

QUICK SPINS

Zieti

ZEMELEWA

Ten years in the making, "Zemelewa" is a collaboration between two musicians from Ivory Coast, singer Yeoue Narcisse and guitarist/harmonica player Tiende Laurent, and two from the United States, drummer Alex Owre and guitarist/D.C. area resident



Michael Shereikis. The album's dozen tracks are rooted in Afrobeat,

the polyrhythmic blend of funk, jazz, Highlife and Yoruba music popularized by Fela Kuti in the 1970s. Elements of blues, rock, Latin and Cajun music are evident as well.

The result, released under the band name Zieti, sounds ageless and without stylistic borders.

"Djemin," for example, features Tex-Mex-style accordion, Juju guitar-work and chanted Afrobeat choruses. In "Bah Bohi," Narcisse's crying falsetto vocals — reminiscent at times of both Van Morrison and legendary Zairean crooner Tabu Ley Rochereau

— float above a smoky bed of blues-steeped organ and reverberating congas. The title track calls to mind Congolese rumba and New Orleans R&B, while "Mandedi" hints at jazz-rock fusion and climaxes with a snaking, Santana-like guitar solo.

Written and sung in a Guere dialect indigenous to the border region between Ivory Coast and Liberia, the lyrics reflect the upheaval and strife that Narcisse and Laurent witnessed in their war-torn homeland more than a decade ago.

However unfamiliar their words may be to English-speaking listeners, the urgency in Narcisse's raspy tenor and in the vocal call-and-response on the album speaks volumes. And it's not just the voices, but also the haunting beauty of the record's melodies and the pointed interplay of the players' crisscrossing rhythms.

— *Bill Friskics-Warren*

RECOMMENDED TRACKS

"Djemin," "Bah Bohi," "Mandedi"

