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From Ndombolo to Scooby-Doo: Congolese musicians in the UK re-create home whilst finding their own voice

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From Ndombolo to Scooby-Doo

31st European Seminar in Ethnomusicology
Sept 17th 2015

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Congolese Popular Music

Popular Pan-Africa particularly in Central and East Africa

In the DRC there is huge interest in popular music and musicians

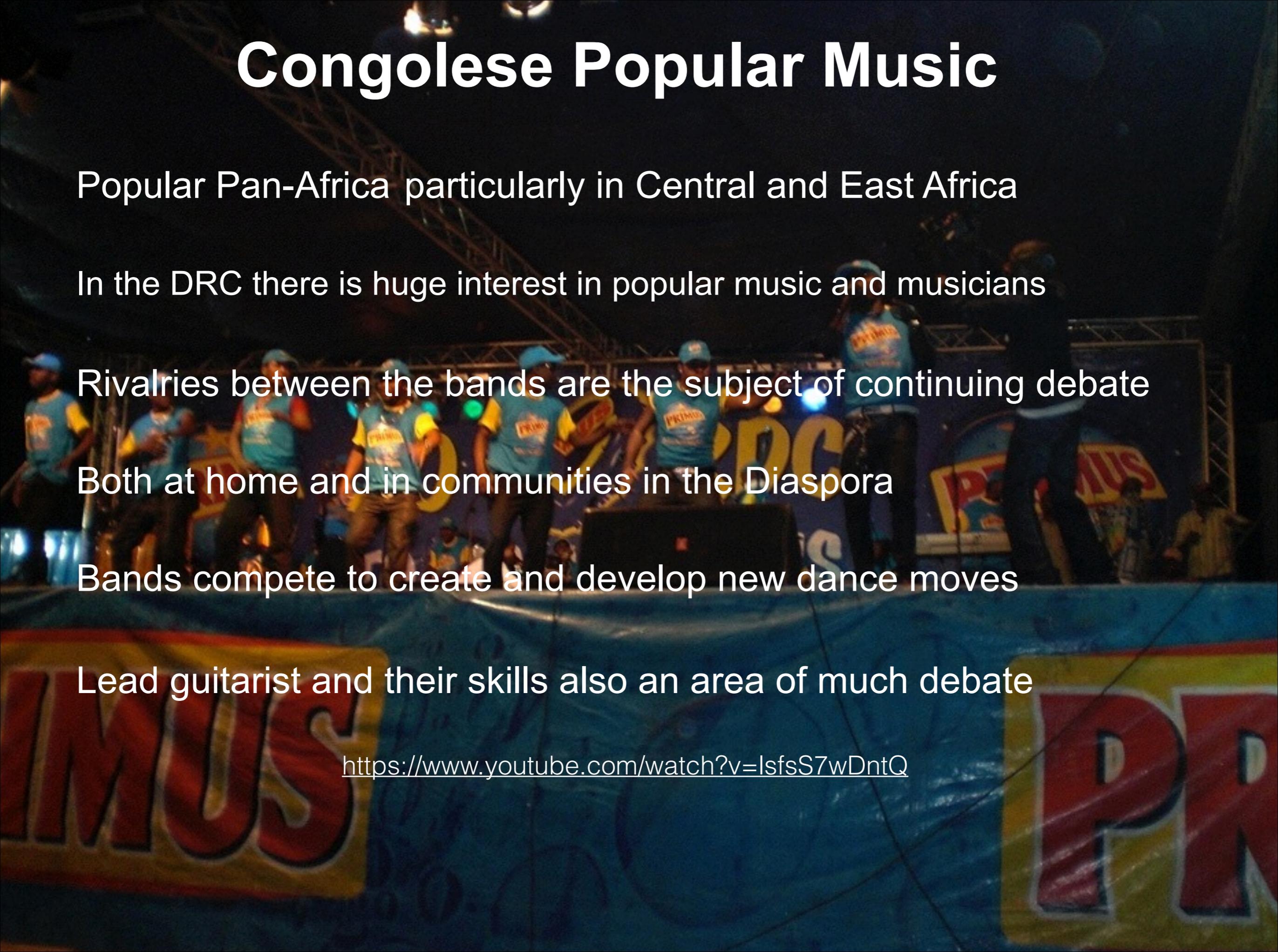
Rivalries between the bands are the subject of continuing debate

Both at home and in communities in the Diaspora

Bands compete to create and develop new dance moves

Lead guitarist and their skills also an area of much debate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsfsS7wDntQ>



Congolese Music in the UK

Sizeable community, although not on the scale of France or Belgium

Popular with Central and East African communities

Clubs are important focal points for the community

Less performance spaces now than a few years ago

There is a clear distinction between African clubs and those for the wider audience

Circumstances of the musicians

Restricted Travel

No face to face interaction with musicians from DRC because of the actions of a group called the Combattant



The Combattant

Claim to Oppose the president of DRC, Kabila

Boycott his supporters

Including the home musicians who are perceived to support him

This has resulted in Congolese artists being unable to play in the UK, France and many other countries.

