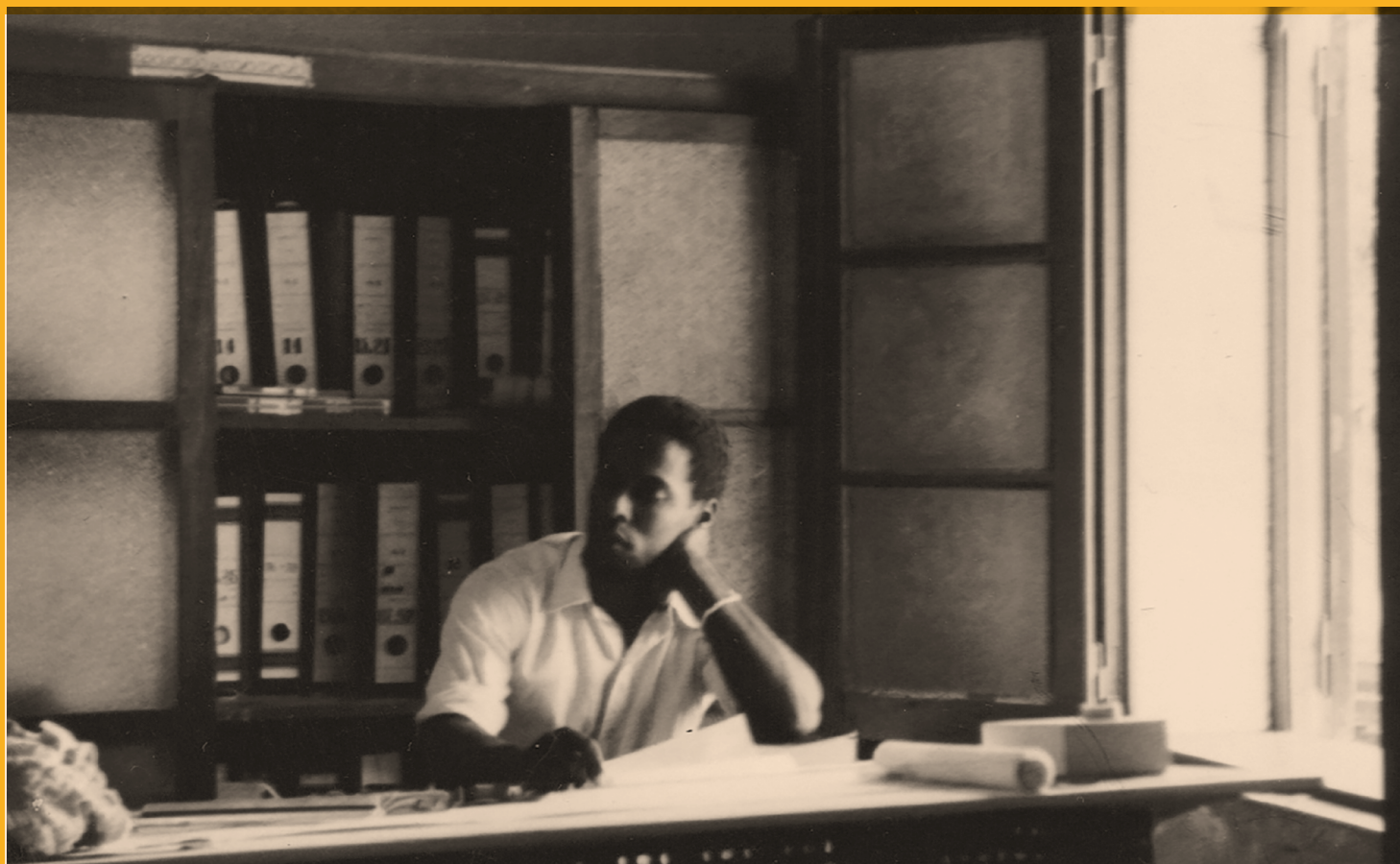


JOSÉ CARLOS HANS SCHWARZ WAS ONE OF THE MOST RENOWNED GUINEAN MUSICAL ARTISTS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY. IN 1977, GUINEA-BISSAU - SCHWARZ'S MOTHERLAND, STILL ON THE REBOUND FROM PROFOUND CHANGES INTRODUCED BY THE PROCESS OF INDEPENDENCE - WOULD WITNESS THE END OF A MUSICAL CAREER WHICH WAS JUST BEGINNING TO COME OF AGE, WITH THE PREMATURE DEATH OF THE ARTIST AT AGE 27.

José Carlos had elements of Guinean, Cape-verdean and German ancestry. Born in Bissau - city capital of Guinea-Bissau, at the time one of several Portuguese colonies - in 1949 to a wealthy family, his early education would be conducted by his father, who would later send him off to Dakar and Cape Verde to complete his secondary studies. After a short stint in Lisbon he would return to Bissau around 1969.

His appetite for literature as well as his strength as a poet, musician and composer, would prevail over his father's wishes, who had envisioned a conventional career for his son. His musical apprenticeship took place, informally, with the Castro Fernandes brothers - most notably Ducko - with whom he would develop his enthusiasm for music and hone his craft. He was part, as a teenager, of the "Pérolas Negras", later creating his own band named "Sweet Fenda", taking inspiration from eclectic American and Brazilian influences.

