

CD REVIEWS

African Music. Sandtracks. 2007. Tiris; produced and arranged by Kad and Momo Hafsi. Sandblast Arts, <<http://www.sandblast-arts.org>>. SBCD001. One compact disc. Liner notes in English by Garth Cartwright, with photography by Rif Spahni and Simon Thorpe.

Sandblast is a London-based charity organization that supports the wide range of musicians, teachers, artists, activists and students with an interest in preservation and awareness of Saharawi culture. Established in 2005, Sandblast's founding director, Danielle Smith, has been involved in the Saharawi community in many capacities for over fifteen years.

Tiris is an eight-member group of singers, dancers and instrumentalists from the República Árabe Saharaui Democrática (RASD), also known as Western Sahara. Tiris, which means "plain", is named for a sacred and mystical region of the southeastern part of the country. The Saharawi people of Western Sahara are historically nomadic, but continue to face a threatened existence through governmental intrusion from the country of Morocco. Moreover, Morocco's construction of a wall in Western Sahara divides not only villages and resources, but also nomadic families. Consequently, many Saharawis call Algeria home, where they live in large, make-shift camps in southwestern Algeria's Tindouf province.

Tiris incorporates a musical bridge from the past with traditions of the present into a very accessible set of songs. In fact, Western Saharan music is influenced by Southern European, Middle Eastern and West African rhythms. The primary language on *Sandtracks* is Hassaniya Arabic. The opening track is a rather short desert chant that sets the tone for the rest of the album. It features some humming and light percussion, including the tidinit instrument, which is a four-stringed lute. The tidinit sound reminds one of a harp, like its close relative, the gourd harp or ardin. Track 2, "*Ma Zein Wadna*", opens with the shrill call of a woman. The song is translated as "Our Beautiful River Valley", so it is only fitting that the music is beautiful and engaging. The music incorporates a bluesy feel and upbeat, North African rhythm. The keyboard, tuned to the piano setting, is accompanied by female vocals, guitar and shaker. In addition, nearly fifteen other musical contributors are featured on this album on instruments including, but not limited to, the nay flute, tamboura, oud, flamenco guitar, bass, acoustic guitar, keyboard, trumpet, sax, African flute and drums.

Tiris' vocals are performed by Mufid Sidi, Suelma Said, Embarca Ayin, Salma Did and Boubba Cheikh. The electric guitar is played by Emhamed Ahmed Bab Ahmed, with Bauba Embarec on keyboard and Hamadi Jatari on tidinit. The flamenco guitar surfaces on "*Tiris Nibreeha*", which is translated, "I Love Tiris". Interestingly, Tiris sings about their love for their home on the Saharan plain. As a listener, one finds oneself also loving

Tiris. Track 4, “*Istenfar*”, which means “Rise Up” is an upbeat ode to a call for action for peace and a home. The trumpet makes a wonderful appearance on this track. This track is quite similar to the jazzy songs of Western Sahara’s southern neighbor, Mauritania. On track 5, the t’bol drum and tidinit accompany female vocals and hand-clapping. “*Ya Jayti*” means “Hey, My Sister”, and is a celebration of social connections and womanhood. The choral singing is amazing on this tune.

Track 6 is “*El Nabi*”, “The Prophet”. The transcendental properties of Saharan music mimics the vast expanse of the environment in which it is composed. This is a slow, but jazzy ode with light percussive accompaniment. The male and female vocals are chillingly transcendental in parts. Track 7, “*El Leil, El Leil*”, which means “The Night, The Night”, is a track that could be listened to night after night. Track 8, “*Assalam*”, which means “Peace”, is a slow, flamenco-tinged and piano infused track with male vocals longing for comfort and peace. Track 9, “*Aid Istiqlal*”, has a reggae-type beat that “celebrates independence”. It is also the only completely instrumental track which is quite reminiscent of popular music coming out of music clubs in Addis Ababa or Asmara. Track 10, “*Ghadara*”, is a musical story about “a gentle betrayal”. Male vocals and female choral additions accompany hand-clapping and ambient soundscapes on this one. Track 11 is a traditional chant, known as “*Ya Dayni*”. It is very similar to Mauritanian music, with female vocals accompanied by a moderately fast beat and jazzy percussion. The final track, “*Eh Heh Esski*”, is a very short song, much like the opening track; the song ends abruptly leaving us yearning for more.

Listeners of West African music, African jazz, North African, Middle Eastern and French music will find Tiris especially enthralling. The indelible music on *Sandtracks* will leave an impression in all our hearts, minds and ears.

Matt Forss, Goddard College

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The Very Best of Hugh Tracey: from the monumental cd series ‘Historical Recordings by Hugh Tracey’. SWP Records. SWP034/HT022. Compiled by Michael Baird in collaboration with ILAM. One compact disc, no accompanying booklet.

Lesotho Calling: Lesiba and Sekhankula Music. SWP Records. SWP 033. Recorded and compiled by Michael Baird in collaboration with Dada Moqasa of Lesotho Broadcasting. One compact disc, with 22-page booklet and notes by Michael Baird.

These two latest CDs from SWP Records are excellent additions to this label’s mission to bring some extraordinary field recordings of African music to a wider and more general audience beyond the purely scholarly.

The Very Best of Hugh Tracey (SWP 034) contains one track from each of the previous 21 CDs in SWP’s series “Historical Recordings by Hugh Tracey” and also includes six previously un-released tracks by Congolese guitarist Mwenda Jean Bosco.