Jean de Dieu Makiese (Madilu System), singer and songwriter: born Léopoldville, Belgian Congo 28 May 1952; married (four children); died Kinshasa 11 August 2007.

His husky tenor blessed with a distinctively taught, tremulous vibrato, and the trademark chuckle that peppered his later work, the Congolese singer known as Madilu System was the brightest vocal talent of the legendary TPOK Jazz during his mid-1980s heyday. Arguably the most influential African band of the second half of the 20th century, TPOK Jazz were led by "Le Grand Maître" Luambo Makiadi "Franco", the formidable guitarist, singer and composer who spearheaded the craze for rumba Congolaise, which dominated African popular music in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

At their peak, le Tout Pouissant Orchestre Kinois ("the All-Powerful Kinshasa Orchestra") really justified their grandiose name; they numbered around 40 musicians, half of whom would stay in Kinshasa holding sway at one of two venues Franco owned, while the other half went on tour —each with ranks of horns, guitars and vocalists.

As one of their several featured singers at the time, Madilu System made his mark on a series of stunning vocal duets with Franco, most notably the epic quarter-hour-long "Mario" (1985), their biggest hit ever. Following Franco's death in 1989, Madilu continued to lead TPOK Jazz until its eventual dissolution in 1993, after which he pursued a moderately successful solo career in Europe, finally achieving recognition as "Le fils spirituel de Luambo Makiadi Franco" ("Franco's spiritual heir").

He was born Jean de Dieu Makiese in 1952, in Léopoldville, the capital of the Belgian Congo, later Zaire (and now the Democratic Republic of Congo). During the late 1960s, when Jean came of age, the city had a vibrant and highly competitive music scene. In 1969, he joined a rumba band called Symba, and spent the next few years honing his vocal skills in Papa Noël's band Bamboula, Festival des Maquisards (with Sam Mangwana) and Fiesta Popular.

In 1973, newly christened "Bialu" under President Mobutu's "authenticité" programme, Madilu formed the band Bakuba Mayopi along with the guitarist Yossa Taluki and a singer called Pirès —"Mayopi" being a nonsense word derived from the first two letters of each of their names. Though never exactly major players, they scored a significant hit with the song "Pamba-Pamba" in 1976, after which Bialu left, forming his own group with Soki Vangu, which they called Orchestre Pamba-Pamba. However, they met with no success, and Bialu spent the last two years of the 1970s in relative obscurity as a member of Tabu Ley's band Afrisa.

In the wake of a humiliating career low-point, which saw him abandoned at Kinshasa's Ndjili airport as Tabu Ley and his entourage jetted off to Europe, Bialu joined Afrisa's main rival, TPOK Jazz in April 1980, and his luck soon turned. He became the first member of the band to be invited to introduce himself in the course of a song, trading verses and harmonising with Franco over the 18 minutes of the slow-burning classic "Non", which took up the whole side of the 1983 album Chez Fabrice A Bruselles

The following year, he cemented his position as their rising star on "Tu Vois?" (popularly known as "Mamou"), a conversational duet focusing on sexual mores, typical of Franco's oeuvre at the time. The upbeat "Pesa position na yo" ("State your position") and "Makambo ezali bourreau" were other 1984 hits featuring Bialu. TPOK also visited the US and the UK that year, with Bialu fronting the band at their gig at the Hammersmith Palais. In a 2003 interview, he claimed that it was during this time that Franco nicknamed him "Système" (or "System," as he came to be known outside Francophone Africa), explaining that the two had an almost father-and-son relationship, and that Franco had empowered him to lead the band in his absence.

With backing by Franco's hypnotic, cascading guitar riff, "Mario" was a soap opera-like narrative about a gigolo, which juxtaposed Franco's gruff spoken-word exhortations with Bialu's precise singing. It made him the group's most popular singer with the public, both in Zaire and on their frequent tours to other African countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. "La Vie des Hommes" (1986) continued his purple patch and the snappy "Tala merci bapesaka na mbua" from the same year showed that he could effortlessly go it alone with no need of Franco as a duet partner.

Franco's death in 1989 was a body blow from which TPOK Jazz never recovered, although they continued to perform to



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considerable acclaim, appearing in London the same year. Under pressure from Franco's family to relinquish the name, the poet Simaro formed Bana OK ("Children of OK Jazz") in Kinshasa at the start of 1994, taking most members of TPOK Jazz with him –except Madilu System, who resolved to start a solo career.

Basing himself in Geneva, (he had married a Swiss woman in 1985 under controversial circumstances) Madilu System divided his time between there, Paris and Kinshasa, working mostly with expatriot Congolese musicians to perpetuate Franco's classic "odemba" style of rumba on a series of solo albums, backed variously by the bands Multi-Système, OK Système and Tout Puissant Système. These began in 1994 with the zouk-flavoured Sans Commentaire. Subsequent solo releases included Album '95 (1995), L'eau (1999), Pouvoir (2000), Tenant du Titre (2003), Bonheur (2004) and most recently Le Bonne Humeur (2007).

During this solo phase, he collaborated on albums with other Congolese musicians, including former Choc Stars' singer Debaba Mbaki, Nyboma (of Kékélé), Benz-Petrole, Ndombe Opetum, Lokassa ya Mbongo, Rigo Star and Josky. He also occasionally participated in Dizzy Mandjeku's long-running homage project Odemba OK Jazz All Stars, although commitments in Kinshasa meant he was unable to make their UK début in May this year.

In 2006, he recorded a reprise of "Mario" on the album Ketukuba by the Afro-salsa supergroup Africando, and at the time of his death, was in the process of making another album with the producer Ibrahima Sylla.

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