

AWADI (Senegal)

Without a shadow of a doubt, **Didier Awadi** is the most prominent artist to have emerged from Africa's Francophone Rap scene. Awadi, Who won RFI's "Musiques du Monde" award in 2004, has established himself as a veritable pioneer, pushing back borders and opening new paths for a sound of an entire generation of African youth and their counterparts across the world.

Working as part of the group, **Positive Black Soul**, Awadi has recorded a stack of acclaimed and accomplished albums, open to influences from Europe and the United States. This talented artist and entrepreneur is the best imaginable example of a generation who have skilfully combined the wonders of modern technology with the traditional culture of their ancestors. Awadi has fed this powerful mix into his dynamic rap, creating a music based on genuine roots and consciousness-raising messages. In short, Didier Awadi is not afraid to stand up and speak out to the world because he knows he's got something to say that we need to hear!

Didier Awadi was born in Dakar in 1969. His father, who came from Benin, and his mother, from Senegal, were both primary school teachers. Bitten by the hip-hop bug in his early teens, Awadi launched a career as a rapper and DJ in the mid-80s and soon began to make a name for himself on the burgeoning local scene with his first group, **Didier Awadi's Syndicate**. The Syndicate faced stiff competition from a rival group, the King's MC, fronted by a certain Amadou Barry (aka Doug E Tee). Awadi hailed from the "Amitié 2" hood, Doug E Tee from "Liberté 6" and, like their rapper counterparts in Paris and New York, they were both on a mission to defend the colours of their native neighbourhood. Music finally won out over gang rivalry, however, when in an attempt to "bury the hatchet" Awadi invited Doug E Tee to his birthday party in 1989.

The coming together of two of Dakar's most charismatic rappers made for a meeting of minds and the discovery of a common vibe. Awadi and Doug E Tee realised they were both coming from the same direction, their musical philosophy being based on a profound respect of their cultural roots and African history. Fascinated by what was going on on the American rap scenen the pair sought the means to produce a sound of equivalent quality, but breathed their own identity into their rap by mixing in elements of African culture. Right from the start Awadi and Doug E Tee made it clear they had a hard-hitting message to get across and they used their militant rap as a mouthpiece to express the views of a generation of young Africans who were open to the rest of the world and cured of their inferiority complex towards the west.

Positive Black Soul was born of the meeting of Awadi and Dou E Tee and the duo soon went on to forge an excellent reputation on the local Dakar scene thanks to a series of popular concerts. In 1992 PBS contributed a track to a compilation sponsored by the French Cultural Centre and their fame soon spread further afield. French rap star MC Solaar, who was on holiday in Dakar at the time, was so impressed by the duo's work that he invited them to support him on his upcoming French tour and PBS returned to play in France on several other occasions. Meanwhile, back home the dire economic situation of the rap scene meant they had to wait until 1994 before they could release a debut cassette album which they financed and produced themselves. The album, entitled Boul Falé, strengthened their popularity on Africa's Francophone rap scene and paved the way for collaborations with Africa Fête and the singer Baaba Maal who introduced PBS to directors at the Mango Island label. Once signed to his international label, the duo proceeded to embark upon an extensive tour of Europe where their live performances went down a storm. They went on to release a debut CD album, entitled Saalam, which included new versions of the hits they had scored in Africa (and which had been released on follow-up cassette albums after Boul Falé). Saalam showed the full extent of the pair's rap talent, songwriting inspiration and militant fervour and also featured a guest vocal contribution from MC Solaar. Over the following years Positive Black Soul went on to make their mark on the international rap scene, touring extensively in Africa and the rest of the world. They brought the house down all the way from Johannesburg to Paris and New York. When they performed at Midem, the international record industry fair in Cannes in 1997, PBS hooked up with their American producer Van Gibbs (father of the Fugees' producer, Salaam Remi). Van and his father made their expertise and their New York studio available to PBS and the result was the album Run Cool, recorded with a helping hand from Jamaican stars Red Rat and Bob Marley's son Ky Mani Marley and Franco-Cameroonian singer Princess Erika. Run Cool was released on the major label WEA. In 2003 New York-Paris-Dakar, an album which had previously only been available as a cassette on the Senegalese market, was released on the independent label Night & Day. New York-Paris-Dakar was, in fact, PBS's second album (but had been blocked in the pipeline as a result of contractual disputes with Island). The album featured a host of prestigious guest stars including K-Mel (the rapper from French group Alliance Ethnik), Manu Key from Mafia K'1 Fry and New York hip-hop king KRS One.

After a round of non-stop concerts and international tours, Awadi and Doug E Tee decided to take a temporary break from Positive Black Soul and devote time to personal projects instead. Didier Awadi went on to record a debut solo album, entitled Parole d'Honneur, which was released exclusively on the Senegalese market 2001. This accomplished work reflects the pioneering rapper's commitment to pan-Africanism and reflections on a host of topical themes such as third world debt, political tensions and the plunder of Africa's heritage.

His album (Un Autre Monde Est Possible) is released in 2006, under the label Sony Publishing FRANCE and the last one (SUNUGAAL) in February 2008, in England during the African Soul Rebels Tour with Salif Keita and Tony Allen, under the label MR BONGO. Didier still has messages to deliver to the Youth, and they are all ears!

Without a doubt, the both productions will show maturity and know-how. It will give Didier the opportunity to open up to new musical experiences from all over the world. There will be a nice blend of relevant lyrics which will serve in a collective sensitization endeavor.