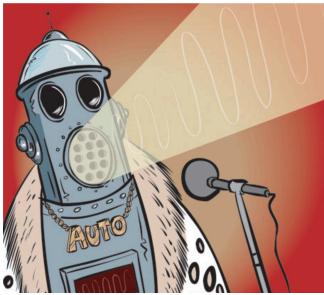


AUTO-TUNED AFRICA



# AUTO-TUNED AFRICA VOL. 1 WONDERFUL WARBLES

Auto-Tune has bad press among the so-called "organic music" lovers, as proven by the amount of friends who cringed when I mentioned I was working on this compilation! Cher's metallic shrieks on 1998's "Believe" seem to have left some scars.

From the T-Pain swagger era to Lady Gaga's stadium-sized antics, up to today's robotic-sounding trappers, the overuse of this audio processor has become one of the standards of mainstream pop music. Long used behind the scenes as a barely noticeable and almost shameful pitch/time corrector, it is now played for effect, loudly and proudly distorting many voices on FM radio. As a result, it has become synonymous with "bad taste" and "fake," many listeners believing that it is employed as an easy trick to cover a lack of musical talent.

This first mixtape is an attempt at showing the incredible beauty and variety of music featuring Auto-Tune manipulations. Let's turn our ears away for a moment from the dominant musical output from the Western world, and focus on the plethora of unfairly overlooked African songs. Auto-Tune has indeed democratized access to music making and quickly become hybridized and assimilated into the popular African music tradition, particularly in North Africa.

After digging for sonic gold for days and nights, lending a curious and attentive ear to these songs, I remain convinced that all the singers featured here can actually sing. The ill-reputed software is actually often employed not as a quick fix to patch up mistakes made by self-conscious amateurs, but as a purposeful aesthetic flourish, a bold artistic choice even. I definitely don't hear the homogenized, emotionless music made by tone-deaf "gerbils" that high-brow critics like to chastise, but hey, maybe that's just me. I hope that some of these amazing tracks and genuine performances change your mind about that "dreadful Auto-Tune warble." If anyone should take the blame for a generic and uninspired song resulting from the homogenization of music, I tend to think it is the songwriter (and the performer, though less), and not any recording or producing technology...

So, purists: beware! We're now venturing off the beaten track where off-key is not an option. This audio journey will take the fearless listener from the Sahel sands to Somali suburbs, from Chad to Mozambique, from balani to shangaan! The second volume of the series will focus on more mainstream sounds, exploring Afrobeats pop gems from Nigeria, Ghana and beyond.



T-Pain, "The Right Tone Back" (U.S., 2014 Interview)  
Leila Gobi, "Tchimey Goney" (Mali)  
Dinganyai, "Kalam Dollar" (South Sudan)  
Nazir M. Ahmad, "I Love U Forever and Ever Soyayya" (Nigeria)  
Joskar & Flamzy, "Faroter" (Côte d'Ivoire)  
Ahmed Zaki, "Hees Cusub" (Djibouti)  
Waayaha Cusub, "Dhiilada" (Somali)  
Afrotronix, "Laamara" (Chad)  
Acid Arab ft. Sadat & Alaa Fifty Cent, "Hez Hez" (Egypt/France)  
Asma Saleem, "Dmak Ma Jab" (Lybia)  
Melancia De Moz, "Nota 1000" (Mozambique)  
Akothee, "Yuko Moyoni" (Kenya)  
Groupe Yana, "Dara Dara Gna" (Niger)  
Kaltuun Bacado, "Gabhaha Laguma Dheelee" (Somali)  
Unknown, "Afar Music" (Djibouti)  
Troupe Amagaba, "Vumera" (Burundi)  
Hussaini Danko & A Faree, "Wana Gano" (Nigeria)  
Sidiki Diabaté, "C'est Bon!" (Mali)  
Noite e Dia, "Tiramakossa" (Angola)  
Lico Kininike, "Toliara" (Madagascar)  
Joseph Dean ft. K-Zee and Marvalous MC, "Spoil You With Love" (Liberia)  
Barinjaka & Velomiranga, "Rapetera" (Madagascar)  
Da Multi Snake, "Golf 5" (South Africa)  
Luka Productions, "Nadoumananikadi" (Mali)  
ÌFÉ, "Yumavision" (Puerto Rico)  
Ne-Yo, "Willy The Robot" (USA, 2011 Interview)



# AUTO-TUNED AFRICA VOL. 2

## AFROBEATS & OTHER AFRO-POPSICLES

Producers of "Afrobeats" (an umbrella term for contemporary mainstream African pop music, in a nutshell) have embraced Auto-Tuning softwares just like other commercial music makers, one may argue even more than in the Western world. Here is a selection of songs making compelling use of the magical digital processing tool. While some are massive club hits on the continent and throughout the dancing diaspora, others would qualify more as under-the-radar gems that never got quite the exposure they were aiming for. Most tracks hail from Nigeria and Ghana, arguably today's reigning kings of the Afrobeats genre.

