

# New African Woman Music Reviews

As selected by **Belinda Otas**



**AYO BILLIE-EVE**

Her voice is distinctive and her sound unique and with every album, German born, Nigerian singer-songwriter and producer, Ayo (Joy Olasunmibo Ogunmaking) keeps evolving and pushing the boundaries. Her third album, *Billie-Eve*, named after her daughter, is testament to a woman who is seeing the world through multiple lenses. From the opening track, *How many People*, which questions our ability to stay true to ourselves and values to the more personal, *It's late* and the catchy dance number, *I'm Gonna Dance*, Ayo weaves a tapestry of songs strunged together by human emotions. This is an album that sees Ayo move towards the external factors of life, by taking on social, cultural and political issues, in comparison to her previous albums, which explored her childhood and Afro-European heritage. An album of growth, it maintains her musical diversity with a combination of soulful and rhythmical ballads and demonstrates an evolution with her lyrics. *Billie-Eve* succeeds in its ability to fuse different cultural sounds with a cosmopolitan feel and Ayo's shift to electric guitar from her trademark acoustic sound is bound to stay with you long after you are done listening.



PHOTO: YANN ORHAN



**RHIAN BENSON  
HANDS CLEAN**

Rhian Benson, the Mobo Award-winning artist returns with *Hands Clean*, a pulsating and soulful collection laced with electronic grooves, thanks to her Danish producers. While Rhian is not new to *New African Woman*, I am and the realisation that her sophomore album is miles away from her debut, *Gold Coast*, reveals a daring and adventurous artist willing to try fresh ideas. However, one thing has not changed, her soulful voice, and with thought-provoking lyrics fused with contemporary musical prowess, Rhian creates a sound that once again proves timeless and a body of work that is bound to be remembered for a long time to come. *Hands Clean* is a perfect kick-back album when you are in need of quality time with self.

PHOTO: LMC WORLDWIDE



### ASA BEAUTIFUL IMPERFECTION

Asa (Bukola Elemide) needs no introduction after her self-titled debut album caught

the world's attention in 2007. The Paris-born, Nigerian raised singer-songwriter returns with her sophomore album, *Beautiful Imperfection*, which demonstrates an artist who has had three years to evaluate her previous offering. "The first album reflected my state of mind then. I had a lot to talk about – social and political issues. This time, I felt different: I wanted to create something that would help people come out of sad moods and feel uplifted." In that regard, Asa succeeds with this eclectic collection of 12 uplifting, soulful sultry tracks, with influences that range from rock to reggae to soul, and lyrics in English and Yoruba, her mother tongue. She explores what it means to love, live and have questions about the world we live in. From *Baby Gone*, a love story gone sour, to *Questions* about life, hopes and dreams and society –with the powerful query, "Why is there so much religion, yet there is so little love?" – *Beautiful Imperfection* is a brilliant album that will get you swaying from side to side with a smile on your face and the lyrics sung in Yoruba will force you to get up and dance a little.



PHOTO: JEAN BAPTISTE MONDINO



### SONA JOBARTEH FASIYA

Sona Jobarteh is a female kora virtuoso, who hails from a griot family. A multi-instrumentalist,

singer, composer and producer, her new album *Fasiya* translates as heritage and draws on Jobarteh's connection to her griot heritage. Songs like *Jarabi*, a love song from Mali, shows her ability to take an old song and add her own interpretation. *Saya*, a track about love, is haunting and soothing, while *Musow* talks about the role of women in West Africa. This is a track that means a lot to Jobarteh on a personal level because it is rare to find women who traditionally play the kora. *Fasiya* is an album that weaves intricate traditional sounds from West African culture with global influences and takes you on a cultural and spiritual journey that evokes the dynamic energy of an artist with great things ahead.

