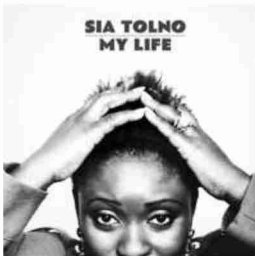


## Sia Tolno



### MY LIFE

Aleksandar Hemon had the following to say about fellow Bosnian novelist Miljenko Jergovic's "Sarajevo Marlboro," a collection of stories about the 1992 siege of their home city: "This book does not belong to the literature of complaining . . . [It] is a book for the people who celebrate life." The same is true of

the Guinean singer Sia Tolno's "My Life," an irrepressible song-cycle confronting the ravages she witnessed in her native Sierra Leone that nevertheless brims with dignity, resilience and hope.

Propelled by funky Afrobeat horns and percussion, the album-opening "Blamah Blamah" finds Tolno fondly remembering the annual year-end festival in Blama, a town in Sierra Leone that today lies in ruin. In "Odju Watcha," singing in English and a mix of Kissi and Mendi dialects, she decries bloodshed and corruption throughout the African continent. Still, the underlying message here, conveyed non-verbally by spongy grooves and rippling Mandingo guitar, is less resigned than assertive. The track's pressing rhythms reverberate with the affirmation, "We will prevail."

Tolno's strapping, pliable alto is sometimes likened to that of South African singer and activist Miriam Makeba — and, in grittier moments, to a female version of the percussive Afrobeat groaner Fela Kuti. Tolno's omnivorous Afropop, which fuses everything from Congolese rumba to contemporary rock and soul, is likewise as prophetic as that of her predecessors. "I'm not the kind of woman who's afraid of problems," she asserts over the interlocking melodies and polyrhythms of "Shame Upon U." "This continent is our mother's land . . . / Africa belongs to us."

— *Bill Friskics-Warren*

### RECOMMENDED TRACKS

"Blamah Blamah," "Odju Watcha,"  
"Shame Upon U"

