

MUSIC REVIEW | REGINA CARTER

# Finding Her Groove in Africa and a Violin

By NATE CHINEN  
Published: March 24, 2010

Regina Carter bookended her first set at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola on Tuesday night with duologue, plucking or bowing her violin alongside the Malian kora player Yacouba Sissoko. The graceful symmetry of their exchanges came with a transparent subtext. Ms. Carter had landed at the club with a new agenda: to put a personal spin on African folk music, as she does throughout her forthcoming album, "Reverse Thread" (E1), due on May 18. Presenting Mr. Sissoko as a partner was a way to signal her intentions.



Matthew Murphy for The New York Times  
Regina Carter performed at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola on Tuesday night.

Not that those intentions were veiled elsewhere in the set. Ms. Carter, leading Reverse Thread, a band that also included the accordionist Will Holshouser, the bassist Chris Lightcap and the drummer Alvester Garnett, seemed grounded in her material and clear about her mission.

There are aspects of "Reverse Thread," the album, that suggest a palatable world-music composite, ready-made for NPR. But in her deft interactions with the band, Ms. Carter put together the most balanced and satisfying performance I've heard from her over about a dozen years.

Her nimble prowess was as much of a factor as ever, and so was the dark-maple sweetness of her sound. The improvement had more to do with her placement and presence within the group. Playing without direct amplification, she was ensconced rather than foregrounded, often no more prominent than Mr. Holshouser or Mr. Sissoko. And she achieved a noncloying vocal quality with her intonation, notably on "Artistiya," a bolt of syncopated effervescence by the Malian duo Amadou & Mariam.

The inclusion of that tune, and likewise "N'Teri," by Habib Koité, another singer and guitarist from Mali, reflects Ms. Carter's interest in African music of poplike pedigree. For the more anthropological side of her research — which

was supported by a 2006 fellowship from the [MacArthur Foundation](#), and facilitated by the [World Music Institute](#) — the album features songs inspired by field recordings.

She played two of those here, prefacing each with an excerpt from the source material. "Zeripiky," an adaptation of a vocal-and-accordion piece from Madagascar, was pure felicity, as Ms. Carter and Mr. Holshouser traded frisky embellishments over a buoyant bass-and-drums groove. "Mwana Talitambula," from Uganda, similarly had violin and accordion in tandem. but with the opposite emotional effect. creating a fog of ghostly

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desolation.

Mr. Holshouser was the pliable center of the ensemble, an engine of harmonic texture. Still, there was a valuable place for Mr. Sissoko, for the spidery movements of his fingers, for his lacework arpeggios. Both sidemen improvised with authority on "Kanou," by Boubacar Traoré (another Malian), but only Mr. Sissoko was there with Ms. Carter as she finished the tune, playing the last bright fillip of the set.

*Performances continue through Sunday at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center, 60th Street and Broadway; (212) 258-9595; jalc.org.*

A version of this article appeared in print on March 25, 2010, on page C8 of the National edition.

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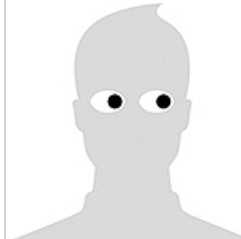
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**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

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MUSIC | MAY 21, 2010

## African Folk Gets a Jazz Infusion

By JIM FUSILLI

*New York*

Even for Regina Carter, the extraordinary jazz violinist and MacArthur Fellowship recipient, there's risk when straying from familiar terrain, as she does on her new album, "Reverse Thread" (E1 Entertainment).

But, she said, there's always risk when making improvisational music.

"Recording and playing live music is always an experiment, if you will," she said last week over sushi in a midtown restaurant here. "Is it going to be not as I expected or better than I expected? You just don't know. You're trying to reach for something."

On "Reverse Thread," her seventh album as a leader, the 43-year-old Ms. Carter r

einterprets traditional and contemporary folk music from Kenya, Mali, Uganda and other African nations; the impact of the continent's music on the Western canon is represented by Papo Vázquez's "Un Aguinald Pa Regina" and "Day Dreaming on the Niger," a song co-written by Ms. Carter and Reginald Washington that first appeared on her 1997 album "Something for Grace." While celebrating composers such as Mariam Doumbia, Habib Koité, Bassekou Kouyate, Ayub Ogada and James Achieng, and Boubacar Traoré on the album, Ms. Carter allows their compositions to hold true to form while she plays with characteristic warmth, intelligence and joy. Jazz is present, but her band's instrumental lineup here—on most tracks, it's a rhythm section of guitar, bass and percussion percolating under Ms. Carter's violin, an accordion and the 21-string harp-like West African kora—allows a seamless blend of varied styles to create something fresh and pleasing. Ms. Carter does much more than replace the singer's voice with the sound of the violin. On gorgeous readings of "N'Teri" by Mr. Koité and the festive "Zeripky," a tune with its roots in Madagascar, she brings us deep into the songs' emotional core.

