

## Mp3 Super Mama Djombo - World: African



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One of the great West African electric roots bands of the 70's and early 80's. With five interlocking electric guitars and several-part vocal harmonies, this fifteen-person orchestra blazes through fresh interpretations of traditional rhythms 14 MP3 Songs WORLD: African Details: Before a nation can become real, it must first be imagined. It seems appropriate that Super Mama Djombo, the band that became a primary expression of Guinea-Bissau's identity after independence, was born in the fertile imagination of children. Four young friends (the youngest was only six) came together to play at boy scout camp, and got their first taste of success. Soon they were playing weddings and parties around Bissau. This young band was serious, and voted out any members who they thought weren't keeping pace with the group as they became more skilled. Ever improving their act, the boys decided that they needed a new name. Their original name was long and in Portuguese; they wanted something more beautiful, powerful, and home-grown. The lead singer suggested Mama Djombo, the name of a sovereign and deeply respected female spirit. The group liked it, and from then on they were known as Super Mama Djombo. It was the perfect choice. Though the group was too young and politically unaware to know it at the time, they were growing up amidst revolution. The revolutionary Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (P.A.I.G.C.) had been engaged in rural mobilization and clandestine urban agitation since 1959. Hidden under the dense forest canopy in the south of the country, guerillas and villagers struggled to set up a revolutionary society. Mama Djombo was the spirit most appealed to for the protection of these independence fighters. Independence was won in 1974, and that year brought the final formative elements to the band: freedom, euphoria, and bandleader Atchutchi. Atchutchi had been mobilized and politically aware for longer than the other members, and his contribution completed the project. The band would become politically charged. It would imagine a new, unified national identity

that was neither Portuguese nor divided by indigenous ethnicity. It would help re-invent Kriol, the synthesis of Portuguese and African languages spoken in the cities, that the revolution had transformed into a common language of national unity. The success of the new orchestra was almost immediate. They toured Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde playing to ecstatic crowds. Their live concerts were broadcast religiously on the national radio. The band traveled regularly with first president Lus Cabral, representing the new national identity in Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Portugal. The orchestra traveled to Cuba, to mark Guinea-Bissau identity "present" at the 11th Youth Music Festival in Havana. They outshined the other groups from Africa, and appeared on Cuban national television. At home, the band continued to reflect the people back to themselves. In early 1980, the group went for its only recording sessions in Lisbon. People at home in Guinea-Bissau already knew the songs by heart, but their release on LP extended the reach of the band and opened new opportunities-particularly the track "Pamparida." Adapted from a children's play song, this infectious track made the band a West African sensation. DJs would often make sure they had two copies of the album, so they could play the song over and over without stopping. It is said that when "Pamparida" came on the radio during lunch, people would get up and dance the song, then return to their meal. It was "Pamparida" that filled a stadium in Senegal to capacity, where a then-unknown Youssou N'Dour opened for the Orchestra. When the music started, the crowds outside literally broke down the doors to hear them play. It seemed like an ascendancy that would never end-and it certainly could have continued. The offers poured in: an African tour, more European tours, album deals. But these offers brought new pressures. This was a revolutionary band committed to imagining and building the nation through song. Atchutchi was opposed to the deals, and at the time most of the band agreed with him. Who was going to tell President Cabral that the national, revolutionary band was now run by capitalists from the Gambia, Senegal, France, or (of all places) Portugal? Nobody had the heart. In November 1980 Lus Cabral was deposed, and political repression intensified. Even before the coup, the band's music had begun to point out corruption and power struggles emerging in the government. Significant tracks in that vein on this collection include "Ordem do dia" and "Suur di no pubis." The new regime wasn't interested in supporting art-particularly art that was critical of the state-like the Cabral government had, and opportunities at home began to dry up. That was the beginning of the end. By 1986 the band was done. What are left are magnetic tapes, captured traces of a beautiful moment of effervescence, a time when imagination's free reign helped create the world around it, and

dreams and real possibilities met. For just a moment, anything seemed possible.

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