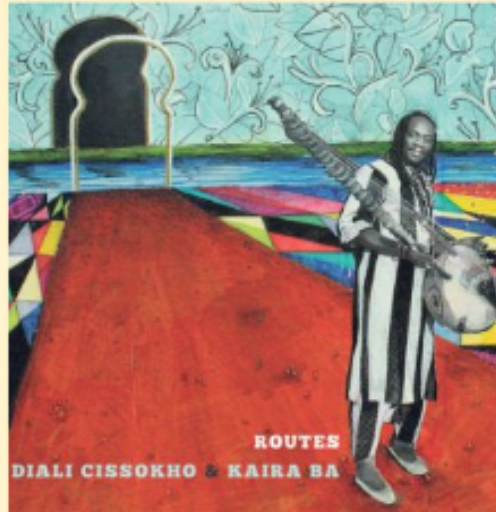


# Music Choice

## Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba ROUTES



Over the years, I have reviewed a few albums that entwine African and American music, starting with banjo player Jayme Stone's wonderful *Africa to Appalachia*, one of my 2008 albums of the year. He was exploring the roots of his instrument in Africa and interweaved runs with kora player Mansa Sissoko.

This Cissokho is also a kora player, but this is world music with an even broader outlook. He now lives in North Carolina and has blended elements of American genres with his own Senegalese and Malian sound.

He begins with a piece that resembles many Malian pieces that have come out over recent years.

But then he starts his run of surprises: second track "Badima" includes an organ solo over the African rhythms; third song "Salsa Xalel" is, yes, a salsa (it's big in Senegal, which shows, as it sounds authentic and effective here). Then comes "Saya,"

with some beautifully integrated pedal steel playing from guest Eric Heywood.

And so it continues. "Xarit" includes a brass section; "Story Song" starts with Tinariwen-like guitar as a Malian desert blues, but then it grows to incorporate organ and Cissokho's improvised spoken vocals. These, and the singing in "Ma Chérie," are in English (and in one of these verses, singer Shana Tucker, makes the only misstep of the disc, where the tune – probably improvised – sounds awkward).

Generally, you really don't need to know the words, as each song seems to have its own hook or special feature.

For example, "Baayi Leen" has a wonderfully addictive vocal hook that stays to the end. It might appeal anywhere on the planet.

Cissokho reverts to more traditional kora music, but is never afraid to expand the overall sound, and these unexpected blends of genre come so naturally that you wonder why there is not more of it around. This is a terrific album.

*Derek Walker*