"I'm taking something already beautiful and complete, and then it's my interpretation," she said, "staying true to the melody, staying true to the simplicity of it. . . . This music, when you listen to it, you may think it sounds simple. But some of the simplest things are really difficult."

Her idea was to explore the songs without overburdening them. "When improvising, all the techniques I've learned, I tried to keep that out," she said. "All those decorations would've been too much."

Several arrangers, including her bassist Chris Lightcap and accordionist Will Holshouser, wrote new charts for the songs. Did they choose the numbers they worked on? "No, I assigned them. I'm bossy," Ms. Carter said with a laugh.

A native of Detroit, as a young student Ms. Carter wasn't encouraged to explore any music but European classical. "I didn't come to jazz until I was a teenager," she said. "Musicians encouraged me, but my teachers

thought I was ruining my career." In her presence, one instructor complained about her explorations to Yehudi Menuhin, who was visiting her school. Mr. Menuhin picked up a violin and played a blues lick. "Leave her alone," he told the teacher.

"A door was opened for me," she said. "I began relating to pop music and Motown that featured strings. I was hearing something that was related to my instrument, something other than classical European music." In addition to jazz, she heard Indian ragas and Jean-Luc Ponty's 1991 album "Tchokola," in which the French violinist played West African music. Said Ms. Carter: "That sent me over the edge. I said, 'I have to do this music.' But there was no audience here."

In the late '80s and early '90s, despite cross-cultural successes by Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon, world music was a tiny commercial category in the U.S. Toumani Diabaté, Salif Keita, Angélique Kidjo, Baaba Maal, Youssou N'Dour and other African musicians hadn't yet found the following here they have today. Meanwhile, Ms. Carter's career in jazz blossomed—try "Freefall," her 2001 duet with Kenny Barron—and in 2006, she received a \$500,000 MacArthur Fellowship. The foundation cited her "signature voice and style . . . fluidity, grace and balance" while acknowledging her "wide range of musical influences including Motown, Afro-Cuban, swing, bebop, folk and world music."

Ms. Carter said, "The MacArthur grant allowed me to hone in on what I really wanted to do. 'Reverse Thread' is only scratching the surface."

In March, I had a chance to see Ms. Carter perform with her combo at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, part of the Jazz at Lincoln Center complex. When Ms. Carter showcased "Reverse Thread," you couldn't say it was a jazz set—and yet jazz informed the music, both in Ms. Carter's phrasing and quiet attack and in the improvisational spirit of her group. The blend of instruments created unexpected sound combinations: The low tones of the bass and the high, twinkling kora together, for instance, formed a textured platform in a tense, almost melodramatic "Kothbiro." At one point, drummer Alvester Garnett played a second-line pattern straight out of New Orleans for the band to jostle with. On Mr. Traoré's "Kanou," the band formed a funk groove for Ms. Carter and Mr. Holshouser to exploit—and then the kora entered like rainfall, its notes dancing and splashing on the pulsing beats.

As she does throughout "Reverse Thread," on this night, Ms. Carter found what she had reached for.

—Mr. Fusilli is the Journal's rock and pop music critic. Email him at [jfusilli@wsj.com](mailto:jfusilli@wsj.com) or follow him on Twitter: [@wsjrock](https://twitter.com/wsrock).

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## Regina Carter Returns to Her Roots with New Album

Friday, May 21, 2010 | 4:40 PM

by Hillary Crosley

[Regina Carter](#) is simultaneously a widely known talent and secret treasure. The violinist and [Detroit](#) native, who currently resides in [New Jersey](#) with her husband, has performed all over the world, released seven albums and recorded with pop icons like [Mary J. Blige](#) and [Aretha Franklin](#).

Now Carter has set her sights on reaching back to her musical roots and exploring her affinity for musical patterns with the diasporic LP, "Reverse Thread," which hit shelves on May 18. Carter will resume her national tour on May 25 in [Seattle](#) and is currently prepping a [music](#) video to be released soon.

The accomplished [musician](#) sat down with ESSENCE.com to discuss the Diaspora, the meaning of "dirty [music](#)" and [Detroit](#)'s future.

**ESSENCE.com: Why did you decide to focus on [music](#) from the Diaspora when recording "Reverse Thread"?**

**REGINA CARTER:** I wanted to do world [music](#) because I'm from [Detroit](#), which is such an ethnically diverse city. I heard all of this different [music](#) growing up and a lot of it incorporated strings, where the violins could be included. When I got the MacArthur grant -- a financial award of \$500,000 for artists -- it gave me time and money to research.

