

GLOBAL BEATS: with Luke Balzan



It's astonishing how quickly time seems to whiz past these days; I can't believe that we're almost half way through February already! While time flying by can be a burden, particularly when deadlines (and lots of them) loom in the near future, one good aspect of a speeding calendar is that it means we're edging ever closer to the festival season! With the Adelaide International Film Festival and the Fringe just ready to kick off, our city's about to get even hotter than the heatwave! And of course, WOMADelaide is drawing ever closer too, and this year's line-up certainly has quite an admirable collection of world stars. Since I first heard the line-up announced last year, I've been hanging out to see some of the bumper list of artists who will be gracing the stages of Botanic Park in early March. Acts like the brilliant Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, Afro-Cuban swingers Ska Cubanao, Aussie reggae champs King Tide, über-cool DJ Russ Jones, The Hackney Globetrotter, Malian legend Rokia Traore, Middle Eastern and North African rockers Speed Caravan, funky Africans Seun Kuti and Egypt 80, and one of the most exciting, the inventor of Afrobeat himself, Tony Allen, have really got my blood pumping, and there's stacks more on offer too. If you're like me, the remaining weeks before the Festival are just too long to wait, and thankfully there are some great albums from some of the WOMAD artists that have been released just in time to whet my insatiable appetite for world music.

First up, we have the brand-spanking newie from Senegal's Seckou Keita SKQ (that's Seckou Keita Quintet). The band's latest offering, *The Silimbo Passage*, set for Aussie release very soon thanks to World Adventures, is a truly amazing piece of work. Often heralded as the Hendrix of the kora, a beautiful 21-stringed instrument native to western Africa, Seckou Keita certainly is a gifted musician, and he immediately draws you in with his amazing playing. Joined by an Italian, an Egyptian and two fellow Senegalese (they all met in London!), the quintet creates an amazingly unique sound, owing a great deal to the griot traditions of Senegal, but with an interesting modern take, assisted by the use of bass, violin and various percussion throughout,

adding to the dynamic. This is an album that you put on and immediately fall in love with. It has an air of peace and tranquility, aided by the beautiful kora and also has some fine rhythm driving things along. It's an awesome album, and I certainly can't wait to check Seckou Keita SKQ out really soon!

Next, we have something from a little closer to home... *Ilios* is the sophomore release from local Adelaide band Akoustic Odyssey (released independently), and it certainly is a gem of an album. These guys formed a few years back, comprising of a group of some of the state's most talented musos, and they strive to cover as much musical ground as possible, with tunes ranging from classical to Greek, Gypsy to Latino, jazz to rock and everything in between. And it all fits together seamlessly and without effort. The album showcases an undoubtedly tight act who are not afraid to cover new ground, and they do it in fine fashion. With such a wide berth of stylistic ground, it's very hard not to find the music of Akoustic Odyssey immediately appealing. The band has been steadily winning all sorts of praise from a growing fanbase and their WOMAD spot is sure to take things further. *Ilios* won me over right from the word go and has cemented my desire to be checking these guys out front and centre in Botanic Park. Check this album out now!

We head back overseas for our next release and return to Africa, though a very different part of Africa than Seckou Keita. We head to Egypt, where the music is every bit as mysterious and enchanting as the culture of the country. Natacha Atlas is a name that needs no introduction in world music circles, with the Anglo-Egyptian songstress enjoying a healthy status in the music industry for over a decade. In that time, she's carved out a niche by blending the music of her native North Africa, Arabia, electronica and continental sounds to produce something fresh, interesting and truly beautiful. I've been a fan for quite some time, and with her latest album, *Ana Hina*, available through World Village, Natacha and her band The Mazeeka Ensemble have further cemented my high opinion of their music. The album straddles the line somewhere between French

chanson and classic '50s Arabia, having a classy jazzy undercurrent giving the music a timeless feeling. Natacha's soaring vocals epitomise a duality between east and west that bears unique appeal for fans of both. As the album plays, you can almost smell the hummus and kefta while images of wandering through a bazaar jump to mind, and Natacha draws you ever deeper into the beauty of her music. *Ana Hina* is a sensational little album, and gives a small taste of what to expect at Natacha's much-anticipated WOMAD spot.

