

From the Streets to the Screen

Skim the article. What makes Staff Benda Bilili different from other groups of musicians?

Staff Benda Bilili is a group of musicians from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They live on the streets of the city. The four original group members are all disabled and move around on homemade tricycles. The group was founded by guitar players Papa Ricky Likabu and Coco Ngambali. Other musicians refused to play with them because they couldn't dance. Later, a street kid, Roger Landu, joined them. He made his own musical instrument from a fish can, a piece of wood, and one guitar string – nothing more.

The group's music is classic Congolese rumba mixed with reggae and rhythm 'n' blues. Their lyrics contain a message to street people and disabled people: Be very strong. Papa Ricky believes that the only real handicaps are in the mind, not the body. He says the group's main musical influences come from the street: "We sleep there, eat



there, rehearse there." They also play there. Every evening, the group performs in front of an audience near Kinshasa Zoo.



In 2004, two French filmmakers were working in the DRC when, by chance, they heard Staff Benda Bilili's music. They loved it so much that they spent the next five years making a documentary film about the group. In 2009, Staff Benda Bilili's first CD was released. It's called *Très Très Fort*, which means "very very strong." The group won the WOMEX (World Music Expo) Artist Award. Then, in 2010, the documentary *Benda Bilili!* was screened at the Cannes Film Festival, and the group played on the opening night.

Staff Benda Bilili wants to use its worldwide success to raise awareness about the problems of street people in Kinshasa and around the world.

A Read the article. Find the words in *italics* below in the article. Then match each word with its meaning.

- 1. *disabled*
- 2. *lyrics*
- 3. *handicaps*
- 4. *rehearse*
- 5. *by chance*
- 6. *raise awareness*

- a. unexpectedly
- b. make people think
- c. things that make it hard to do what you want
- d. words of a song
- e. unable to walk or move easily
- f. practice before performing in front of an audience