

# Kimbamba Leon - INTERVIEW

## Speaker key

IR Interviewer

IE Interviewee

| Speaker | Transcription  |
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| IE      | Good afternoon Mr Kimbamba   |
| IR      | Good afternoon Young Man   |
| IR      | <p>Thank you for your time.</p> <p>This interview is about Bridging Cultures. A heritage project funded by Heritage Fund to collect stories of Congolese who migrated in East London. We are all Volunteers from Community Active Support (CAS). My name is George and I am being assisted by Etta and Ariannah.</p> <p>Can you introduce yourself to our listeners?</p>   |
| IE      | <p>My name is Kimbamba Leon. I was born in 1957 in Kinshasa, Africa in DR Congo. My parents are both dead now and they all originated from Luozi in Kongo Central province, South West of DR Congo. Not to confuse it with Congo Brazaville. I have 5 siblings, 3 girls and 3 boys including me. Dad used to take us to the village to visit other members of our extended family. These trips were frequent, we used to go on all School holidays and half terms. We had a massive house in the village where everyone will gather and it looks like parties every day. People used to go to daily business such as trading and farming and everyone will convene in the evening, where a massive diner will be served to everyone and people will together be singing and dancing to the drum. I never forget that wonderful childhood life. I completed my primary education and dropped my Secondary education after completing 3 of the 6 years of Secondary education. In 1972, I went on to doing music and I never done anything else since. Music has always been my passion and I think I must have picked it from my Grand Father during our numerous trips to the village.</p> |
| IR      | It is good to know that you are a musician. What inspires or influences you to do music?   |
| IE      | People who have known us always said that we have music in our genes. I am   |



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## BRIDGING CULTURES

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|    | <p>from a family of Griots, my Grand Father used to play traditional music at events, I grew up watching them play in family gathering. Also, I was also part of the Scout in my school, I was arranging the music and I interested most in playing the drum; if I hear the drum playing in the distance, I would go near to see. I really used to admire it. While back in Kinshasa, my cousin used to take me see different groups playing music at Bars, and I loved it; that is why I dedicated all my life to making music.</p>   |
| IR | Where you looking up into to someone? Did you have any role model?   |
| IE | My Grand Father is one of them. I wanted to do something different than what he used to do. I wanted to combine what he did and what I see in Cities. I used to like all sort of music but I preferred Jazz Salsa and Fiesta, Rumba and cha-cha-cha  |
| IR | How can you differentiate them?  |
| IE | <p>Rumba is slow dance but Tsha-tsha-tsha is quite fast. Its general knowledge, when you know, you know,...</p> <p>One day, a Trumpetist asking me, "Where did you learn to play the drum?" and then I replied that I used to watch people playing it and from there, I started playing and he said that I was very good. I never been trained to do it. Learned by watching people doing it and I got better and better by doing it.</p> <p>I remember playing at a Bar, the owner of the Bar was very impressed and even suggested that he would like us to be his permanent Bar's Band and we would be paid a salary. We agreed to the proposition and became full member of his orchestra. I never return to school since that day. Monies and fame took place, what would a school give? My Dad was very upset but every one supported me and he had to back off.</p> |
| IR | What would you say to those who claim that African music is the same across the continent?   |
| IE | They could be right. If I use "Rumba" as reference. In Ghana, as in Congo, that music was played way before in Africa before slaves took them to America. I met with a Colombian woman, she told me that in Colombia, there is a tribe that came from Congo; Jamaica also has a tribe from the Congo; even Reggae music used to be played by Leon Bokasa, before Jamaicans took it, I used to hear this rhythm   |



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|    | when I was younger.   |
| IR | Any idea where "Rumba" originated from?   |
| IE | There is a confusion, Rumba is originally from the DR Congo, it sounds like swing, when slaves were brought to America, they took Rumba and made it modern, that is also where Salsa came from.   |
| IR | How did you find yourself in the UK?  |
| IE | <p>I visited Europe and England as a performer. And few years later, after a disagreement with the boss in the orchestra in Congo, I went to Lusaka, I joined a group over there and then we came to England for the first time in 1986, we went back to Lusaka and came back to England in 1987; they salary was not good, they would pay us up to £50 per week while we were playing here and there. That is unacceptable. One day, we played in Derby and I met a generous white woman. She became my friend and even bought me a drum and other materiel to take to Africa.</p> <p>Then I went back to Nairobi, met a gentleman who had a production contract for Japan, he asked to form a group for a performance in Japan, I agreed to the offer, I took three musicians from Tanzania, we got visas and went to Japan. Friends who stayed in Zimbabwe were surprised to hear that we are heading in Japan, they could not believe it. After nine months in Japan, we went back to Kenya.</p> <p>My girlfriend that I met in England, joined me in Kenya, we got married, she came back to England. I got another production contract to Japan and after that I joined my wife over here in England.</p> |
| IR | Where were you staying?   |
| IE | First, I stayed in East London. We had a big Congolese Community there and I moved to Bristol. A different place from London, there were not a lot of Congolese, I had formed an orchestra with Caucasian people, a Gambian guy and an Australian woman.  |
| IR | How have you influenced the Congolese music?  |

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| IE | I have become wiser with time. I used to play only drum but today I can sing, I am the lead singer of my orchestra “All Star” and my music is more lyrical, with a deep message to educate people. I play old Style; my new Album has those old style, it’s different to what others play. Money is always an issue. You need good publicity to get your Album reach the large audience and that requires funding.  |
| IR | What was your experience of mixing with other communities?  |
| IE | Music has no barriers. I can communicate with everyone through my music. I had Funs from across the board. Never experienced any discrimination. Let not forget that people have different musical taste.   |
| IR | What is your experience with the Immigration system in the UK?  |
| IE | Things were pretty easy for me compare to whatever I hear in the media or testimonies from other fellow Congolese. I was married to an English lady. Things were pretty much easy for me. I do understand that many Foreigners have it the hard way, unfortunately it was not my experience.  |
| IR | Any advice to those who are trying to come here?  |
| IE | Do your research, keep to what you know and specialise in what you know. Only that way you may feel welcomed anywhere you go. Otherwise, you will be trying your lack and it doesn’t always work. In this modern age, information is available on our fingers and those who try to make their ways to Europe are doing it for lack of prospects where ever they come from. You cannot prevent someone who is ready even to risk his own life to move to the West. |
| IR | We have reached the end of our interview. Do you have anything else to add?   |
| IE | Thank you for having me and good luck with your project.  |

[00.48.12]

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration 48 minutes and 12 seconds**



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