



## From an Artist Enclave to the World Stage: Ivory Coast's Dobet Gnahoré Crosses Disciplines and Cultures on *Na Afriki*

**US/Canada Release Date:** June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007

**For more information, review copies, support materials, etc. please contact:**

**Cumbancha**

**Tel:** +1 (802) 425-2118 \* **Fax:** +1 (866) 340-0054 \*

**Email:** [info@cumbancha.com](mailto:info@cumbancha.com) \* [www.cumbancha.com](http://www.cumbancha.com)

**Online Press Kit:** [www.cumbancha.com/albums/dobet\\_gnahore/press](http://www.cumbancha.com/albums/dobet_gnahore/press)

When she was a young girl in the Ivory Coast, **Dobet Gnahoré** knew she wanted to devote her life to the arts. At age 12, Dobet announced to her father that she wasn't going to return to school. "I want to stay in the village like you!" she asserted so forcefully that her father knew there was no talking her out of it. However, this was no ordinary "village." Dobet's father, a respected master drummer, singer and actor, was a founding member of Village Ki-Yi M'Bock, one of Africa's most unique artist enclaves. The influence of this exceptional community and the creative environment in which she was raised can be heard on Dobet's new recording, *Na Afriki* (To Afrika), which will be released by **Cumbancha** on **June 26, 2007**.

Located in a pastoral neighborhood of the otherwise bustling capital city of Abidjan, the artistic cooperative of **Ki-Yi M'Bock** was founded in 1985 by Cameroonian **Werewere Liking** as a place to inspire creativity and collaboration. The village is home to over fifty resident artists of diverse traditions, ages, and origins, including dancers, actors, puppeteers, sculptors, painters, costume designers, and musicians, and has played an important role in the African arts scene. There African artists with a multitude of ethnic backgrounds collaborate freely, united in their commitment to creating uniquely African artistic expressions. Dobet was trained in a multi-faceted approach to music and performance where dance, percussion, song, poetry, and theater are intertwined.

Dobet's life changed when a young French guitarist named **Colin Laroche de Féline** arrived one morning in 1996 with a backpack over one shoulder and a guitar over the other. His expected three day visit stretched to three years, having fallen in love both with the village's artistic lifestyle and with Dobet. Colin mastered a range of African guitar techniques and he and Dobet formed a musical and romantic bond that made them inseparable collaborators. While the artistic colony was a utopian hideaway, the city of Abidjan became embroiled in social and political turmoil. Seeking a more stable and less dangerous environment in which to raise their child, Dobet and Colin moved to France in 1999, where they formed a band made up of a diverse line-up of musicians.

Soon, the group was performing at European music festivals, and Dobet's unique talent began grabbing people's attention. She earned a Newcomer of the Year nomination by the **BBC World Music Awards** in 2006, and her debut album, the 2004 release *Ano Neko*, received wide accolades. Radio Producer Sean Barlow of *Afropop Worldwide* raved: "Wow! Dobet Gnahoré is one helluva talented artist. Powerful singing combined with a charismatic stage presence, original choreography, and a theatricality that reminds me of **Marie Daulne** of *Zap Mama*." Major European press has also compared Dobet to some of the great women of African music, such as **Angélique Kidjo** and **Miriam Makeba**.

Last fall, Dobet joined Malian guitarist **Habib Koité** and South African troubadour **Vusi Mahlasela** on **Putumayo's Acoustic Africa** tour, which was presented across Europe and the United States. Sharing the stage with these two established African icons, many Western audiences got their first taste of Dobet's exceptional and dynamic stage presence. In a review of the performance, *The Los Angeles Times* raved, "She's a dynamic singer, the airy sound of her high notes recalling the focused timbre of Salif Keita. Gnahoré displayed powerful star potential."



The songs on ***Na Afriki (To Africa)*** address social and political issues in Africa: the struggles of women in African society, the exploitation of children, and the impact of greed and violence on the family. Dobet calls upon Africa to seek solutions from within and draw upon its own vast resources to create a better future. She sings of love and loss, as well as joy and celebration, using a wide variety of rhythms and styles that reflect her pan-African approach.

A young mother herself, Dobet's songs refer frequently to children. On "Télodé" she provides advice from one mother to another, encouraging a parent to let a son go forth into the world and express himself. On "Khabone-n'Daw" she speaks out with a fearless, fierce tongue against incest. On "Djiguene (Woman)," she pays homage to the "Woman of Africa, woman of Asia, woman of Europe, woman of the world," who fight for freedom and heal sickness, who cultivate the earth, feed the children, and become mothers. Many of her songs offer personal reflections on her life growing up in an artistic community, and praise for Liking and the others that helped guide her down the path she chose for herself.

Dobet composes in a number of languages and incorporates a variety of rhythms and styles into her music. **BBC Radio 3's** Jon Lusk says that Dobet's songs in seven African languages are "defiantly diverse, musically and linguistically." She sings in the indigenous Ivorian languages of Dida and Malinké, and in Wolof (Senegal), Fon (Benin), Lingala (Congo), and Xhosa (South Africa). "This mixture is a way to bring me back home, to the diversity that I held close there" Dobet told **Le Monde** earlier this year.



Wérewère Liking once said that her challenge in working with artists in Ki-Yi is "to convince them that their duty is to become genuine cultural entrepreneurs, fanning out across the globe and yet starting from Africa." In Dobet, she has undoubtedly succeeded in doing so. The little girl who begged her father to allow her to drop out of school has grown up and come into her own; taking her will and talent and life experiences that started in an uncommon village in Africa and expanded them into a global vision that aims to educate other young people and inspire them to action.

Dobet Gnahoré's *Na Afriki* is the fourth release by Cumbancha, a record label that was founded in 2006 by Jacob Edgar, the long-time head of music research for Putumayo World Music.

**For more information on this and other Cumbancha releases visit [www.cumbancha.com](http://www.cumbancha.com).**

*--written by Dmitri Vietze, rock paper scissors and Jacob Edgar, Cumbancha*

