

## Prince Nico Mbarga & Rocafil Jazz – Cool Money (1981)

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1. *Cool Money* 2. *Another Woman's Husband* 3. *Impossible* 4. *Afufu Uwa*

Prince Nico Mbarga (1 January 1950 – 24 June 1997) was a highlife musician, born to a Nigerian mother and a Cameroonian father in Abakaliki, Nigeria.

His music was inspired by the five years he spent in Cameroon during the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960's. He played the xylophone, conga, drums, and electric guitar in school bands and he made his professional debut as a member of a hotel band, the Melody Orchestra, in 1970.

Although he only recorded one significant hit, "Sweet Mother," in 1976, which sold more than 13 million copies (and which is recognised as one of Africa's greatest songs), Mbarga played an important role in the evolution of African music. With his soulful vocals set to the light melodies of his acoustic guitar, Mbarga created a unique hybrid of Ibo and Congolese guitar playing and uplifting highlife rhythms. He formed his own group, Rocafil Jazz, to perform regularly at the Naza Hotel in the eastern Nigerian city of Onitsha. After releasing a disappointing single in 1973, Mbarga and Rocafil Jazz had their first success with their second single, *I No Go Marry My Papa*, which became a regional hit. The band's inability to break past their local following, however, resulted in their recording contract being dropped by EMI.

The label's decision proved ill-fortuned when the band signed with the Onitsa label and recorded "Sweet Mother." Sung in Pidgin English, the song became one of the top sellers in the history of Nigerian music. In the six years that Mbarga and Rocafil Jazz remained with Onitsa, 1975 to 1981, they recorded nine albums. Temporarily relocating to England in 1982, Mbarga became known for his flamboyant, 1970s glam rock-inspired performances. While he continued

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to appear with Rocafil Jazz, Mbarga also performed with London-based highlife band the Ivory Coasters and Cameroonian vocalist Louisiana Tilda. Despite launching his own Polydor-distributed record label, upon returning to Nigeria, Mbarga and the original members of Rocafil Jazz separated after several Cameroon-born members were deported. Although he later formed the New Rocafil Jazz Band, Mbarga failed to match his early success. Leaving music, he turned his attention to managing the two hotels that he owned, Hotel Calbar and the Sweet Mother Hotel.

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