

out as we fly into the mythical African nation of Wakanda (the song garnered extra poignancy following the 2020 death of Boseman from colon cancer). This was the Africa that filmmakers wanted the world to know. An Africa of colour, culture, technology and creativity, overcoming its colonial past and celebrating its positive future.

In July 2022, Baaba and Massamba performed at the launch of the film's box-office-breaking sequel, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, at San Diego Comic Con. Exuding charisma, the two

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men walked through an audience that included actor Lupito Nyong'o, Baaba flinging notes into the air with gale-force ease, Massamba using a stick to pound the small drum clamped under his armpit. To finish they joined a traditionally dressed line-up of drummers and dancers with bare feet and flailing limbs, the crowd whooping all the while. “I think the African Americans were proud to have something to show their non-African neighbours. Proof of their heritage, their future. The power of Africa is there in its song.”

The power of Africa is there, too, on *Being*, an album about the survival of culture, democracy, community and the planet. A call to honour tradition, and to use technology as a tool for empowerment. A paean to wandering and discovering and finding your way home. It's an almanac of sorts, imparting wisdom, offering guidance. “I don't pretend to save people or tell them how to live,” says Baaba. “But I have experience of music and the world, and as an elder it is my responsibility to say what I think is good for the community, and what might be dangerous. I wanted to make an album that is totally about now, about the dreams I have of the past and future.”

Highlights are many: buoyed by guitar, ngoni and percussion, spliced with effects that whoosh and shimmer, lead single 'Yerimayo Celebration' is an ode to Podor's fishermen and, by extension, to community and the environment. 'Casamance Nights' is a kora-kissed prayer for peace. 'Agreement' is about relationships,



Matthew Donaldson



the importance of keeping one's word: “If you make a commitment, you don't break it. Like me and Mansour,” he says of Seck, 68. “We are lifetime friends.”

There are other Baaba Maals, of course: the Baaba who spent his teenage years listening to Wilson Pickett and James Brown (“All music is African music”); the Baaba who dons outfits by Issey Miyake or vibing young Nigerian designers and attends openings in London, New York or at Dakar's newish Museum of Black Civilisations (inaugurated in 2018). “Dakar is very alive. Its young people are not shy anymore. They push boundaries. Nothing will stop them moving forward.”

He tells me about other projects – there's an exchange programme involving tree planting, and he's an active supporter of the UNHCR, the UN refugee charity. How, I wonder, does he stay grounded? “I meditate a lot,” he says. “I try not to worry. I take it easy until I am ready to make another album.” Another smile. “And I come home here to Podor.” ♦

+ **ALBUM** Baaba Maal's *Being* is reviewed in this issue

+ **LISTEN** Hear 'Agreement' from *Being* on this issue's CD, track 11

WIN

We have five vinyl copies of *Being* to give away. To enter, answer: What is the Fulani vocal coming-of-age ritual called? See p19 for competition rules

BAABA'S PATH TO BEING



Djam Leeli (Mango, 1989)

Recorded with long-time collaborator Mansour Seck in 1984 – though not released for five years – this is a marvellous document of Baaba's acoustic years, full of hypnotic finger-picked guitar and *kora*, with Baaba's voice already possessing a unique power.



Firin' in Fouta (Mango, 1994)

The album that heralded Baaba internationally as a major force. The presence of Jah Wobble, Planxty's Dónal Lunny and Afro-Celts' Simon Emmerson already shows his predilection for surprising collaborators on an album that saw him push into a more electronic globally-minded style.



The Traveller (Palm / Marathon Artists, 2016)

Baaba's first album with producer Johan Hugo saw him marry pop-focused elements with activism and roots. From delicate, acoustic passages to anthemic, percussive climaxes, this is peak Baaba, clearing the way for the heavier refrains of *Being*.

lighthouse

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| Reggae



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Absolute Reggae

Take a trip down Reggae memory lane as Johnny2Bad recreate the songs of an era from legendary artists such as UB40, Aswad, Big Mountain and Bob Marley.



FRI 5 MAY

The King of Reggae

This brand new narrated musical charts the life and times of the man who brought Reggae music to the world, filled with live songs played by the King of Reggae Band.

| Folk



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| Studio Jazz

FRI 17 FEBRUARY

Alan Barns Octet: The Copperfield Suite

FRI 24 FEBRUARY

Greg Foot Quartet with Thokozile

FRI 10 MARCH

Claire Martin and her Trio

FRI 31 MARCH

John Etheridge Organ Trio

FRI 14 APRIL

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