**ESSENCE.com: Initially you wanted to perform pieces from Black composers but refined your search to [Africa](#) specifically?**

**CARTER:** I wanted to do [music](#) from the Middle East, then international Black composers, but just buying [records](#) and listening, I ended up on the continent of [Africa](#). I didn't want to concentrate on any particular style. Whatever I liked I wrote it down, so it became a mix of material because the continent is so huge, there's no way to cover it all.

**ESSENCE.com: We've heard you like a 'dirty' recording?**

**CARTER:** [Music](#) is too clean with all of the technology these days, I like the dirt. I wanted to record everyone in the same room like the jazz [musicians](#) did in the 1960s. Fortunately, I've got a great engineer who found a studio and we used baffling -- which is covering a stand alone wall with a blanket to help muffle the sound -- to make the project sound grittier.

**ESSENCE.com: How did you come to work with kora virtuoso Yacouba Sissoko?**

**CARTER:** My friend recommended him to me. Yacouba's from [Mali](#) and a very gentle person, but I was nervous to work with him because he's such an incredible musician. The kora has 21 strings, I have trouble with my four! The whole way of learning [music](#) in [Mali](#) is passed down, so Yacouba learned from his grandfather and became a griot himself. He can hear something once, remember it and play it back, which is how I learned to play although it was through the Japanese technique, Suzuki. Now I'm more reliant on reading, but I want to get back to using my ears and strengthen that muscle.

**ESSENCE.com: Besides [Uganda](#), [Mali](#), [India](#) and [Puerto Rico](#), what other countries inspired "Reverse Thread" and did you find a favorite sound?**

**CARTER:** I can't say I have a favorite. We recorded a song called "Zerapiky" from [Madagascar](#) because the [music](#) was so catchy. Sometimes I hear [music](#) and get caught up, so when I initially heard this [music](#), I really liked it. It's filled with accordions and in this culture, only men are allowed to play the accordion and women are the drummers. I want to go check out more [music](#), my dream is to go to [Madagascar](#).

**ESSENCE.com: With seven albums under your belt, how did you begin your career?**

**CARTER:** After college, I went to [Germany](#) for awhile and when I came back to [Detroit](#), my career started. I joined the group Straight Ahead, with [Cynthia Dewberry](#), Gailyn McKinney, [Eilleen Orr](#), and [Marion Hayde](#), which is when I hit the map, and we signed to [Atlantic Records](#) in 1992. I moved to [New York City](#) in 1995 and went solo not long after.

**ESSENCE.com:** In 2002 you were honored to play a violin -- the famed Guarneri "Cannon" -- that was fashioned in 1743 and favored by composer [Niccolo Paganini](#) in [Genoa, Italy](#). What was that like?

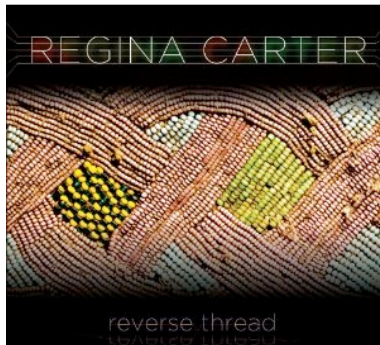
**CARTER:** The story goes that [Niccolo Paganini](#) lost his own violin in a gambling debt and got the "Cannon" from Guaneri, a famous violin maker. This violin is special because it is so loud and has a bigger body than most violins. It's usually kept in a vault and every year people compete to play the "Cannon" by playing Paganini's technically challenging pieces. One day, a friend of mine in [Genoa](#) suggested I do a Jazz show with the violin and it just so happened the [Genoa](#) mayor was a huge Jazz fan, so they allowed me to play. Six months later, [Genoa](#) was voted the world's most cultural city.

**ESSENCE.com:** Finally, do you think your hometown of [Detroit](#) will recover?

**CARTER:** My city is suffering but it's slowly making a comeback. [Dave Bing](#) is really doing a good job, finally we have someone caring in the mayoral position. There are a lot of [music](#) clubs popping up and more to do than there has been in awhile. [Detroit](#) won't go back to the city it was, but it'll move forward.

