

# THE Score

An Insider's Guide to the Performing Arts

<http://www.lincolncenter.org/article/belo>



Photo: frederic/dupoux © September 2018

## BÉLO on Art + Social Justice

INTERVIEW BY CHRISS RIMPEL *July 15, 2019*

### MUSIC

With six albums already under his belt and a new one out this month, acclaimed Haitian singer/songwriter BÉLO has been busy, not only making music, but also making change. He sat down with artist manager and independent booking agent Chriss Rimpel to talk about his sound, social justice initiatives, and the meaning behind his new music, in advance of his **free performance on Thursday, July 18**, at the David Rubenstein Atrium.

---

**Chriss Rimpel:** Hi, BÉLO! Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. Can you please talk to me a little bit about the album? What was your inspiration?

**BÉLO:** You know, after more than three years since I put an album out, I decided not to really work on an album. But I realized that there is a real need for not only good music to keep on

coming from Haiti, but also there's a real need for the message. My focus on this album is the youth. The name of the album is *Motivasyon* in Kreyòl, which means *Motivation*, and the songs—I mean, 9 out of 10 songs—are really focused on motivating the youth. To give hope to them, let them understand that they can create their way, because, you know, we are in a country where so many things are missing. But we as a new generation can't pass our whole lives complaining. So, I dedicate this album to the youth.

Of course, the sound is very open, the songs will talk to people from all over the world, but the message of this album is really dedicated to the Haitian youth. So yeah, I can't wait. The album just came out online on July 10, and then our first show is on July 18 at the Atrium. I can't wait to share with you the good vibes. You know, with me, it's always about changing my sound. That's something that I really like to do—even if it's not new to the world but a new sound to me, because I don't want to repeat myself. I keep searching until I find what I need and put them together and, you know, propose the album.

*"The main reason I am on Earth is because I have something to say."*

**CR:** So now talking about the album's message—can you expand on that? If you were to choose a particular song, tell us the title and talk to us a little bit about a particular message that you're trying to pass along to these young men and these young women of Haiti?

**BÉLO:** One song in particular that reflects the message of this album is called "*Swiv Wout ou*," which means "Follow Your Path, Follow Your Way." It's a song about my life. It's a song about where I'm from. I was born in a village with no electricity, no nothing. And I moved to Pétion-Ville with my mom. I moved to different neighborhoods looking for a better life. We never really had all we needed. But I realized when I was 11 years old that I had to create everything that I needed—everything that not only I need, but that other people might need, too. So, I followed my path, I followed my way, and I became the famous singer that I am not because I had everything with me or for me, but because I had determination and I had motivation. So, this song, I think, is one of the best to explain to the youth that even though you don't see the light, the light is there. As long as the sun exists, there will be light. All you have to do is be prepared. All you have to do is educate yourself. Work hard, because hard work always, always pays off.

But as I mentioned, it's not just one song. The whole album is about motivation. I have this song called "*Tilandeng*" saying to the youth that you should never let people use you, because some people attempt to use you, abuse you for a little money, a little privilege, and then they will trash you. And in this song, I'm letting people know that your character is the most important thing that you have. And you should never let somebody touch this. You have to stay strong. You have to be strong, be courageous, and keep hope.

**CR:** I'm very touched by your story. It makes me even more proud of you as a person and proud of you as a representative of the country. Now, some people know about your social justice work, but not everyone knows the details or the depth of the work. Can you talk to us about the incredible work that you do with the children at the Saint-François care center in Île-à-Vache? And also about your social justice work with Femmes à Aimer—which is something that is very

dear to my heart and that I've been a part of for a few years now. Talk to us about this absolutely amazing initiative, and how and why you got involved?

**BÉLO:** Well, thank you. I always like to say that the main reason I am on Earth is because I have something to say. And if I have something to say it's because there are so many things to do and doing social justice projects is one of the things that I think needs to be done. I use my popularity to take other people with me, just to do what we have to do. Especially this project in Île-à-Vache. I was called by this organization from Paris, Espoir pour Haiti, to do a Christmas show for some kids that I did not know. When I got to that village, I realized that I shouldn't get paid for that. And then since that day, I decided that I would spend Christmas with them and invite my friends, my fans, and family to go and bring something. Since then it has become like something traditional—they know every year I'm here. And my management team, they all know that I will not take any contract on that date because it is as important for me to go there than it would be to have any other contract.

And with *Femmes à Aimer* ("Women To Love")—I visited a friend of mine at a prison, and I realized that there were people in the prison that were there for so many years, some of them five years, six years without seeing a judge, an actual judge, and I told myself I have to do something. I can't act as if I did not understand or see what was happening.

I decided to come and do a show on Valentine's Day, inviting friends and fans to collect humanitarian kits, chocolates, cake, beverages, food—everything that is allowed to enter in this prison. So, we collected stuff, and friends like you and so many other women in my environment decided to create that movement and call it "Women To Love" and go to the prison every year. Not to just bring things, that's not the most important part of it. The most important part of it is to bring awareness to what's going on in the prison and use this project as a portal for these women and try to bring more journalists inside and get more people involved in order for the authorities to do what they have to do.

**CR:** If someone wanted to contribute to your different organizations or different initiatives, or get some more information, how would they do that?

**BÉLO:** Of course! If somebody wants to participate or to know more about my social justice projects they can email me at [atisbelo@yahoo.fr](mailto:atisbelo@yahoo.fr) or at [atisbelo@gmail.com](mailto:atisbelo@gmail.com). I would be more than happy to tell you more because my projects are not my projects. My projects are everybody's projects. As long as you want to do something, I just have a platform, you know?

**CR:** Thank you, BÉLO. It's really amazing what you're doing, what you're contributing as not only a human being, but as an artist, to the country, to the world, to humanity. We can't wait to have you come and share this wonderful music with us at Lincoln Center.

**BÉLO:** Thank you, Chriss. I'm so excited. I can't wait to be on that stage with some good people. And I'll bring some good music and a good message.

---

Chriss Rimpel has built a career as an artist manager, independent booking agent, and head of CR Booking-N-Marketing. Read more about her work: [DubMC: Expanding the Circle](#).