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MUSIC

Ola Onabulé: Point Less

By Raul da Gama - Sep 3, 2019 16 0



The cultural topography of Africa and Europe collide in the musical spirit of Ola Onabulé, a vocalist with a hot and liquid baritone who is able to pour his lyrical vocalistics into higher registers with masterful elasticity so that he has command of three and a half (we're told) registers in all. But merely being able to reach great heights and impossible lows is one thing; to be able to do so with great poetic skill is quite another and this is exactly what Mr Onabulé is capable of and does with the greatest of aplomb. There's plenty to be thrilled about on this 2019 recording *Point Less* where Mr Onabulé negotiates the repertoire revealing exactly what it means to have the kind of vocal flexibility with which he has been blessed as well as his gift for phrasing as well as delivering the music, muscularly and rhythmically deliberate in places but with oomph and gravitas in the big, vocals apostrophes.



This vocal project has a very special feeling of authenticity about it. That's largely because of Mr Onabulé's extraordinary vocalistics but one must also acknowledge, at the very outset, the most sympathetic and imaginative of accompanists, especially the pianists, bassist, drummers and percussionists who weave their magic with astounding colour, balance and timing. Their accompaniment of Mr Onabulé and the interpretation of his music are of a consistently elevated standard – bassist Phil Mulford, in particular setting down a high

marker with his exceptional playing throughout. Meanwhile, throughout Mr Onabulé judges the balance between words and music to perfection anchoring his art with typical clarity and swirling dramatic twists and turns, every once and a while adding African style ornaments and wailing *protamentos* making for a poignant delivery that can only be described – as Heine would – as the "poetry of emotion".

Beauty of tone is often melded into dramatic interpretation of text – such as in "I Knew Your Father" – and always Mr Onabulé emerges as the silent actor of night who promotes a theatrical sense of space throughout the song. The vocalist dueling with guitar and percussion is the driving force throughout. Mr Onabulé velvet tone brings dramatic intensity to this piece as well as to "Tender Heart" that follows a short time later. It is in these pieces, particularly, that Mr Onabulé's refined naturalness of delivery is highlighted as is his phrasing which is crafted with elegance and the gentlest of glimmering vibratos at the ends of these phrases and lines. This is a striking piece of recorded work from a prodigiously gifted musician with a very special vocal instrument.

Track list – 1: Throwaway Notion; 2: The Old Story; 3: Point Less; 4: And Yet; 5: Exit Wound; 6: What The Heck; 7: Ballad Of The Star Crossed; 8: I Knew Your Father; 9: Suru Lere; 10: Tender Heart; 11: Conceive It; 12: So They Say; 13: Pas Famille; 14: You Can't Depend On Love

Personnel – **Ola Onabulé**: vocals; **John Crawford**: piano (2, 5, 6, , 8, 10, 13); **Ross Stanley**: piano (3, 11, 12) and Fender Rhodes (7); **Pete Adams**: piano (1, 4, 7, 9, 14); **George Hazelrigg**: Hammond B3 organ (4); **Phil Mulford**: bass; **Jack Politt**: drums (1, 3, 4, 6 – 12, 14); **Chris Nickolls**: drums (2, 4, 13); **Will Fry**: percussion; **Femi Temowo**: guitar (4, 7, 9, 14); **John Parricelli**: guitar (1 – lead and solo, 3, 11, 12); **Guillermo Hill**: guitar (2, 5, 13); **Al Cherry**: guitar (6, 8, 10); **Duncan Eagles**: saxophone (9); **Bertold Matschat**: harmonica (13, 14)

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Based in Canada, Raul is a musician and an accomplished writer whose profound analysis is reinforced by his deep understanding of music, technically as well as historically.

