

Canadafrica Where's the One?

Borealis

5 out of 5

Here's some real fusion or you.

Canadian Mike Stevens, harmonica player par excellence, and Okaidja Afroso of Ghana, on vocals and various percussion and stringed instruments, use very spare lyrics as foundations on which to build an astonishing array of rhythms and song lines.

Opener Abifao, for instance, is a small lullaby played on harmonica and finger snaps, but it swings on those bare lyrics and superb instrumentation. What a track.

Then there's the lowdown and wild harp playing of Mercurachrome Blues. Afroso comes in with a gutbucket vocal that groans the good and evil of the title medicine. A seven-line song that smokes.

These guys sing about romantic breakups, war through the eyes of a child soldier, living through dark times, and the wonderful folk wisdom of Empty Barrel - it makes the most noise - just like some people's mouths. Listen to Stevens sing through his harp on this one, and to the gyil (Ghanaian xylophone) and Marine Band diatonic harmonica on Keeping the Mosquitoes Away. Wow.

Source: BILL ROBERTSON, THE STARPHOENIX JANUARY 16, 2014