

## FROM RURAL MARTINIQUE TO LONDON

Debbie Golt interviews **Francine Luce** whose first album is newly released: "Bò Kay La Vi-a - (Next to the house of life)" Ogun Records OGCD 012



Francine Luce

Francine Luce's debut CD strides boldly where few have the verve - or sheer brilliance to go. A world-class improviser, she has selected some of the world's finest musicians, all long-time colleagues, to create a vibrant vocal-led tapestry where each person adds extraordinary colour and tone to the passionate whole. Francine's compositions show her immense experience in jazz, african-caribbean, free-form - with accessible reference points in uncharted soundscapes evoked by rural Martinique or the urban Diaspora, ruled by love and without inhibitions. It's breathtakingly beautiful.

Early in her career Francine played trumpet, which inspired her vocal explorations - an admission I found very interesting given the interaction of trumpet and voice with blues singers like Bessie Smith. Luce leads Claude Deppa (trumpet), Paul Rutherford (trombone), Evan Parker (sax), Paul Rogers (bass), Keith Tippett (piano) and Louis Moholo (drums), giving as generously to this project as she has to theirs. It was hard choosing - as Francine regularly works closely with a myriad of tremendous musicians on worldwide stages, in a career that began in her teens.

"I wanted to sing ever since I was 8 and I really found my voice at about 16, in Martinique, when a chance meeting led to me joining a band. I was so excited, travelling in a car packed with instruments, I didn't think, I just felt it!" Francine met key musicians in Paris and then London as she followed her muse and made serendipity work for her

- alongside hard graft. Singing and then playing trumpet with 80's fusionists Dreamtime and Dedication Orchestra and following the courage of her convictions in a duo with double bassist Roberto Bellatalla forged vital connections - and opened up her creativity. "I was called to the Sardinia Festival in 1987

where we were recording an album where I had to improvise from a text. I just dried up in rehearsals and then, in the studio, I sang in a completely new way, influenced by the trumpet, and astounded even myself. That was it - I loved it!"

Well placed chance led to Luce's incandescent work with Louis Moholo's 'Viva La Black' "He heard me singing at a party in 1988 and said he had found the voice he would need when he was ready" (a magic 7 years later). Her collaboration with

Lester Bowie carries an amazing story. "I rushed to Paris to hear him in '86, taking my luggage into the concert. For the finale his band paraded through the audience. I couldn't resist sneaking my trumpet out of my bag and playing from my seat. Of course he saw me and made me lead the parade back to the stage - and pointed at me to play the final note." The contact came to fruition 12 years later (another of Francine's magical numbers) at the '98 Oris Jazz Festival.

When we spoke, Francine Luce was preparing for her South Bank album launch whilst looking forward to headlining at the Martinique Jazz Festival and singing with the Ben Park (classical) ensemble on October 24/25 in London. I was lucky to catch her!