

Angélique Kidjo – *Eve*

Something Else Reviews

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When it comes to painting an emotional portrait of beautiful Africa, Beninese singer and songwriter Angélique Kidjo has effectively done so many times before.

Her fearless energy, her advocacy for a better tomorrow for her motherland, her UNICEF ambassadorship, her unmatched sense of rhythm and the vivid colors that always accompany her — in her voice, in her music, in the light of her eyes and that wide smile. All of it finds a comfortable spotlight in her songs, showcasing feelings that run deep and never go away once you listen to them: They become part of you. She is, indeed, “Africa’s premier diva” (Time Magazine). And the best of all is her willingness to spread the love, and help those she considers her African family develop and stand in their own two feet.

In January 2014, Kidjo will release *Eve* (429 Records), “dedicated to the women of Africa, to their resilience and beauty. What I enjoyed most about creating *Eve* was the women giving me the authority and strength to continue speaking about justice, love, empathy, and compassion. As long as we are strong, we will move forward with dignity.” In conjunction with this grand project, she will also present her autobiography *Spirit Rising: My Life, My Music* through Harper Collins, and written with Rachel Wenrick. 2014 will definitely be Angélique Kidjo’s year.

Eve comes to us wrapped up in the voices of women’s choirs from Kenya and Benin, with musically and stylistically astonishing songs brought to life in a wide range of native Beninese languages, such as Fon, Yoruba Mina and Goun. And if that wasn’t enough to get your spirit enchanted, Kidjo’s striking vitality is bolstered by the talents of pianist Dr. John (“Kulumbu”), The Kronos Quartet (“Ebile”), Vampire Weekend’s Rostam Batmanglij (“Bomba” and “Hello”), Nigerian singer ASA (“Eva”), the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra (“Awalole”), as well as session musicians such as bassist Christian McBride, fellow Benin native and guitarist Lionel Loueke and drummer Steve Jordan. The music was carefully recorded in New York and French director Luc Besson’s studio in Normandy, and later Kidjo traveled to Benin carrying a Roland B26 six-track field recorder, in search of the rhythmic harmonies and chants you will hear in this album. Nothing can compare to this. The result is a clear blue sky of extreme sincerity and beauty.

“Blewu,” in its simplicity, is perhaps my No. 1 pick — which, featuring guitar and voice, leaves you with a feeling that you were just in the very presence of greatness; that the very air of Africa had just visited your senses. And there you are, smiling as if you just learned how to do so. Others like “Kamoushou,” “Shango Wa” and “Cauri” (this one talks about forced marriages; “why would we crush the dreams of young girls by marrying them to older men they don’t know? Money and family alliances are not good reason enough to force anyone to marry. The song is their declaration of independence,” says the singer) are irresistible tokens of goodness, and she knows you will not be able to stop listening. And then there’s “Bana,” a traditional Congolese song featuring Ivonne Kidjo — mother and daughter sing together and lift the album’s essence to a level of absolute perfection with a melody that soothes the soul.

The rhythm is absolutely breathtaking in *Eve*, which serves as a tribute to African women is both entrancing and spectacular. There’s a mixture of might and tenderness that very few can balance out, just like the women she is singing with — and about. This is the best work of this already incomparable artist yet.

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