

From the 'Corneille – Music of Life' lesson plan

Corneille's French R'n'B

Acclaimed as one of the hottest new arrivals on the French-speaking music scene, Corneille made a major impact with his debut album, *Parce qu'on vient de loin* (Because we've come from far away), released in February 2003. The Rwandan-born singer, now based in Montreal, has created his own individual style of French R'n'B, celebrating his new life after the tragic genocide in his homeland.

Given his first-hand experience of the Rwandan genocide, it is perhaps not surprising that Corneille has evolved into such a forceful personality. The singer freely admits that writing the songs on his album *Parce qu'on vient de loin* was a way of exorcising both collective dramas and his own personal nightmares triggered by a day in April 1994 when the army broke into his family home in Kigali. 'I lost my whole family that day,' says Corneille, 'My father, my mother, my brothers and my sisters were all wiped out while I was in the same room as them. I managed to escape the massacre at the last minute, diving down behind the sofa to hide. The soldiers never stopped to check whether their killing spree had spared anyone.'

After coming so close to death himself, the singer appears to have chosen to celebrate life in his music. But there's an undeniable political edge to his songs at times, too. 'My album's dedicated to all those who feel they've been ignored and overlooked.' Corneille declares. 'I've realised just how much injustice there is in this world. Take the events in Rwanda, for instance. OK, so the media reported the genocide in Rwanda – which was, let me remind you, the biggest genocide in the world since the Holocaust – but they made much more of a fuss about 11 September. You had all these different governments rushing to pledge help and support to the US, but those governments didn't lift a finger in 1994 during the Rwandan genocide. What's my new album? Definitely a celebration of my new life, but I never forget that countless people never had the right to that.'

(Adapted from the website of Radio France Internationale
http://rfimusique.com/siteEn/article/article_7138.asp)