Putumayo Presents: African Blues (2012)

1.Mali Latino - "Ni Koh Bedy" - (Mali) 2.Adama Yalomba - "Djamakoyo" - (Mali) 3."Diabel Cissokho & Ramon Goose - Totoumo" - (Senegal) 4.Amar Sundy - "Camel Shuffle" - (Algeria) 5.Issa Bagayogo - "Djigui" - (Mali) 6.Taj Mahal Meets the Culture Musical Club of Zanzibar - "Dhow Countries" - (United States) 7.Kalaban Coura - "Mali" - (Morocco) 8.Koudede - "Alam'i" - (Niger) 9.Playing For Change featuring Tinariwen - "Groove in G" - (Various) 10.Muntu Valdo - "Timba" - (Cameroon)

Powerful African voices and rhythms demonstrate the deep connection of the blues to its African roots. The blues has long been about storytelling, about raising a voice from the margins and edges of American life. As it spread from the Deep South to Chicago and beyond, the blues incorporated a powerful musical groove which has influenced music around the world. Now, musicians are reaching across the Atlantic and finding that they have a common story to tell in shades of blue. ---putumayo.com

Putumayo Records began in 1993 as an offshoot of Dan Storper's Putumayo Clothing Company, and the company's initial releases were largely marketed through clothing stores and coffee shops, built essentially to work as bright, rhythmic, and soothing soundtracks for shopping, and as a rule, Putumayo compilations don't ruffle feathers. It's a brand as much as anything, with the covers of the various releases all featuring the bright, colorful art of British illustrator Nicola Heindl, and often the company's international-themed music releases are, well, more easy, breezy, and pleasant than they are particularly memorable. This set is a mild exception, collecting tracks that link American and African blues-based music, even if a lot of what is here isn't, in the common sense, exactly the blues. It's refreshingly interesting, and with tracks like Taj Mahal's "Dhow Countries," a panoramic epic that wonderfully unites Mali with the

Mississippi Delta, the Booker T.-like organ swing of Mali Latino's "Ni Koh Bedy," and the kora and guitar-driven summer shimmer of Kalaban Coura's "Mali," this set manages to be engaging, as well as being as sweetly smooth as a sunny summer's day spent leisurely shopping at the market. ---Steve Leggett, Rovi

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