

SINGERS



FRANCINE LUCE FINDING VOICE

Known for her incandescent voice improvisations with Louis Moholo's Viva La Black and collaborations on the worldwide stage with some of the world's finest jazz and improvising musicians, Francine Luce is defining her own ambitions.

Inspired by the unequivocal acclaim for *Bô Kay La Vi-a*, her superlative debut CD (Ogun 0012), Luce wants to establish a permanent band, and profile her own music live as much as possible. This is a significant decision in a career that has grown as much through a passionate capacity to mature opportunities and turn friendships with her peers into collaborations, as by design. She has a powerful aura. One moment she speaks deeply about the importance of her time playing trumpet with 80's improvisers Dreamtime - Nick Evans, Jim Dvorak et al: "I got such joy from their music, I was energised. This was a crucial period in my life"; the next she is laughing unrestrainedly at her audacity when her sheer love of music unexpectedly shaped her career: "I cut short a London holiday in 1986, to rush back to Paris to hear Lester Bowie play, my first time hearing him live. From the moment I discovered him on disc, I felt an unbelievable connection with his style. I was in love with the trumpet and had never heard anyone like him. Without making comparisons, he reminded me of myself! The finale saw all the musicians parading through the audience and I just couldn't help but reach for my trumpet and join in!" Bowie pointed to Francine to play the last note. "I would never do that now, go to a major festival and just play! I was young."

Numbers are important to Luce and, a magic lunar 12 years later, she was to share a stage with Lester Bowie as a fellow soloist with The African Drum Orchestra's 98 Oris London Jazz Festival concert, alongside Louis Moholo and some of Africa's finest percussionists "That was one of the most important concerts of my life, Louis Moholo and Lester Bowie are my two greatest inspirations." Luce's luminary work with Louis Moholo's Viva La Black grew from another unusual connection. Moholo heard her singing at a party in '88 and said he'd found the voice he was seeking for eventual collaboration. Seven years later (another key Luce number) he called her to tour worldwide. Shortly before that Luce had considered launching her own band, but "I wasn't quite ready and I felt really comfortable with Viva La Black. Despite the band's longevity, I fitted in so well immediately. There was a real strength between us all, it's hard to describe. After one festival in Italy we just kept on playing right up to the dressing-room, it was magic! Viva La Black has been an essential part of my career, I learnt so much you've got to be there, you can't miss a second or you'll lose your entry point."



Co-ops are vital for Luce's music making, her forte is improvisation although that wasn't how she started. "I knew I had to sing horn I was about 8 and I really found my voice when I was 16. At 19, in my native Martinique, a chance meeting led to me joining my first band - Kampech. It was a fantastic experience, rehearsing every day for six months before our

first gig". Kampech's "avante garde West Indies music" wasn't quite what Francine wanted, she found that more back in London and Paris with people like Jean-Claude Montredon (with whom she recently headlined at the Martinique Jazz Festival). Her uncanny gift of meeting the right people, coupled with considerable talent matured through study, led her to double bassist Roberto Bellatalla, a significant muse playing her other favourite instrument who introduced her to many kindred spirits - notably Dreamtime and Maggie Nicolls, for whose conceptual approach to

improvisation Francine has great respect. It was in a recording session with Bellatalla in Italy in 1987 that Francine discovered her special skills. "I had to improvise from a text and at first I simply dried up. Then, spontaneously, I made sounds I had never sung before, I found I could use my voice like my trumpet and astounded even myself that was it! I loved it!" It's this artistry alongside both a fascination for new sounds and a rare ability to re-interpret her vast musical experience in Caribbean, jazz, freeform, lyrical composition, that makes *Bô Kay La Vi-a* such a tremendous oeuvre. Luce creates a vibrant vocal-led tapestry where each musician (long term world-class associates Claude Deppa, Louis Moholo, Evan Parker, Paul Rogers, Paul Rutherford, Keith Tippett) adds extraordinary colour. Uncharted soundscapes evoked by rural Martinique (with sampled frogs opening the album) or the urban diaspora are illuminated by

Francine's amazing voice. Her range is awesome, jazz enriched lyrics in French, Creole, English, half-silent breaths, sounds from across the galaxies and beyond. One track is performed through water. The inspiration came

from the sound possibilities in a high-ceilinged London bathroom - oh and Francine's infinity for water as a Pisces. She shares wisdom about why we are here, how the earth is entrusted to us. The heart of the album is the epic "L'amour vaut bien un chanson" which took several months to come to fruition "Like giving birth" (Francine). Love in all its facets is explored "I wanted to write a love song and at first I didn't know how" Francine said. I drew from three major relationships in my life, and what I learnt, about how passion can only last so long and how love cannot exist without really knowing a person: how fear of being alone, hurt, unloved or loved too much influences our judgements. The piece grew taking on love itself and all human experience and how you must love yourself so you can love and be loved". It's a profound creation, essentially full of optimism and faith. "Steve Beresford helped arrange it, following my feel for where I wanted just two chords, or a whole swathe of improvisation. I was determined to put this song on my album". The piece extends musical perceptions, sometimes lifting, sometimes as dramatic as opera. "You can feel that you know so much and then in an instant you realise you don't know anything at all".

A sentiment expressed by Tina Turner in a TV interview struck a chord with Francine. "Tina Turner said 'NOW I can sing' - suggesting that only when a person has an understanding gained through living can they become a true artist. I understand what she meant so well". When Lester Bowie greeted Francine at their concert, he said "So, you are a mature woman now!" She took it as a compliment.

On April 13th Francine premieres some impassioned, innovative and musically mature compositions at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. Opening for Archie Shepp, Luce shows her mettle, leading peers Claude Deppa (trumpet), Jason Yarde (sax), Pule Pheto (piano), John Edwards (double bass), and Brian Abrahams (drums). With typical verve she is only presenting two pieces from *Bô Kay La Vi-a*.

Francine Luce is ready to realise her ambition. "This is just my beginning," she said modestly. She will dedicate a special song *An ti son ba-ou* in memory of Lester Bowie. "A little sound for you". (Debbie Golt) Debbie Golt is Chair of Women in Music and DJs as DJ Debbie on www.gaialive.co.uk playing world jazz. She is also an arts officer and mother of two daughters.

