

## African Band Turns Junk into Funk

Sometimes the road to success takes a most unlikely route. For [Konono No. 1](#), a traditional [Congolese](#) band, it came from playing old tunes with an **unintentionally** modern **twist**.

Three decades ago, KN1 was part of a state-planned **revival** of traditional Congolese music. But they had a problem. Whenever they performed outdoors, their sound would get **drowned out** by traffic noise. Too poor to buy proper **amplifiers**, the band **scrounged** about for **scrap** metal, automobile parts, and old radios. They used these to assemble **makeshift** microphones and amplifiers. The result: traditional music with a raw, electric **distortion** that, like modern western electronic music, was somehow appealing to the ear.

The **parallels** were **coincidental**, however, as none of the band members had had music exposure to western music. This didn't matter to **Belgian** music producer [Vincent Kenis](#). After hearing KN1's sound on French radio, Kenis traveled to Congo to meet the band members. Unfortunately, by the time he arrived, KN1 had broken up. Due to the political **upheaval** there, the Congolese cultural revival had been **short lived**.

After years of searching, Kenis found the band members and encouraged them to regroup. With Kenis producing, KN1 created an album called [Congotronics](#). A "mix of traditional..... [trance music](#), [lo-fi](#) electronic, and more," the album has attracted fans of electronic music all over the world. Considering KN1's humble beginnings, this journey to the top is as **remarkable** as the music itself.

—By Murray Walker & Robert Kelly

**Drown out:** to be so loud that someone or something cannot be heard.

**Short lived:** *adj.* short-lived: Living or lasting only a short time; ephemeral.

*Konono No.1*

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*Lo-Fi Electronic Music*

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