

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



Vieux Farka Touré

The Secret

Traveling down Linden Blvd towards JFK Airport, *Vieux Farka Touré* had a realization. Having just left The Bunker recording studio in Brooklyn, he was discussing the sessions with his manager, Eric Herman. A newly constructed song, played in part by his father—the great Malian guitarist **Ali Farka Touré**—came on over the car stereo, and Vieux said, “This is what we call ‘the secret of the blues.’” The two friends laughed, though it quickly dawned on him that his off-the-cuff remark was a perfect summation of his third album. ***The Secret*** (Six Degrees Records) was born.

“To make this album I had to dig deep into the secrets of my own history and my country’s culture in order to move the music forward,” Vieux said, back in his native Mali. Indeed the song, which is pulled from the last session Ali cut before heading to a French hospital (he would die of bone cancer shortly thereafter), will be instantly recognizable to fans of the elder’s classic albums, such as *Niafunke* and *Talking Timbuktu*. “**The Secret**” is the young Farka Touré’s attempt at blending generations, making it difficult to surmise where Vieux begins and Ali ends. Including a beautiful flute section by Cheick Diallo, Ganda Tounkara on n’goni and Vieux on guitar, there is no doubt that he succeeded.

Recorded largely in Mali’s Studio Bogolan before being carried to Brooklyn, ***The Secret*** was produced by **Eric Krasno**, a versatile guitarist and founder of jazz futurists Soulive. Originally conceived of as an extended family-style project, Krasno says, “Initially we wanted to have a lot of guests, but in the end we narrowed it down to just a few, and that lent itself to the strength of the album.” Still, when those musical relatives include people like **Dave Matthews**, **Derek Trucks**, **John Scofield** and **Ivan Neville**, the sonic DNA is going to be heavy and the sessions are going to run deep. Given his recent accomplishments—including a successful collaboration with South African rock band **BLK JKS** and a performance in front of a billion people during the **2010 World Cup**—Vieux’s time to break through to larger audiences has arrived.

“I feel so grateful to have Dave Matthews on this album,” says Vieux, finishing with a laugh, “his voice is diabolical!” Ironically, Matthews felt nervous after Krasno had sent him the initial blueprint of “All the Same.” Matthews’ native South Africa is a long ways from Mali, yet his contribution is arguably one of his best moments in music. His trademark nonchalant vocals hang effortlessly over Vieux’s mellow guitar and drummer Tim Keiper’s laid back beat. The vocalists trade lines gorgeously, a sentiment both men shared in the end. “After my first listen to his part, I knew that this guy was African,” adds Vieux. “He understands the music so well and he knew exactly what to do. Dave Matthews knows the secret!”

Powerful lyricism aside, this is a guitar-driven album. Derek Trucks, who cut his teeth with the Allman Brothers Band, is revered as one of today’s best electric slide guitarists. His addition to “Aigna” makes the catchy number jump from the speakers. “I was not sure how he would respond to the Malian sounds I threw at him, but he was in tune with it right away,” Vieux says. “It’s humbling. He is a true master of the guitar. I play his track for people in Mali and they can’t believe their ears (laughs).” Krasno, who brought Trucks into the session, adds “I knew that track was for Derek the moment I heard it.”

A full generation before Trucks picked up a six-string, John Scofield was collaborating with artists like Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock and Charles Mingus. Vieux knew little of his work prior to this album, but was immediately enthralled by his searing efforts on the driving, pulsing sounds of “Gido.” Scofield adds an Eastern flavor to the upbeat track, coloring the urgent beat with airy introspection. “His concentration was so deep but his heart was light the entire time,” Vieux concludes.

Perhaps the greatest departure from his previous records is “Lakkal (Watch Out),” the only song recorded entirely in Brooklyn. The jazzy intonations conjure the vibe that Krasno has created in *Soulive* and *Lettuce*, and features the producer on guitar, Ivan Neville on organ and Eric Herman on bass. Krasno credits Vieux with the idea, however, affirming that his off-the-cuff style is not limited to keen observations like album titles, but generally defines his entire studio dynamic. “He likes to just start playing and hit record; he really likes to catch the groove and go,” Krasno says. Cut in one take with minor overdubs pieced in later, “Lakkal” best captures Vieux’s live show, which is a must for any fan of this fascinating young guitarist.

Being introduced to Vieux through his management company, Krasno was blown away when he saw him perform at the Outside Lands Festival in San Francisco. A longtime fan of his father’s work, he immediately accepted when asked to produce ***The Secret***. The feeling was reciprocated on Vieux’s end, who says, “Eric Herman told me that Krasno wanted to produce my new record and I knew immediately that this would be a good idea. He is very easy to work with and he understands the balance between traditional and modern music. That was very important to master in order to succeed with the sound of this album, which bridges the past and future.”

And that is what Vieux Farka Touré today represents to fellow Malians, not to mention the world beyond: a generational bridge connecting American and African blues music and culture. While fellow Malians were initially confused when Vieux broke free from the genre his father helped define, they quickly realized his role as a global ambassador, carrying on and sharing his African culture with the planet, while taking in the sounds of this planet—an opportunity his father truly never got to explore—and bringing them back to Africa. A tireless artist, Vieux’s 2011 itinerary is already filled with shows across America and Europe.

It’s simply impossible to burden Vieux with old associations. When you hear that guitar rip over those blues progressions, when you hear the electric buzz of his rock-influenced solos, you don’t stop to think what nation the man is from. You simply become engulfed in the music, which for Vieux is something beyond understanding with words. Speaking of his evolutionary struggle of his country’s tradition, he becomes reflective: “My music is more mature now, more evolved. It digs deeper into the past and pushes harder into the future as a result. This is a hard thing to explain, but hopefully the music speaks for itself. Do you want to know the secret? You have to listen to the album.”

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