

CASE STUDY

“HE TRUSTED THAT WE WERE GOING TO RESPECT HIS MUSIC, HIS COUNTRY AND THE ESSENCE OF HIS ART.”

TAKING A CONGOLESE MUSICAL ICON TO THE GLOBAL STAGE

When Alexis Puterflam, Managing Director, Elektra brought Fally Ipupa to Elektra France / Warner Music France in 2016 he knew he was signing someone who was already one of Africa's most storied artists.

Fally Ipupa had come to prominence as a member of the critically acclaimed Congolese band Quartier Latin International before achieving huge popularity across Africa for his solo projects, which were mainly in the Congolese Rumba style.

“Fally was just a hugely talented artist,” says Puterflam. “He was respected across Africa, mainly through French-speaking African countries, but he also had a huge reputation in Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Angola and many others. He’s a singer, composer, dancer - the whole package - he had this aura and potential that I felt we could build on, even with everything he had established already.”

Elektra’s plan was to take an artist who was a major act in his homeland and connect him to a wider audience and to help him access new markets. To do that there would need to be a musical evolution, and it was vital that the artist shared the vision.

“That’s what we had with Fally”, says Puterflam. “He knew how big he was in Africa and in the diaspora and he knew and felt he could do more. He also trusted that whatever we did, we were going to respect his music, his country of origin and the essence of his art. He already had the same vision as us, he was open to ideas, open to working with other people. Our task was to put a great team around him, and to make sure that those people completely “got” Fally, what he had already achieved and where he wanted to go.”

The results came in the shape of *Tookoos* - the title of the album and the term Fally came up with to describe his new sound which retained the essence of his music while bringing in sounds and beats more familiar to global ears, such as Rap and R&B. The Elektra team also ensured the album included collaborations with a star-studded line up of guest artists including Wizkid, Booba and Aya Nakamura.

“The collaborations were important,” says Puterflam. “Obviously they’re a way of opening doors in other countries, but when we took Fally on, other than YouTube - where he has always been strong - we had to add everything in terms of his digital presence. Audio streaming was still relatively new for him in 2017 and those other artists were more advanced on those platforms and it was a way of fast tracking his presence on them. And in France it proved a great way of establishing recognition and respect from a French audience who were into Rap, into R&B, but less aware of African sounds.”

“What was great on the collaborations was a lot of the French urban artists already knew of Fally, they were aware of his iconic status across Africa and the diaspora and that really helped. And so the first single we did from *Tookoos* was with Booba, the biggest French Rap artist of the last 25 years. He knew who Fally was and was proud to do something with him. It gave us credibility and exposure from the off.”

The marketing campaign was all about getting Fally’s story told in France and new markets. “It was about spending money in the right places,” says Puterflam, “that was videos, digital marketing, and getting our media teams up to spread his story. He has a great story, we just needed to tell it in a way that resonated with new audiences, with the press, with TV exposure, and we began to get there. We got his first radio plays here and then credible press, internet presence, television and then radio playlists on Skyrock, NRJ and Fun Radio, and other major media including Brut, Konbini, BFM TV and Libération...”

“We introduced him to the streaming platforms, contextualized his story for them, got him on the playlists. It wasn’t easy, it took work but he had a great team evangelising about him.”

That work has paid off, as evidenced in part by Fally’s social numbers. YouTube, his strongest channel when Elektra signed him with 75,000 subscribers now has 3.7 million subscribers and over 1.6 billion views. His Instagram followers have gone from 700,000 to more than 5 million, on X he has over 1.3 million followers and has 1.9 million followers on TikTok. That first single *Kiname* - featuring Booba - set the tone for album’s success, being certified Gold in France with over 25 million in sales and streaming. There was a further Gold certification for the single *Bad Boy* - featuring R&B singer Aya Nakamura, and the album went on to achieve Gold certification in France and a Platinum export certification.

Since then Fally’s success has continued. Elektra have released another hugely successful ‘*Tookoos*’ album (in 2020), but also two albums in his traditional Rumba style.

“We’ve had two globalised albums” says Puterflam, “but with *Control* in 2018 there was a real need from his African fans for a Rumba album, for him to go back to his roots with a classic album of the genre and we pulled it off. It keeps him a huge figure in the culture.”

With the recent popularity of Afrobeats across the world, it appears the market is now coming to Fally. His international ‘*Tookoos*’ albums continue to do very well on streaming platforms but now the Rumba albums are also growing. *Formule 7* released in late 2022 received more than 3 million streams in the first 24 hours, is currently still in Apple’s top 50 in France, with over 40 million streams less than a year after release.

“Since coming to Elektra,” says Puterflam, “Fally has now surpassed over a billion audio streams in all.”

Over the last year Fally has toured across the world including Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and the USA, and in late 2023 will play the largest indoor arena in France, the Paris La Defense Arena (40,000 capacity) and London’s OVO Arena.

“The seeds we grew with another style of music are now benefiting his traditional music,” says Puterflam, “and further setting up him as an international superstar. With African music coming to the fore on a worldwide level, Fally is now benefiting from having been a trailblazer.”

Warner