

Aya Nakamura

French rap finding its global voice

One example of an artist blowing up in her home territory, while also starting her international journey, is Warner France-signed Aya Nakamura.

Born in Mali, Nakamura moved to a suburb of Paris as a baby and grew up immersed in - and influenced by - both cultures. She started making music as French urban music was finding its voice and moving into the mainstream.

Thierry Chassagne, President, Warner Music France, says: "The popularity of French rap was driven in part by streaming, but also by demographics. We have strong Caribbean and African communities here that have been the driving force behind much rap music.

"At the beginning of the [Aya Nakamura] project, especially on the digital aspects, we focused on these communities, before expanding into the wider market.

"It was important to have this community, her community, behind her. She is a very empowered woman, and the idea that somehow the record company could lead the way without tapping into her roots and her fanbase, that she'd built herself, would have been wrong - and would not have worked."

Nakamura's first album, *Journal intime*, was released in 2017, reaching number six in the French charts and achieving Gold certification.

Things moved up a gear for her second, self-titled album, *Nakamura* - and especially its lead single, *Djadja*.

Chassagne explains: "It was the perfect situation of the set-up being created by the first album, and then the second album being preceded by such a big hit. *Djadja* went to number one here in its first week and is the most audio-streamed track by a woman in France so far in 2019."

Nakamura's appeal was such that Warner Music drew on its global network and began to look for opportunities for the artist outside of her home country.

Alain Veille, Managing Director of Digital, Warner Music France, explains how Warner was quick to see the wider appeal of her music: "It resonated outside of France very quickly. Our colleagues in neighbouring countries were asking us about her story; they could feel there was something happening."

Veille describes how his team had early discussions with surrounding territories, helping them kick-start their own campaigns: "The spread of awareness dovetailed with our strategy of establishing a core fanbase in Aya's community, taking her mainstream throughout France, and then, working with offices on the ground, targeting territories where the buzz was building."

Recognising each market's inherent differences, campaigns were tailored to build on Nakamura's already

strong roots, whilst adding a local flavour. Veille describes one example: "In Germany, we recorded a version of *Djadja* with a female hip-hop artist called Loredana, who shares similar values, and is a strong, independent woman. That version got accepted by the streaming platforms and was added to influential German rap playlists."

The work paid off. German radio picked up the track, eventually choosing to play the

original over the newer, German version.

Djadja has now achieved over 190 million audio streams and 315 million video streams worldwide, and in three territories - Netherlands, Germany and Belgium - the numbers are matching what's been achieved in France.

Ultimately, Nakamura's music and ability to connect with her fans, coupled with the support and backing from her label, is allowing her to reach an increasing number of people around the world, as Chassagne explains: "It's a true collaboration within a global structure. We know the artist very well, so we can contribute that insight and understanding, we bring the artist's story. And, of course, our colleagues know their territories - their tastemakers, their media, they can recommend collaborations and so the project is amplified globally."



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President,
Warner Music France