

REVIEWS



Amira Medunjanin

AMIRA MEDUNJANIN

Damar World Village WVUK032



Damar is the follow-up to Amira's 2014 release, *Silk & Stone*, her second on World Village but the first to be billed as 'Amira Medunjanin' rather than simply 'Amira'. Medunjanin has shown herself to be not only a brilliant ambassador for Bosnian culture and Bosnia's folkways but also a vocalist and song interpreter on a steadily upward trajectory since she entered a wider listener-ship's consciousness with *Rosa* back then in 2004. With her World Village debut *Amulette* in 2011, she began hitting the paydirt of a richer cultural mother-lode. *Damar* is a progression, a development of that. Its appearance is the musical equivalent of the culinary arts' slow food – and all the better for that.

Once again, the pianist Bojan Z with his jazz chordings raises their game. Together they've created a capricious and contemporary take on traditional Bosnian song forms. This release continues that approach. Their approach remains reverential to, but not obsequious about *sevdah*, once a dying art form in Tito's Yugoslavia, but one they have re-energised and re-animated.

A fine example is the opening track whose title they translate as 'Sing, whatever song is in your heart.' It opens with heart-



Abou Diarra

Photo: Victor Delim

'beating heart', but you get the gist. It comes with a flowing guitar that compares beautifully well with the tastefulness of Portugal's composer and Portuguese guitar virtuoso Carlos Paredes' *guitarra portuguesa*. In a nice touch, heartbeats time it out. And that is only the first track.

Damar is a truly great, indelible work. Like the finest of musics, its revelations are slow-drip, conceivably until the listener cannot believe that this music wasn't always in their life. It is that inspirational – big word – and impressive.

www.worldvillagemusic.com

Ken Hunt

ABOUT DIARRA

Koya Mix & Métisse 69342MAD



Were this CD a man, he would be an elegant dask-robed gent. The type of man who moves with unhurried grace, long-necked and limbed, nonchalantly hoiking the heavy folds of his sleeves up onto his shoulders. And he smells really good.

Malian singer, composer and kamale ngoni player Abou Diarra's *Koya* has been a long time coming, and yet it has walked into the room as if owns the place. Not with an arrogant swagger, mind; more with a quiet

Oh, and is that Toumani Diabaté dropping in to add his trademark tumbling cascades of kora gorgeousness on *Djarabi* and the poignant *Labanko*? Of course it is.

The collaboration with artistic director Nicolas Repac infuses Diarra's classical Malian cool, with its reserve and gently melancholy, with more urban electro grooves and blues sensibilities – from Vincent Bucher's sultry harmonica parts to more explicitly full-on guitar solos from Repac. *Koya Blues* is a fine example of its success with evocative, breathy Fula flute parts, smoking harp and kamale ngoni riffs, trip-hop loops and the understated gritty vocal of Diarra's mother, after whom the album is named. Impressively and spaciouly produced throughout, there's plenty to unveil and surprise on repeat listening: an array of curious plinky, guitar trickery (maybe over-heavy on the animal effects!) and the 'tight as' backing vocals and groove of Donko Band.

But at its heart is Diarra. Not the finest singer you've ever heard from this tradition – though by god, he's a demon of a Manding axe-wielder – but radiating musicality and sincerity. The only intrusions to *Koya*'s meditative spell are the smurf-effect BVs at the end of dancefloor-filling *Ma Chérie* and the intermittent beefburger guitar solos which seem indulgent in the context of the whole.

By turn, *Koya* swings, it rolls and it grooves without ever breaking a sweat. Were this CD a man, he'd be well out of my league.

aboungoni.com