



SENEGAL'S  
INTERNATIONAL  
ALCHEMIST

AFROPOP IS  
JUST THE  
BEGINNING

Senegalese composer/guitarist Wasis Diop may well be the harbinger of a new kind of international pop music, a mellow hybrid that combines African, Caribbean, Arabic, Asian, African-American and European elements in a seamless manner that's sure to appeal to listeners no matter where they come from, musically or geographically. *No Sant* (Triloka), his second album, was a major hit in France last year, and "African Dream," the album's frothy lead track, hit the British charts the week of its release this past January.

It's easy to see why *No Sant* has struck a chord with pop music fans, despite the language barrier. Diop's voice is a unique low tenor with a sexy vibrato, several tunes have lyrics in English—although Diop himself only sings in Wolof to compliment the African rhythms of his music—and the album's tunes combine traditional Senegalese elements with reggae, funk, calypso, blues and pop flavored R&B. "African Dream" and the Latin reggae of the title track feature the powerful vocals of Ghanaian diva Lena Fiagbe and are ready-made for the international MTV generation. Diop's use of international colors—a bagpipe here, a vocalist singing in the style of classical Japanese opera there—has produced a smooth, cosmopolitan version of Afropop. *No Sant*'s musical sophistication and studio polish may disappoint those who fancy themselves hard-core Afrophiles, but Diop's easy listening approach will undoubtedly win him legions of fans. Like many of today's Afro-Parisian musicians, Diop considers himself a citizen of the world, and sees his music as a way of reaching out to everyone on the planet.

"In this life, nothing is static," Diop said, speaking via phone from his Paris apartment. "The only danger is to not adapt, to not travel, to stay in one spot, musically or spiritually. Our response as musicians must be to go forward, not backward. The fundamental thing in music is the emotion, the power of the music, and that's what we Africans keep, even if we play in a modern style. Another important aspect is the language. African languages are part of our

by j. poet