

Rokia Traore - Ne So (2016)

Written by bluelover

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1. *Tu Voles* 2. *Obike* 3. *Kenia* 4. *Amour* 5. *Maye* 6. *Ile* 7. *O Niele* 8. *Kolokani* 9. *Strange Fruit* 10. *Ne So* 11. *Se Dan*

Rokia Traoré has changed direction, yet again. Her last album, *Beautiful Africa*, was her most commercial, rock-influenced set to date, memorable for its blend of energy, anger and fine, personal songs. Now she's back, with the same producer, John Parish, the same instrumental lineup (guitars, including her own electric guitar, bass, drums and ngoni) but a very different approach. The slinky, repeated riffs are more sparse than before, and the mood is darker and more personal, with quietly urgent, thoughtful songs of advice to Mali's politicians and a rejection of violence influenced by events in her homeland. The best songs are left until last: *Kolokani*, a reflection on African village life and values; a breathy, soulful reworking of Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit*; and the partly spoken title track, which concerns the refugee crisis. Less commercial than her last album, maybe, but it's a finely sung, pained and intimate set. --- Robin Denselow, theguardian.com

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