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FORTHCOMING FILMS AT KINGS  
LYNN COMMUNITY CINEMA CLUB

Thursday 12th January — WIENER-DOG tbc  
Tuesday 17th January — LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP  
Sunday 29th January 3pm — ROMAN HOLIDAY  
Thursday 9th February — MAGGIE'S PLAN  
Thursday 9th March — JULIETA tbc  
Thursday 13th April  
— HELL OR HIGH WATER tbc  
Thursday 27th April — ADULT LIFE SKILLS tbc

All details at <http://www.klccc.uk/films>

FROM JANUARY WE ARE BACK  
TO OUR REGULAR MONDAY SLOT  
AT THE OLD PALACE

# Benda Bilili!

Renaud Barret, Florent de La  
Tullaye, Republic of Congo 2010

Script and cinematography by Renaud  
Barret and Florent de La Tullaye

With: Leon Likabu , Roger Landu,  
Coco Ngambali, Cubain Kabeya, Paulin  
Kiara-Maigi, Maria Barli Djongo,  
Vincent Kenis, Montana Montana, Theo  
Nsituvuidi , Djunana Tanga-Suele and  
the voice of Renaud Barret

If you enjoyed *Buena Vista Social  
Club*, you will enjoy *Benda Bilili*. Both  
follow the road to celebrity status of  
a group of disadvantaged musicians,  
from a small underdeveloped country,  
discovered by outsiders. Like *Buena  
Vista Social Club* [Wim Wenders and Ry  
Cooder,1990], *Benda Bilili's* story is not

only shot by foreign film-makers, but  
also promoted by their input. However,  
like *Buena Vista Social Club*, set in  
Cuba, *Benda Bilili's* success depends  
on the charisma of its performers.  
[Coincidentally, they could also be  
descendents of families who were  
taken from Africa to Cuba as slaves



three hundred years ago. Their music has the same rhythms and themes: work, poverty, the struggle to stay alive.]

The film is divided into several sequences, shot at intervals between 2004 – 2009 in Kinshasa, the capital of the Congo, of a disparate group of paraplegic musicians, led by Papa Ricky on guitar, who get around on specially adapted tricycle wheelchairs, and a few street urchins. One of them is a serious young lad called Roger, who plays a single-stringed instrument – a monochord or *satonge* - which he has made himself; several of the scenes seem to be seen through his eyes, unflinching in response to whatever life throws at him. When his mother buys him a uniform for his first day at school, he sells it, telling her that school wouldn't get him to Europe, but his music would (a statement whose faith is justified at the end of the film, despite one of his friends telling him – in 2006 "God made that country – Europe – so we could compare it to ours; it's a country where not everyone can get in).

Appropriately, for this band, who are seeking to escape from their disability and poverty, they meet daily on Mandela Roundabout in the middle of this chaotic city. Other scenes are shot in the zoo, where the animals are equally impoverished;



one of them says of the birds trapped in their cages "they want to escape to Europe ,too". The shabbiness of their situation is contrasted in one shot by a grandiose monument in the background, suggesting a more glorious history. The visuals are more powerful than the commentary, though the dialogue indicates a simple acceptance of their situation: "What do you do?" – "I'm a beggar". Much of the emotional force of the film derives from close-ups of the musicians' faces, their disabilities disregarded; but their disabilities in turn become their strength: their sleight of body playing football when unable to walk, the dance moves when they come down from their wheelchairs, are not only life-affirming, but totally joyous, infectious

and inspiring. The existence of these musicians is fragile, but the survival of these colourful characters against adversity is heart-warming.

Although both *Buena Vista Social Club* and *Benda Bilili* come under the heading of documentaries, portraying real life stories, the audience reaction to both of them suggests that they should be considered more as character-driven, musical melodramas. Unlike a documentary, it does not pretend to offer an objective view, but it does reveal an inner truth about the lives of its protagonists.

To quote Mark Kermode: *This is one of the most moving and engaging music films I can remember seeing. Treat yourself this Christmas.*

“ [...] The following morning Vincent and I walk to Kinshasa's zoo, which was once part of the *cordon sanitaire* separating the strip of the city along the river in which the Belgian colonialists lived from the *cit  indig ne*. This is where the band used to hang out and rehearse and where, in the absence of any studios in Kinshasa today, Vincent recorded half of *Tr s Tr s Fort*. "We had to record at night," he says, "because otherwise the noise from the traffic and the markets outside was too much." To begin with, he had a problem with the noise that the local amphibians were making, too, "so I asked some *sheges* to stamp on them, but it was just impossible". That is why on the song *Polio*, you can hear the toads of Kinshasa zoo in the background, making their own atmospheric

contribution. Rather than a generator to power the equipment, Theo was able to hijack the electricity supply of a refreshment stand and Vincent recorded everything on his MacBook Pro.

[...]It is a head-trip, the zoo; it seems quite incredible that the city should be able, or want, to support such an institution, and visiting it proves an utterly dismal experience. There are dozens of small concrete cages containing dismayed monkeys and a couple of furious-looking chimpanzees; there is an enclosure for some kind of antelope; there are turkeys and geese, owls and wild dogs, with bloody, chewed ears; it's a relief to see that the largest cage, presumably meant for a lion, is now empty.

It could be worse – during the direst troubles of the 90s, the

animals were simply taken for food. Staring at one of the crocodiles, a gaunt man with rheumy eyes murmurs "*c'est go tant*" (tasty). He introduces himself as Elias Kiabutunda, and makes the obvious point that "life in Africa is very hard. When we wake up in the morning, we don't know what we're going to eat." ”

Caspar Llewellyn Smith  
The Observer  
2009

**WE'RE BACK TO MONDAYS!!!**

NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS  
**PATHS OF GLORY**  
(Stanley Kubrick US 1957)  
**MONDAY 16 January 2017**

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