

## AfricaREVIEWS

### Habib Koité Kharifa

Centre-Jour (45 mins)

★★★★★

*A welcome return from Malian with a few special guests*



Recorded in Bamako with his six-piece band Bamada and some of the finest names in Malian music

among the guests, Habib Koité's first studio album in five years is a gem of mellow, laid-back grooves and impressive song craft sung in Bamana, French and, somewhat less convincingly, in English.

'Wara' (The Lion) opens the disc strongly with a funky, bubbling riff that is infectious, yet not entirely representative: for the most part, *Kharifa* finds Habib favouring soft-hued Afro-pop guitar melodies

crooned in a gentle tenor voice. The flute on the title-track lends an appealing folk whimsy and 'Hakilina' is lilting Californian canyon-rock transposed to West Africa. 'iVazi' with Habib's son, Cheick Tidiane Koité taking the lead vocal, is the sort of catchy pop song you might find a West African boy band singing. The interlocking strings of Toumani Diabaté's *kora*, Sékou Bembeya Diabaté's slide guitar and Abou Sissoko's *ngoni* make 'Forever' the album's musical highlight, but the effect is somewhat marred by the vocal; if you cringe when Youssou N'Dour sings in English, this is worse. However, the spirited banjo picking on 'Mande', synth horns on the upbeat 'Djiguya' and some great singing by Amy Sacko on the rippling 'Symbo' get things back on track.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Symbo*

### Ben Molatzi No Way to Go

Cree Records (49 mins)

★★★★★

*Music that's been hidden in archives finally finds its path*



Many a record containing messages of hope and unity was suppressed due to racist censorship

during the South African apartheid era. Artists routinely had their recordings destroyed and were forced into obscurity. From Tsumeb, Namibia, Ben 'Tukumazan' Molatzi fell victim to this policy. Three years after his death in 2016 *No Way to Go* is released by Bear Family Records' Cree label and has been showcased by a recent crowd-funded exhibition at SOAS, *Stolen Moments: Namibian Music History Untold*, which

documented the underground Namibian pop scene of Molatzi's time.

A self-taught guitarist and singer, Molatzi composes music that draws heavily on his Damara and Sotho heritage, with distinctive melodic idioms; flurries of fast, clipped, syllabic notes are followed by resonant, drone-like ends of phrases, laid over a chugging, strummed guitar line. 'Sida !hu (Our Land Damaraland)', the opener, immediately commands attention. Here Molatzi sings a mournful ode to his faraway homeland. He sings, '*we will return one day... Oh Damaraland!*'

'D:R:M:D' is sung in solfège and therefore devoid of lyrics, but the song encapsulates Molatzi's sound. The rest of the tracks are helpfully written out and translated in the booklet, which also contains an interview with Molatzi about his life, his creative inspirations and his love for singing, whistling and playing guitar. In a market where previously-unreleased 'world' discs are consigned to DJ fodder with little artist recognition, I'm delighted to see such a well-researched and long-overdue release.

CHARLOTTE ALGAR

**TRACK TO TRY** *Sida !hu (Our Land Damaraland)*

### Papillon Moyo

Naxos World (61 mins)

★★★★★

*A voice that will give you butterflies in your stomach*



Papillon, a multi-instrumentalist and singer from Kenya, has a goal to reclaim musical

traditions that were lost during the bloody and devastating colonisation of Africa. He began his musical career in a band called Juakali Drummers, who toured Europe. Now, it seems, he's moved on to something much more relaxed and pensive. The opening string samples, accompanied by the 'doom-doom' of a heartbeat, create a setting for Papillon's pitch-perfect, soft voice on the opening track 'Cinoma Ofwneke'. The melodic qualities here and his tone of voice bring UK pop singer Seal to mind. 'Dream' is gorgeous, a multi-layered sung passage leads into gentle acoustic guitar, a lamellophone (probably, according to the press release, of Papillon's own making), gentle shaker and flute. The overarching musical texture of this album consists of



### Ballaké Sissoko & Baba Sissoko Sissoko & Sissoko

homerecords.be (79 mins)

★★★★★

*These cousins are really buzzin' on this magnificent collaboration*



Back in the day, Djelimady Sissoko and Madou Sissoko were stalwarts of the National Orchestra of Mali. Eventually their sons, Ballaké and Baba respectively, replaced them in the ensemble before Ballaké moved to Paris and Baba settled in Italy. Years later the cousins have now reunited on this splendid album of interlocking *kora* and *ngoni* strings recorded in a Belgian chapel. One thinks of Ballaké's elegant duetting with Toumani Diabaté and his semi-classical *kora*-cello duets with Vincent Segal, but there's quite a different feel here – funkier and more

percussive in sound. The opener 'Sigi Gno Gonya' is a case in point, as Ballaké strikes up a stately *kora* melody before Baba's *tama* (talking drum) pushes the tune into a syncopated desert blues groove. On 'Djamu Djakoli' the *ngoni* begins with a raw and earthy riff, which is then transformed by the lyricism of Ballaké's *kora* into something more weightless and ethereal. And so it goes on, the pair taking turns to lead – yet by the end, it is unclear who is leading as they push and pull each other into perfect calibration. Magnificent.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Djamu Djakoli*

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