

# Malonga John - INTERVIEW

## Speaker key

IR Interviewer

IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Hello Mr Malonga, my name is Jose a Volunteers from Community Active Support (CAS). This interview is about Bridging Cultures. A heritage project funded by Heritage Fund to collect stories of Congolese who migrated in East London. Hope you are keeping safe?
IE	Hello Jose. I am indeed keeping safe.
IR	Good, can you please introduce yourself to our listeners?
IE	My name is Malonga John, I was born in 1955 in Kikwit, Kwilu District, now Kwilu Province. It is of of the 21 provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). Created in the 2015 repartitioning of bigger provinces, giving them more autonomy and power. Mayindombe, Kwilu and Kwango provinces are boprn from the dismemberment of the former province of Bandundu. It is situated at 400km , west of Kinshasa, capital city of the now Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). I am a born musician. I started my musical career in 1971. I travelled around Africa and played in many bands.
IR	Did you attend any school?
IE	Of course, I have. I did 6 years of primary education and 2 years of secondary school. This is the best I could have done at the time. Music was my number one priority and my dream was to become famous or play in a famous band. My mother was very supporting. Being my mother only child, I think I was spoiled
IR	What did you do then?
IE	I was in pursuit of fame. And it took time to materialise. My girlfriend of the time felt pregnant. My family become upset and suggested that I look for a steady job to support my women. I went from one company to another, unable to keep a job. I started with a Credit Union bank, then another company and another began until I decided to leave and decided to play music in bars and restaurants around the city. A friend of mine new a guy who was wealthy and persuaded him to sponsor



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	<p>our new band. Within months, I recorded my first disc, top on the chart, everybody wanted me. One of our fun invited me at his house, gave me a suitcase full of clothes, monies started coming, that was it! We travelled to Brussels to play at Centre 66, we had played in Paris as well.</p> <p>We recorded our first disc with revolutionary orchestra, we had spent almost a month and half, then we went back to Kinshasa and then the revolutionary orchestra has terminated due to disagreement between the leaders of the group, we were young, so we could do nothing.</p> <p>Then I moved on to another orchestra, I was playing as soloist. Though I can write and arrange songs and the music in general.</p>
IR	How successful where you with your musical career?
IE	<p>It was very hard at the time, although you are talented you need connections and monies to buy instruments. I travelled around Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Kenya. It was quite difficult in Tanzania to make money, I tried playing my music in clubs and parks but I was still struggling, so I had decided to record a disc and then I went to Kenya. The Western people I used to play with, they followed me in Kenya and we start playing together. A guy in the name of Robin Scott, he now lives in Brighton/England; he came to Kenya and he was looking for someone to help him record his music using the African style, we worked together, I played the guitar for him but his music never came out, he was smoking a lot. Mr Robin Scott liked my talent and told me that I would make a lot of money if I come to play in the UK, he got me a visa and arranged my trip to the UK.</p>
IR	What different is there, between making music in Africa and Europe?
IE	African are interested in African music and Europeans are interested in Western music, African music does not have large audience in Europe.
IR	Why don't you have a large audience here?
IE	They are interested in pieces of our music. They have tendency od mixing it to create something new to please their ego. I personally do not like that; I like people to take our music and keep it authentic. When African people take the Western music, they keep it authentic, Western people should do the same.

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IR	Why don't you adapt African music to Western audience to help your career over here?
IE	How can you adapt when you are not given the opportunity to do so? It is hard for us to adapt to their style, sometimes we take a couple notes and mix them with our music but it is difficult to completely change everything. Some few people were able to adapt their African music to the Western ones. People like Manou Dibango from Cameroon have succeeded doing just that.
IR	Who helped you in your journey?
IE	Yes, I had a record label, I had Caucasian friends; I had formed a group of musicians, I was the only Black; I am a guitarist and I cannot sing, so I took a female singer from South Africa now passed away and a guy called <i>Simba Fogus</i> but the rest of the band were English, we played together and I taught them African music. One of them is in America, he often writes me letters, one is now teaching music in Holland and some of them are still here in England; they helped me to settled here and I helped them as well to learn music. I have been here since 1984 and I had toured around Europe with the group that I had formed. After that, I started playing with African, I had a good music career.
IR	Did you have trouble settling in the UK? Have you experienced any discrimination?
IE	I can't remember experiencing discrimination. I was surrounded with friends from across the board. People had attitude of course but that didn't border me.
IR	Do you miss your home town?
IE	Very much so. I am old, although I look young. I always think of going back but things have gone from bad to worse. Now that there is a new president, we hope that there would be changes. No infrastructure, no medical or social services. Politicians are billionaires whereas the majority of people live for less than a dollar a day. That's how life is.
IR	What would your advice someone who comes from Africa?
IE	I would advise them to learn English. Without a good English, you can't do anything. That's the way forward. Be a law obedient citizen. You may end up not returning back from wherever you came from watch your steps.
IR	We are almost getting to the end. Do you have anything to add?



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IE	I would like to thank you for adding my voice to this collection of interviews.
IR	Thank you to you
IE	It is a pleasure for having me.

[00.58.47]

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration 58 minutes and 47 seconds**



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