

Velile – Tales From Africa (2010)

Written by bluelover

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01. Helele (Safri Duo Mix) 03:09
02. Ela Ela E 03:24
03. Ngiyekeleni 03:57
04. Kuyabanda 03:04
05. Zingane 03:21
06. Raise Your Head (Mama Africa) 03:40
07. Jongosi 03:31
08. Omalo 03:29
09. Ngiyavuma 03:48
10. Thando 03:09
11. Zinyanya 03:27
12. Sondela 04:01
13. Helele – (Single House Mix) 03:28

Velile began her career in the Broadway musical *The Lion King* and made it big, at least in Europe, after her song -- naturally, the opening track on her debut record -- was picked for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, taking place in her native South Africa. This gives enough hints as to what the album is likely to sound like, and indeed, *Tales from Africa* is mainstream dance-pop with plenty of new agey African influences and strong female vocals. Velile gives an impressive performance, utilizing her powerful -- though not very varied -- vocals to the fullest, but balancing out the lyrics, mostly in a language bound to strike the global audience as exotic (except for "Mama Africa," of course), with simple synth textures and commanding rhythms that could have been called tribal, had it not been for the fact that they are catchy dancefloor fodder. No attempts are made to deviate from the stylistic template, but at least Velile tries to vary the mood, going from all-out party-in-the-savannah pieces to slightly more brooding -- though still larger than life -- tunes and back again. It would have worked better, however, with at least some tempo differences between the songs, which blur together into one big lump of sunlit, bouncy, exhausting fun. On the whole, *Tales from Africa* delivers what it promises, but also

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comes across as peculiarly un-exotic, despite all attempts to tout the African vibe: conformity to chart standards means the album is not a South African reinvention of pop, but more of a cleverly camouflaged Boney M. rehash with essentially the same vocals and dance patterns. But then again, this is far from the worst band to take cues from. ---Alexey Eremenko, AllMusic Review

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