Finally this week, we have an album from the artist who I am perhaps most pining to see at this year's WOMAD fest, and that is of course Nigeria's Tony Allen. Tony is credited as being one of the founders of Afrobeat, along with legend Fela Kuti, and is the originator of the sensational rhythmic vibe that really drives Afrobeat. Tony has been a staple component of the genre for over 40 years, and through his time playing with Fela, and subsequently with his own streamlined band, has taken Afrobeat to new levels and continues to push the boundaries today. His WOMADelaide performance is sure to be outstanding and will doubtlessly blow me away. But if you're not so familiar with Tony and the amazing trance-like style that is Afrobeat, then it's time to get some funky rhythms into you, with one of Tony's latest offerings *Afro Disco Beat* being a fine introduction to the genre and to Tony's amazing sound. Available through Vampi Soul, the album chronicles Tony's early days as a solo musician with Afrika 70 - and later with The Afro Messengers - and features all his releases from those recordings. This is pure Afrobeat at its best! The collection will strike a chord for fans old and new, and will give you an opportunity to work out your best Afrobeat dance moves - you'll certainly need them when Tony takes the stage!

For these and more albums from the WOMAD artists, be sure to check out Mr V Music's groovy Semaphore or City shops, or head online to the WOMusic website at <mrvmusic.com.au/womusic/home> and start to get excited... it's less than a month to go!

SINGLES: with Scott McLennan

FLAVOUR OF THE WEEK:

SNEAKY SOUND SYSTEM

16
(Whack)
Accused of diva behaviour at the Big Day Out simply because they avoided the heat, here's the latest hot dispatch from Sydney's unshakable Sneaky crew. Unless you're planning a bathysphere escapade through the Mariana Trench this year, it's unlikely you'll experience compression like the type displayed on new single 16. Despite the tinny keyboards and tight'n'treated drums being almost farcical, Miss Connie brings home the production with her warm and familiar vox. And whether it's Sneaky mastermind Black Angus or celebrated producer Mark 'Spike' Stent who are behind the Pet Shop Boys quirks here, it's a cool change.

THIS WEEK'S SINGLES PICKS INCLUDE:

THE RIFLES

Fall To Sorrow (Stomp/Ryko)
Named after The Jam tune *Eton Rifles*, The Rifles are such a London band it's possible the Thames runs through their veins. Filtering out the meathead element from the pub rock of The Pigeon Detectives and The Fratellis, *Fall To Sorrow* hints at the punchy and urgent sounds of their forthcoming album *Great Escape*. As black and tight as the Levi's they live in.

COBY GRANT

Is In Full Colour EP (Independent)
Melbourne singer songwriter Coby Grant's introductory tune *A Song About Me* couldn't be more cheerfully upbeat if it was sung by a Christian Care Bear. With a dash of Kate Nash's diary style and Colbie Caillat's breezy acoustic simplicity, *A Song About Me* opens this debut EP with a brightness that would make the NapiSan guy jealous. The earnest Coby offers a little more light and shade on the EP's following four songs, with her multi-tracked vocals adding depth and making her sound like a more assertive version of Lisa Mitchell.
Coby Grant plays the Grace Emily on Fri Apr 11 and the Wheat sheaf on Sat Apr 12.

KILL TEEN ANGST

Small Town Small Children (Inertia)
After announcing themselves via the simmering power of last year's *The World Or Nothing* single, Perth kids Kill Teen Angst return with another finely tuned pop kick. Despite sounding like the energised keyboards, guitars and drums are tripping over each other to get to the finish line first, *Small Town Small Children* finds the quartet keeping it together long enough to impress. Supersonic youth.

SULTRY SALLY

Gypsy Woman (Independent)
They've got the old school look of Hollywood's classic glamourpusses, but there's nothing on this debut EP of covers to separate Sultry Sally from previous Aussie femme fatale car crashes Girlfriend, Teen Queens or Young Divas. The sleazy funk of Crystal Waters' *Gypsy Woman* and budget Pro Tools take on Euphoria's *Love You Right* lack the sass the quartet's name suggests, while Kool & The Gang's *Celebration* sounds like it's being performed at a wake instead of a party. Time to remove Sult from my diet.

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR:
Tic Toc Tokyo - *Ritual* (MGM), Hercules In NY - *Foiled Me* (Blue Max) and Hugo Race & The Spirit - *Sorcery And Sand* (Spooky).



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