

África Festival in Lisbon

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África Festival - Lisbon came into existence because of the political will to integrate a programming on Africa in the Festas de Lisboa. It was the first and only initiative of African musics held in Portugal on a regular basis and with international importance. Three editions were realized: 2005, 2006 and 2007, all as part of Festas de Lisboa, organized by EGEAC [(Empresa de Gestão de Equipamentos e Animação Cultural) from the Municipality of Lisbon].

The initiative assumed a position of great importance to Portugal as a platform for interculturality, supporting the dissemination of African cultures in the world by backing the circulation of artists, and gave Portugal its place in the international circuit of world music festivals (which includes African musics), in a very short time gaining a significant reputation and recognition (noticeable by the quality and stability of the program over the three editions, by the great coverage in the national press, by the international press that was present and by the significant and wide variety of spectators that it attracted), all these factors being indicators of success.

In 2005, the great music shows were presented in Monsanto (Anfiteatro Keil do Amaral), and in 2006 and 2007, in the park next to the Torre de Belém. The emblematic performance of Ali Farka Touré with Toumani Diabaté, in Monsanto, is perhaps the biggest reference of this program that presented a significant range of the most important musical creations from Africa or with African roots. Baaba Maal, Tiken Jah Fakoly, Oumou Sangaré, Tcheka, Mayra Andrade, Tinariwen, Bassekou Kouyaté, Cheikh Lô, Músicos do Nilo, Bonga, Tito Paris, Waldemar Bastos, Paulo Flores, Lura, Manecas Costa and Ray Lema, and many others.

África Festival was a tribute to an important facet of Portugal and Lisbon's identity, which called for a simplified approach, free of stereotypes that proposed an area of true knowledge, information and dialogue between people of different backgrounds and cultures. It was a pioneering programming concept in Portugal which considered the participation of all African countries (and not just the Portuguese-speaking African countries) and that of all Africans: those living in Africa, those living in the diaspora, afro-descendants and people of mixed origin. In this way, the festival contributed to the creation of new audiences, internally promoting an increased consumption of these genres. The artists gained presentational space in Portugal and today we can enjoy performances by artists such as Toumani Diabaté, Oumou Sangaré or Ray Lema, in places of reference such as Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon or Casa da Música in Oporto.

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Within the perspective of creating new audiences, the used strategy naturally involved a model of free entrance for the first years (as, by the way, was also the case of the Festival de Músicas do Mundo de Sines). With an average audience of 10,000 spectators per day for the outdoor stage, where the big music concerts took place, África Festival united a very diverse audience - from different backgrounds, ages, social classes and cultural interests -, interested, critical and participatory. It involved the African communities, the indigenous community, other foreign residents and tourists, noticeably with great participation of families. People who love music and who love to get to know different cultures.

Focused on music but sensitive to other artistic disciplines, the festival annually opened the way to other expressions: film, visual arts and photography, dance, literature and theater. Training, opportunities for dialogue, information and reflection. The 2007 edition gave the festival a new dimension and represented a huge leap compared to the previous editions, considering the extension of the agenda (a program comprising eleven days) and the possibility to also integrate a venue to the program - Cinema São Jorge - which brought together 5,388 viewers in a week. Immediately after the last edition (2007), EGEAC decided to take the event out of the schedule of *Festas de Lisboa*. Three years later, África Festival still lives fondly in the memory of the people and the city.