These songs serve as further proof that far from dehumanizing music, Auto-Tune has actually given many "mute" people a voice, emboldening an entire new generation of eager amateurs by giving broader access to creating and recording music for those unfamiliar with the process. This way, up-and-coming artists who are insecure about their abilities can resort to Auto-Tune as a safety net, trusting the producers to massage wandering notes. Indeed, Auto-Tune and other similar softwares like Melodyne are helpful band-aids on imperfections at the hands of sound engineers who often lack time, training or money to quickly correct imprecise pitches. It is also another fascinating technological tool for creative producers and musicians to experiment with and craft something truly unique.

For these two reasons, efficient mistake-adjustment and spark for innovation, this omnipotent vocal effect soon became immensely popular in Africa's digital-only recording studios. When recording went from tape to digital in the '60s, there were even more opportunities for effects and manipulation, and the (over-)use of this late-'90s technology-enabled perfect pitch is just another natural step in this evolution.

Auto-Tune inventor Andy Hildebrand confirms the positive impact: "Auto-Tune's largest effect in the community is that it's changed the economics of sound studios. Before Auto-Tune, sound studios would spend a lot of time with singers, getting them on pitch and getting a good emotional performance. Now they just do the emotional performance, they don't worry about the pitch, the singer goes home, and they fix it in the mix."

Let's now dig in to these sweet tunes masterfully crafted for dancefloor enthusiasts! Regardless of the technology employed to capture it, I am convinced that a great song always comes through, and I sure hope that this second volume will help prove my point.



Clifford Owusu (Youtuber/Comedian, Ghana), "Music Artists Auto-Tune Their Voices To Make Hot Songs"  
Paq ft. Spacely RJZ & Stylin, "Body" (Ghana)  
KaySo ft. Papachie, "Lovey" (Ghana)  
Iyanya, "Type of Woman" (Nigeria)  
Ajebutter22, "Ghana Bounce" (Nigeria)  
Jidenna, "Boomerang" (U.S.A./Nigeria)  
Tekno, "Be" (Nigeria)  
B.S.M.G. ft. Joy Denalane, "Nach Hause" (Germany)  
Joey B, "You & Me" (Ghana)  
Krizbeatz ft. Davido & Tekno, "Erima" (Nigeria)  
Belce, "Ghana Boy Tin" (Baba Nla Cover) (Ghana)  
Skales, "Temper" (Nigeria)  
J Hus, "Did You See" (U.K.)  
Young Paris ft. Reekado Banks (U.S.A./Nigeria)  
DJ Henry X ft. Wizkid, "Like This" (Nigeria)  
Kuami Eugene, "Angela" (Ghana)  
Asha & Kundalini, "Nana" (Ghana)  
DJ Neptune ft. Mr Eazi, "Marry" (Nigeria)  
Atimbilia ft. Ruff N Smooth, "Sister" (Ghana)  
Spee, "Say" (Nigeria)  
Bisa Kdei, "JWE" (Ghana)  
MC Galaxy ft. Davido, "Nek-Unek" (Nigeria)  
Runtown ft. Uhuru, "The Banger" (Nigeria/South Africa)  
King Monada, "Ska Bhora Moreki" (South Africa)  
Wisa Greid, "Mintse Bo" (Ghana)  
Pilato, "Mwabetako" (Zambia)  
Tay Grin ft. Sonye & Orezi, "Kanda" (Malawi)  
E.L, "Fefefe" (Ghana)  
Flavour N'abania, "Iwe" (Tribute to Mc Loph) (Nigeria)  
Stargo, "Super Glue" (Ghana)

Chillz ft. Sam Oki, "Komije" (Nigeria)  
MONI, "My Jorley" (Ghana)  
Lord Paper, "North K Guy" (Ghana)  
Santi, "Gangsta Fear" (Nigeria)  
Ace Tee ft. Kwam.E, "Jumpa" (Germany)  
R2Bees, "Concert Party" (Ghana)  
Ofori Amponsah, "Akua Ataa" (Ghana)  
Clifford Owusu (Youtuber/Comedian), "Music Artists Auto-Tune Their Voices to Make Hot Songs" (Ghana)

## EXTRA NOTES

### THE SOUND OF A DEMOCRATIC VOICE

Jace Clayton/DJ Rupture : *"Auto-Tune is the most importance piece of musical equipment of the last 20 years."*

Sounding Out!'s Osvaldo Oyola defends the groundbreaking technology as one that both destabilizes conventional ideas about musical ability and allows everyone to sing in tune, free from the "tyranny of talent and its proscriptive aesthetics." "The Auto-Tuned voice is the sound of a democratic voice, and is another step in the increasing access to cultural production, going beyond special classes of people in social or economic position to determine what is worthy. It is not the quality of art that is endangered by mass access to its creation, but rather the authority of cultural arbiters and the ideological ends they serve. It undermines the authority of the talent experts and lets anyone potentially take part in public musical vocal expression."