▼ José Carlos Schwarz, 11 years old - (1960)



▲ José Carlos Schwarz - (Bissau Town Hall)

Around this time Schwarz's political inclinations come into being, when his natural talent for leadership becomes noticed by Portuguese local authorities who attempt to recruit him as part of a larger movement disseminating political propaganda favourable to the occupant regime. It is during one of his journeys to the metropolis, however, that he comes into contact with the pro-independence ideals of the PAIGC<sup>[1]</sup>, chiefly through Filinto Barros, one of the heads of the organization. In time his allegiance to the pro-independence ideals would prevail, and both his artistic and political action would soon support the armed struggle for independence in Guinea-Bissau.

His activity as a musician intensifies from 1970 onwards, as he gradually abandons a preference for imported foreign music and starts developing a taste for more traditional forms. At the same time his political ideas get in tune with his artistic personality, and Schwarz starts to compose inspired by local music and turns to writing mostly in Guinean creole.

In the early 1970's he founds - along with Aliu Bari, Mamadu Bá and Samakê - the most influential popular music group in Guinea-Bissau: "Cobiana Djazz". They witness an

unprecedented mass enthusiasm, on account of a music which revives traditional genres - such as gumbé - whose existence had been mostly confined to underground venues and small scale festivities, and which had, accordingly, no existence in mainstream media. In effect the group picks up political momentum in Guinea-Bissau and gives it shape through their music. A deep sense of cultural identity is given back to the Guinean people, who find comfort in this roots revival music and look upon it also as a weapon of affirmative resistance. The use of both lyrics in creole and traditional music genres establishes an immediate affective bond with their audiences, further emphasized by the politically engaged spirit of the

▼ José Carlos Schwarz & Cobiana Jazz with PAIGC comrades (Baia Das Gatas / Cabo Verde - 1975)



lyrics, all of which play a key role in motivating Guinean youth to take part in the struggle emerging across the country.

The explosive birth of “Cobiana Djazz” brought about other kinds of detonation. Schwarz would become involved in urban guerilla activities which resulted in several bombings in the centre of Bissau, leading to his imprisonment and torture, along with Aliu Bari and Ducko Castro Fernandes, in the facilities of the PIDE/DGS<sup>[2]</sup> in Bissau. He would later be transferred to the penal colony of Ilha das Galinhas and stay there for three and a half months. Schwarz remained in lockup for a total period of about 2 years, between 1972 and 1974.

The process of decolonisation, in the wake of the Portuguese revolution of 25 April 1974, led to the recognition, during the same year, of the sovereign nation of Guinea-Bissau. Schwarz, a key figure in the fight for independence, would play an important part in the transition to the democratic regime, profiting from his popularity as an artist. He actually took an active part in shaping the nation’s politics: Schwarz would be appointed as director of the Arts and Culture Department and become responsible for the new government’s youth policies. Nonetheless the artist would eventually become a thorn in the side of the political elite. His interventions, especially as an artist, came to be increasingly thought of as inconvenient by the establishment, which resulted in his being sent off to Cuba under the pretence of setting up Guinea-Bissau’s diplomatic representation in that country.

José Carlos’ musical trajectory during this period becomes erratic: artistic differences with his fellow musicians from “Cobiana Djazz” make him decide to leave the band and form a new one, “Kumpô”, in 1975. This collective was to be short-lived, due mostly to his time consuming agenda as a politician. It is during this period that his critique of ideological treachery by ex-revolutionaries now in power becomes more noticeable.

Among the titles the artist has left to posterity - songs written mostly between 1970 and 1977 - stand out such masterpieces as Ke ki mininu na tchora

(a snapshot of the fratricidal conflict between pro- independence Guineans and their brethren submissive to Portuguese domination), Mindjeres de pano preto (a tribute to the mourning mothers of Guinean soldiers who fought and perished in the war for independence, true unofficial hymn of Guinea-Bissau) or Djiu di Galinha (a narrative of the time the artist spent imprisoned in the penal colony of Ilha das Galinhas).

His official discography consisted of three albums: José Carlos Schwarz Et Le Cobiana Djazz (vols. I and II) and Djiu di Galinha (recorded in New York with Miriam Makeba and released posthumously). A significant portion of Schwarz’s musical and lyrical repertoire remains largely undisclosed, many of his poems still waiting to be shaped into songs.

José Carlos Schwarz met a tragic and untimely death when his plane crashed on arrival at Cuba’s José Martí International Airport on 27 May 1977. His body was flown back to Guinea-Bissau and the memorial service took place a few days later. A remarkably numerous funeral procession attested the immense respect the artist had garnered among his fellow citizens.

Schwarz remains a prominent name in Guinea-Bissau’s musical landscape and is highly revered in a country which still awaits his deserved international recognition.

**Fernando de Costa Conde**  
(Rossio Music Publishing)

[1] Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde), founded in the 1950’s by Amílcar Cabral.

[2] Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado/Direcção-Geral de Segurança (International and State Defence Police, later General Direction of Security) was a section of Polícia Judiciária (Investigation Police) active from 1945 to 1974, whose main purpose was to investigate, pursue and suppress political opposition to the dictatorship.

▼ Left: Letta Mbulu, Miriam Makeba / Center: Teresa & José Carlos Schwarz (Bissalanca Airport / Bissau - 1975)



**Audio restoration:** Frédéric D’Oria-Nicolas  
**Mastering:** Nicolas Thelliez  
**Lacquer cut:** André Perriat  
**Graphic design:** Erwan Coutellier  
**Liner notes:** Fernando de Costa Conde  
**Project management:** Louis Hautemulle

**Special thanks:**

Remna Schwarz, Naman Schwarz, Teresa Schwarz, Yannick Jame, Tchuma Bari, Patricia Loff, Luis Correia, Adulai Jamanca, Toni Tcheka



▲ José Carlos Schwarz & PAIGC comrades