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Music Review | Vieux Farka Touré

Young Guitarist Shows Some Things He Learned From His Famous Father



Vieux Farka Touré, center, at Joe's Pub on Thursday night with, from left, Seckou Touré, Eric Herman and Tim Keiper.

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One of the ways the Malian guitarist Ali Farka Touré impressed Western listeners was that he never made you think much about technique. Of course it was there — in his control over the curled, stammering phrasing of his lines; in his slow, easy-moving confidence while implying more than one meter. But hearing him work within a single scale, you received a perfect lesson in how much more there is to music than what notation or academic pedagogy can impart.

His son Vieux Farka Touré, also a guitarist — 25, tall and charismatic — has picked up on many of his lessons. During his show at Joe's Pub on Thursday night, the only local stop on his first American tour, it took a little while for him and his rhythm section to get past a clinical sound. But soon the music was aglow.

Vieux Farka Touré's touring band is a simple cross between ancient and modern, with the American musicians Eric Herman on electric bass and Tim Keiper on drums, and three Malians: Mana Cissoko on second guitar and the lutelike ngoni, Baye Kouyaté on talking drums and Seckou Touré on the overturned calabash, making a thud like a second bass drum.

Playing with his fingers and a bit of echo, Vieux Farka Touré used two different guitars, a plugged-in steel-string acoustic and a black electric, the same guitar that his father held on the cover of "Savane," his final album before his death last year. But it was the electrified acoustic that produced the greater mysteries. Its sound had some tooth to it, a hard, glinting high frequency.

The son's music is based in the same traditional Malian languages, melodies and minor pentatonic scales as his father's. But even in "Dia," a beautiful slow song about traveling to Niafunke, his hometown, he didn't yet have the undefinable hot-weather grace of the elder Touré, and his arrangements tend to be more modern.

One of his slow songs, "Ana," written for his sister, used a plain reggae rhythm, and toward the end of the set, he played a song in a style he called "Koroboro rock" (Koroboro being one of the languages spoken around the Niger River in Mali). It was chugging, up-tempo, two-beat music, like hard-driving Chicago blues without the blues chord changes.

Here he played dueling leads with Mr. Cissoko; their long, entwined phrases, logical and nearly symmetrical, sounded like scrambled fugues.

Vieux Farka Touré will perform again tonight at the Harbourfront Center in Toronto.