

Toumani Diabate and Roswell Rudd



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MALICool

Sunnyside Records

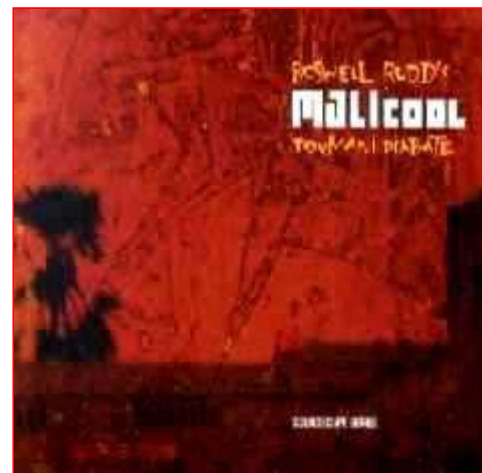


The connection between Mali and the American blues (and therefore, for many, American jazz) is now accepted popular musicology, regardless of which side of the chicken-or-egg debate you might

stand. Musicians on both sides of the Atlantic know it when they hear it, and the smart ones don't give a damn about ethnomusical origins.

Kora player Toumani Diabate has long understood the connections between the world's various musical sounds, and has made his name in both traditional Malian music and in a wide range of cross fusions with Americans, Europeans and even Japanese musicians. On MALICool

he takes another step out on the edge, joining free jazz trombonist Roswell Rudd on a unique collaborative project that taps both players' unique ability to stand outside of the expected. In the liner notes Rudd makes much of how he was subsumed into the Malian musical culture, relearning how to play his instrument in the local style and such. But what you hear on MALICool is really a cross-hybrid where all the musicians are so thoroughly absorbed in one another's music that the lines blur completely and beautifully.



Joined by Lassana Diabate on balafon, Basseko Kouyate on ngoni, Sayon Sissoko on guitar, Sekou Diabate on djembe and Henry Schroy on bass, the mood is decidedly cool and groove driven rather than melodically 'outside.' The arrangements are sparse, leaving everyone room to improvise (and not just the two leaders). This is exemplified in the opening cut, "Bamako" and the following "Rosmani," where Rudd's raw horn lines are elegantly wrapped by the kora and bass, Diabate offers a true blues-guitar style solo, Sissoko's guitar riffs like a kora and Lassana Diabate's balafon shimmers everywhere. On Rudd's sprawling "For Toumani" they head into harder, jazzier turf, with hand-struck snare drums and djembe and a throbbing bass line offering a driving rhythm over which the rest of the ensemble roars. The title track is pure swing, albeit with a balafon where Lionel Hampton's vibes might be expected to appear. There's a few odd turns, like their slowly evolving interpretation of Monk's "Hank," the swinging twist they give to an old Welsh folk song, or their brief, nutty take on Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," but most of the pieces are pure Rudd and Diabate, and therefore out of any specific tradition while still beholden to many. - CF

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