The internet and regular phone calls enable the musicians to keep abreast of trends

Implications for live performance - no exchange, the community is static.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWz470K8AIE> Papa Wemba in Paris 11

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-NGosrUBGs>

The musicians

Eugene Makuta

Arrived here with Congolese singer General Defao in the late 90s. Considered to be one of the UK scene.

Iddo

Arrived with lesser known Congolese band Planete Elegance in the early 2000s Initially primarily has developed as a singer.

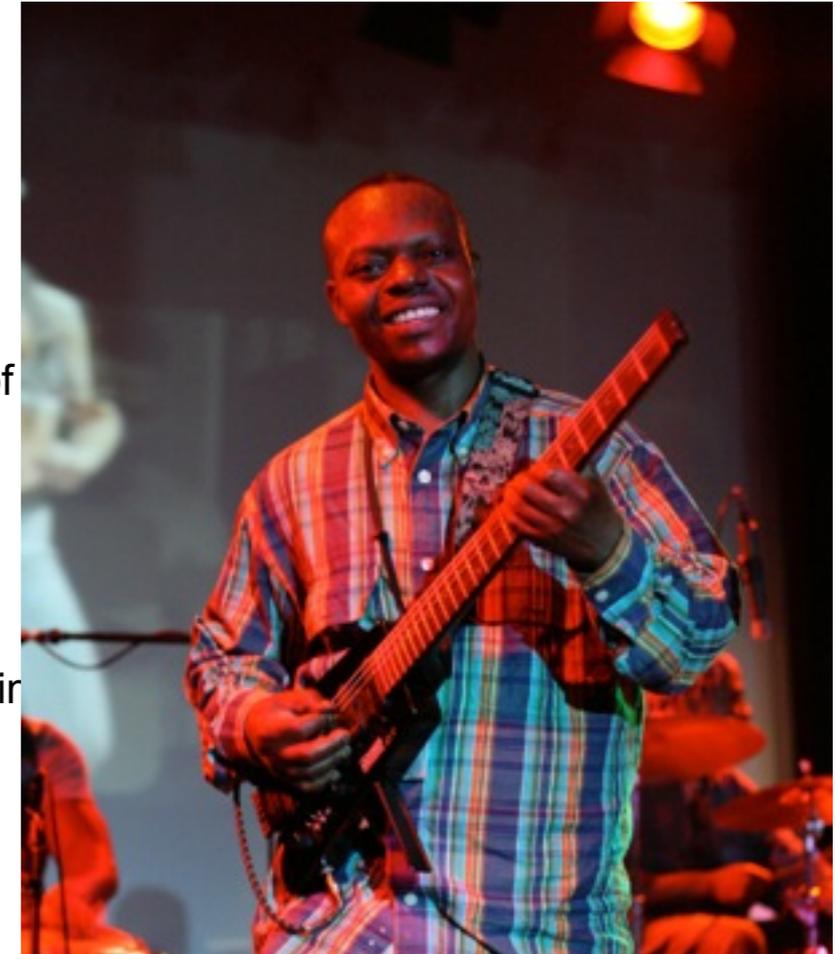
Burkina Faso (aka Mbokalia)

Arrived in 2006 with Congolese singer JB Mpiana and his band Wenge Musica B... top guitarists in the DRC, instrumental in developing Congolese popular music and into popular music.

Maintained popularity in Congo and throughout Congolese communities

“For me Burkina Faso is the most original of all the popular guitarists. His technique of varying it, bringing in little folkloric ideas [Ngimbi sings example] catches you with a deep knowledge of Congolese music.” (Ngimbi, Interview with Author)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRxdOp_ILv8





Role in the Community

Recreation of home

Nostalgia - required to sing classic songs

Contemporary dance moves - expected to have learnt and developed the latest moves

Inclusive - involve members of the audience in the performance



Rhumbatainment

Role in the Community





The Wider Audience



An ongoing dialogue with home

Two way flow

Dancers

Pressure to find and copy dances

Pressure to add your own special twist

Pressure to keep creating in order to keep being remembered

Dance moves created in the UK now being copied in Congo

Guitar

Burkina Faso

In Congo often the subject of rumour and speculation

When in detention, JB Mpiana went on National TV saying that he was due to be

In July he insisted that I post this picture on the Internet to spark rumours

He recognises the role that he plays in the Congolese identity

He also is aware that he needs to remain better than upcoming guitarists, or retain his individual style

Whilst Congolese talk about him being a thing of the past, at the same time they celebrate his playing



In Conclusion

Congolese musicians play an important role in the UK based community

They take their responsibilities to the community seriously

They re-create home, whilst asserting their new-found identity in the UK

As well as preserving identity,

they are creators and participants in musical development

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