The author further criticizes music elitists: "When someone argues that Auto-Tune allows *anyone* to sing, what they are really complaining about is that an illusion of authenticity has been dispelled. My question in response is: So what? Why would it be so bad if *anyone* could be a singer through Auto-Tuning technology? What is really so threatening about its use? Rather than cold and soulless, the mechanized voice can give direct access to the pathos of melody when used by those whose natural talent is not for singing."

### BIG IN NORTH AFRICA : WHEN TECHNOLOGY COMPLEMENTS TRADITION

Adil El Miloudi (Morocco raï musician) : *"Auto-Tune gives you a "me" that is better."*

In the Western milieu, Auto-Tune has acquired the reputation of being a novelty, or something that serious musicians do not bother using. Under-recognized as a unique factor in modern popular music, it has been branded and cast aside as an inane trend, or as "unmusical." Auto-Tune presents itself with a number of qualities that appeal to the musical mentality that exists throughout the African continent. These qualities reflect the importance of community and language, a variety of technical features reflected in the music, and also fit into the established history of hybridity within the African continent.

Auto-Tune's spread to Africa popular music is an interesting mix of both the influence from an increasingly present global music industry, and from its ability to lend itself easily to many of the traditional aesthetics that define African music. It is often the case that music that utilizes Auto-Tune is more in line with factors of community, dance, and timbre (similar to what you would find at a traditional musical performance) than any other African pop music trend of the last 40 years. It also ties in with the treatment of the voice within African music, and with that treatment come a multitude of technical aspects seen in music styles throughout Africa that can account for Auto-Tune's popularity and ease of assimilation. For example, throughout West Africa, the griot style of singing is extremely nasal, with the timbre possessing a quality that is different from the normal talking voice, therefore being a good fit for digital-enhancing experimentations enabled by the software.

Auto-Tune became a significant part of the signature sound of certain cultures fond of melismatic singing, from Nigeria's Hausa through Maghreb's Berbers all the way to Somali's pop hitmakers. Technically speaking, melisma occurs when vocalists use melodic embellishment to extend a single syllable. The use of vocal alteration is not new in the Islamic world, as most large cities will broadcast the traditional call to prayer over speakers or through a megaphone. Similarly,

a lot of artists from Islamic countries use Auto-Tune as a form of modernization of this centuries-old stylistic ornamentation.

The penchant for those features is familiar to those who are surrounded by the concept from a younger age, but to many children raised in an increasingly urbanizing and modernizing African environment, there may be exposure to, but little chance to experience and internalize these melismatic practices. Tying in with the previously stated notion of community and ease that Auto-Tunes portrays, with Auto-Tune, an artist is able to correctly sing a melisma in their song, without having extensive musical training or experience.

Jace Clayton AKA DJ Rupture describes in his book *Uproot* what led to the software's tremendous success in North Africa : "Melisma's swoops and dives are exactly the type of melodic movement that provokes Auto-Tune into extreme corrective mode, thereby producing its most unusual sounds. The region embraced Auto-Tune so early and so heartily because for more than a millennium audiences have been listening to—and for—those gorgeous, subtly rising and falling pitches. And they sound especially startling when processed through Auto-Tune. The familiar pitch slide gets activated by bizarre effects. A weird electronic warble embeds itself in rich, throaty glissandi. The struggle of human nuance versus digital correction is made audible, dramatized in a zone of heightened attention. Listening habits from the dawn of Islam helped Auto-Tune mean so much here."

Following a sonic trend traditionally associated with a genre or a type of singing is also a sure way for artists to appeal immediately to their local community and therefore gain more exposure and, hopefully, a better way to monetize their art. Auto-Tune appears to have become a globalized commodity that links and unifies different regions and the mindsets that utilize it. AutoTune also seems to have become a major part of youth culture within Africa, managing to become more than just a musical device, but actually becoming a social factor that creates a unifying effect not only throughout the African continent, but throughout the African diaspora and the rest of the world.

## SOURCES

**Jace Clayton**, *Uproot: Travels in 21st-Century Music and Digital Culture* (2016)

**Andrew Stanley**, *Auto-Tune in Africa : A Study of the Factors Leading to the Phenomenon* (2012)

**Oswaldo Oyola**, "In Defense of Auto-Tune" (Sounding Out !, 2011)

**Owen Marshall**, "A Brief History of Auto-Tune" (Sounding Out !, 2014)

**Jace Clayton**, "The Link Between Whitney Houston and the Rise of Auto-Tune in North Africa" (Pitchfork, 2016)

🎵 [SOUNDCLOUD.COM/DJMIXANTHROPE/SETS/AUTO-TUNED-AFRICA](https://soundcloud.com/djmixanthrope/sets/auto-tuned-africa) 🎵

BORIS PAILLARD | DJ MIXANTHROPE



DJMIXANTHROPE@GMAIL.COM