

***Youssou N'Dour: Egypt***

*Produced by  
Nonesuch  
Records,  
2004,  
40 minutes*



**Contact:** [www.nonesuch.com](http://www.nonesuch.com)

**Rating:** Highly recommended

*Review by Nina Costanza*

In *Egypt*, Youssou N'Dour, an internationally respected African musician, documents Sufi music from Senegal. The songs, composed and sung by N'Dour, contain religious

references to the sages and saints of Senegal. Though expressing religious themes, the music stands on its own—beautifully conceived compositions with interesting and contemporarily oriented explorations of Egyptian and Senegalese sensibilities. The mixture is clean. One can easily distinguish the blended Egyptian Arabic sounds from the more African-sounding Senegalese arrangements.

The eight track CD features traditional musicians of Dakar (Senegal) and Cairo. Music is played by the Beugue Fallou Ensemble of Senegal (percussion and vocals) and Egypt's Fathy Salama Orchestra, and consists of violins, *oud*, *kawala*, *arghul* and *magruna* (double-reed wind instruments), *rababa*, *mizmar*, *tabla*, *dhola*, and *zagal*. The selections were arranged and conducted by Fathy Salama. The album was produced by N'Dour and Salama, with executive producer Birame Ndiaye (Paris), and recorded in Cairo. Liner notes contain lyrics in Senegalese or Arabic with English translations. The melodies are cheerful and rhythmically upbeat.

"Allah," track 1, is a beautiful, simple melody sung in Senegalese, celebrating the grace of Allah. Akin to a light-hearted folk song, with a contemporary jazz-like arrangement, it has a distinctive Senegalese rhythm. Contrasting track 1, track 2's "Shukran Bamba" sounds Egyptian, with N'Dour's *mahwal* followed by a female chorus. The melody is fast and celebratory: "I can only sing your glory and con-

secrate my life to repaying your good works with some of my own." "Mahdiyu Laye" (track 3) is a romantically flavored andante with biblical references: "The

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Messiah has appeared bringing honor to his country. We all reply to the call. You are Issa's (Jesus') companion Laye." "Tijaniyya," based on Gulf rhythms, incorporates a profound Senegalese call-and-response solo/chorus interchange. This combination, along with a Philip Glass-like, minimalist, repetitive rhythm, adds up to a jazzy arrangement with Gulf overtones. This segues into the lightly mournful "Baay Niasse" (track 5):

So many books did he dedicate to the Prophet. So many books did he write in the sciences. So many books did he devote to philosophy. He was blessed by God, yet maintained his humility. He had so many disciples in the Black nations, and even more in the White nations.

Both "Bamba the Poet" (track 6), which celebrates religious figure Amadou Bamba, and "Cheikh Ibra Fall" (track 7), which praises the heroism of Cheikh Ibra Fall, have the

essence of African folk songs. The album concludes suitably with "Touba-Daru Salaam," one of the purest mixtures of the genres. The orchestration, rhythm, and arrangement of alternating solo voice or instrumental line with female chorus or instrumental is very Egyptian and interspersed with an occasional Senegalese-sounding vocal line.

N'Dour has a fine reputation for producing international music. Here, he celebrates Senegal's Muslim mystical culture. Combining Senegalese rhythms and Egyptian orchestrations with narrative lyrics extolling the deeds of religious figures, the outcome is beautiful, with the natural affect of modern folk songs.