

## SYNOPSIS

Ricky has a dream: to make Staff Benda Bilili the best band in Congo Kinshasa. Roger, a street child, more than ever wants to join these stars of the ghetto, who get around in customised tricycles. Together, they must avoid the pitfalls of the street, stay united and find the force to hope in music. Spanning five years, from the first rehearsals to their triumph at international festivals, *Benda Bilili!* ('beyond appearances') is the story of this dream becoming a reality.

## OVERVIEW

'We find the band living in a ramshackle shelter, riding through the dusty streets of the capital on hand-powered tricycles and playing their songs to passers-by. This is where, in 2004, French filmmakers Renaud Barret and Florent de La Tullaye stumbled across them by chance while making short films about music from the Congo.

The filmmakers' love for the music and dedication to the band over the years saves the film from worthiness or condescension: the most striking thing about Staff Benda Bilili is their self-sufficiency. In a country where basic survival is a daily struggle for many, with no welfare or charitable support for the disabled, the story of the group of musicians who formed around Ricky is uniquely inspirational. They discover Roger, an intense, serious street kid busking with his santonge, an instrument he invented himself. It's the film's defining moment. When we first meet him, Roger plays a haunting, spectral melody that belies the base materials of his device – a single guitar string stretched between a tin can and a wooden stick. He is invited to join the band and we see him grow into a confident and hip young man in sportswear and braids.

A recording contract, album and budget problems follow, before Benda Bilili embark on a tour. Their excitement and trepidation are touching and, although it is unlikely they would have reached such heights without the filmmakers, it is wonderful to enjoy their journey with them. '

From a review in Little White Lies: <http://www.littlewhitelies.co.uk/theatrical-reviews/benda-bilili-14468>



## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

**Renaud Barret:** *'We began to understand that the city is a cauldron of all the 400 ethnicities of the Congo, with their rhythms and all that. And yet there's a stylistic which is common to everyone, this kind of melancholy in the voices, in the melodies, this kind of DIY approach to making instruments, using rubbish and scraps, which is due to the poverty but which also creates a certain sound. It's almost as if the city has this DIY recycling soul. We were totally into that whole thing.'*

**Florent De La Tullaye:** *'They felt there was something different about us, because they beg on the streets, and there are whites who give them money, who might even buy them a guitar from time to time, but nothing more, and in our case, I don't know, I think we had a way of looking and talking to them that they liked. We didn't propose to make a music recording with them straightaway. And if you like, just the fact that they let us film their world was important in that it showed us that handicapped people can do almost anything. And afterwards it was even they a bit who decided, "Hey we'll go a film this, we'll go and film that..." A couple of days later Ricky was introducing us as "here are our producers..." But like all musicians, you know, like everyone who's a bit lost in life does if they have a whitey to hand. And so, as it happened, their status on the streets grew because of us. There were plenty of interconnected issues.'*

Full interview: <http://www.andymorganwrites.com/benda-bilili-they-never-told-us-it-was-impossible/>

Interview with the band: <http://heritage.scotsman.com/interviews/Interview-Staff-Benda-Bilili-street.6737328.jp?articlepage=2>

## QUOTES

*"One of the most moving and engaging music documentaries I can remember seeing...it's not a music doc, it's not a rock doc...it's something else!"* **Mark Kermode**

*"Wielding inspiration and uplift in equal measure, this musical odyssey is one of the cinematic journeys of the year. Don't miss it."* **Empire**

*"...artful and utterly compelling... an uplifting, understated and wholly engaging insight into a world entirely unlike our own, 'Benda Bilili!' is wonderful."* **Time Out**

## FILM INFORMATION

**Theatrical release date:** 18<sup>th</sup> March 2011

**DVD release date:** 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011

**Language:** Lingala, French with English Subtitles

## FILM BOOKINGS

Trinity Filmed Entertainment, [joshua@t-fe.com](mailto:joshua@t-fe.com)

BFFS Booking Scheme, [bryony.bffs@googlemail.com](mailto:bryony.bffs@googlemail.com)