

Beautiful Africa, by Rokia Traoré

reviewed by [Steve Thorngate](#) in the [November 27, 2013](#) issue

In Review



Beautiful Africa

Rokia Traoré
Nonesuch

Malian singer, songwriter, and guitarist Rokia Traoré has long blended West African music with occidental influences. Her fifth album, produced by P. J. Harvey collaborator John Parish, features the strongest rock element yet. The tracks are

built on static, riff-driven grooves, above which Traoré's inventive vocal melodies dart and play—often joined by the West African stringed *n'goni*. The effect is surprising and delightful:

As a singer, Traoré conveys an array of emotions—in three different languages. The most intense song is the title track, an up-tempo lament for a homeland torn from within and without. Perhaps not coincidentally, the politically charged song is one of just two that include some English lyrics: “Battered, wounded Africa / Why do you keep the role of the beautiful naive deceived?”