

THE UK'S ESSENTIAL BLACK MUSIC MONTHLY

ECHOES

SOMI – The Lagos Music Salon

Album Review

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The best new album I've heard this month is unquestionably Somi's *The Lagos Music Salon*. If you recall her previous set, *If The Rains Come First*, from 2009, then you'll be as delighted as I was to discover that this new one, coming through Sony/Okeh at the end of April, is even better. Once again, the Olatujas, Michael and Alicia, are involved, but this time the whole project has been inspired by an 18-month stay in Lagos, Nigeria, where Somi went to recharge and refresh after the death of her father just after the last CD came out. The lyrics are of a very high standard, Somi keeping a written journal of her time in Lagos and thus observing life in the city (and wider country) from the viewpoint of a semi-attached American with strong African roots and connections: her parents were from Rwanda and Uganda and although Somi was born in the United States, she spent time as a child in Zambia and Kenya as a result of her father's diplomatic postings. The music thus bears its soul, jazz and West African influences on its sleeve, is impressively composed and played and has been overseen by Somi herself with major help from Nigerian musician Cobhams Asuquo (who happens to be blind and self-taught) and New York's Keith Witty. There is powerful, horn-driven funky jazz (*Lady Revisited*, featuring Angelique Kidjo), seduction jazzy-soul (*Ginger Me Slowly*), and a trumpet-laced lament for Lagos's young prostitutes (*Brown Round Things*), a funny slant on the Nigerian fraud legend, as applied to romantic situations (*Four.One.Nine*), a brilliant evocation and re-telling of Nina Simone's *Four Women* as *Four African Women*... so much to enjoy in an album of rare richness. Eighteen tracks too – and they're all good. Feature and a lot of fuss most definitely on the way.