisis. Likewise it’s impossible to have friends and family in Luanda and not include the political and social problems that the city has.”*

On ‘Bazuka’, a deeply satirical song and one that set the blueprint for Batida, Pedro samples a former boy soldier recorded on the streets of Luanda, featured on the documentary that he produced with his brother Ikonoklasta called “*É Dreda Ser Angolano*”. The man was drafted against his will to fight in both the independence and civil wars in Angola. Having lost his parents at an early age, he wonders if the president is his mother and the former leader for the opposition his father. ‘Saudade’ sees Batida reminiscing about Angola during the 1980s/90s but also wishing for a better future for Angola. *“One day these Neo Colonialists will be brought to justice / When the so called Democracy really exists”*

Eventually the project needed to be taken out of his loft so the album was taken into Beat Laden’s studio in Lisbon and finished in 2009.

The next challenge for Pedro was how to present Batida as a live show, a simple MC and DJ sound system would not suffice. As with the music Pedro wanted Batida’s live show to encompass elements of both old and new. Researched images from Angola, both archive and new, of Angolan streets, war and fragments of tribal life are played out behind percussionists and MCs.

As with nearly all African music there had to be a dance associated with it. Combining traditional tribal Angolan dance with modern dance routines, the dancers became an integral part of Batida’s live troupe.

Anyone who has witnessed Batida live will testify, not only to its irrepressible party atmosphere, but also the sheer attention to detail that goes into the live show. The clothing and accessories of the performers, the stage and the visuals are all meticulously planned and designed by Pedro.

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