# In Stores Today: Regina Carter, *Reverse Thread*

Posted by [Michael J. West](#) on May. 18, 2010 at 01:24 pm



If *Reverse Thread* sounds both airy and folksy, it's purely by design. Esteemed jazz violinist **Regina Carter** explores the folk music of Africa with this album, revealing in the process just how deep and varied those traditions are: Indeed, the very first track, "Hiwumbe Awumba" is a piece of Ugandan Jewish music. Likewise, it's hard to overstate the depth and richness of Carter's work here. Her violin effortlessly portrays the easy singsong of these hand-me-down melodies from Mali, Senegal, Madagascar, and elsewhere, but without sacrificing the virtuoso clarity of her tone and the complex weavings of her improvisations (the unbearably catchy "Kanou" being a sterling example of both). She also quite cleverly embeds harmonies from the likes of Puerto Rico and India into the arrangements for accordion and kora, a subtle but compelling demonstration of just how far the African diaspora reaches. (Her band also deserves high praise, especially kora player **Yacouba Sissoko**, accordionist **Gary Versace**, and percussionist **Alvester Garnett**.) It's a landmark achievement purely on intellectual merit, but its sheer listenability—nay, delectability—makes it a major early contender for best jazz album of 2010.

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## Regina Carter takes her jazz violin on a jaunt around the world

By **Andrew Gilbert**  
Special to *The Seattle Times*

Genius has its privileges. For jazz violinist Regina Carter, who was awarded a coveted MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellowship in 2006, the financial freedom afforded by the no-strings grant allowed her to research and record "Reverse Thread" (E1 Entertainment), a singular jazz journey to the heart of Africa.

Though she's been the most visible and popular violinist in mainstream jazz since the late 1990s, Carter could never convince her record labels to green-light a project that was international in scope.

"For years, I wanted to do a world-music record, and the company said, 'no, it's not popular,' " says Carter, 43, who opens a two-night run at Jazz Alley on Tuesday with her quintet featuring Malian kora master Yacouba Sissoko, accordionist Will Holshouser, bassist Chris Lightcap and percussionist Alvester Garnett.

"It seems like every culture on the planet has an instrument that reminds me of the violin, so the first idea was all kinds of sounds and instrumentation on one record."

After three years of planning and investigating, Carter began to home in on music by African composers such as Kenya's Ayub Ogada, Senegal's Mamadou Ba, and Mali's Boubacar Traoré, Habib Koité and Mariam Doumbia. She collected material from every corner of the continent, traveling to South Africa and conferring with pianist/composer Randy Weston, whose sojourns to Nigeria and Morocco in the 1960s inspired his landmark recordings blending jazz and African forms.

"I had friends who would travel to West and North Africa, and they'd bring me fiddle music," Carter says. "Mamadou Ba had written a tune about his impression of New York when he first arrived. I went to World Music Institute in New York and found these beautiful recording from the Ugandan Jews, some sacred and some secular."

It's not just the material that distinguishes "Reverse Thread." Carter recorded the music with all the musicians in one room, rather than following standard studio practice of isolating each instrument. The sound quality is warm and



RAHAV SEGEV / RAHAV SEGEV / PHOTOPASS  
Jazz violinist Regina Carter will play at Jazz Alley Tuesday and Wednesday.

### On the Internet

**Regina Carter:** Stream tracks at [www.reginacarter.com](http://www.reginacarter.com), click on Discography.

### Jazz preview Regina Carter

7:30 p.m. Tuesday- Wednesday, Jazz Alley, 2033 Sixth Ave., Seattle; \$24.50 (206-441-9729 and [www.jazzalley.com](http://www.jazzalley.com)).

intimate, with an emphasis on group feel rather than perfection.

"That was a lesson I learned from [double bassist] John Clayton," Carter says. "Don't listen to yourself. Listen to everyone else. I couldn't go in and redo a solo later. It had to be about the group performance."

More than an emotional journey, creating "Reverse Thread" forced Carter to change her approach to improvising. With few chord changes, the deceptively simple tunes don't provide obvious points of entry for her jazz training.

"It becomes about the groove, and not overplaying and over-embellishing," Carter says. "It's about letting beauty be beautiful for the sake of being beautiful. But sometimes I get in my own way, and I have to say, 'Stop! Quit playing all those notes.' "

*Andrew Gilbert:* [jazzscribe@aol.com](mailto:jazzscribe@aol.com)

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**Regina Carter**

APRIL 15, 2010

### Regina Carter Announces New Album, Tour

*Reverse Thread, A Celebration of African Folk Music To Be Released On May 18th*

When preeminent violinist [Regina Carter](#) made the decision to record an album primarily of African folk tunes, she created a great challenge for herself: how do you take beautiful traditional music and infuse it with a contemporary feel while remaining true to its past - and then, not compromise its beauty? Her newest release, *Reverse Thread*, due out on E1 Entertainment on May 18th brilliantly responds to the challenge.

To achieve the uplifting and stirring result, Regina added an accordion and *kora*-the West African harp traditionally played by village storytellers-to her longstanding rhythm section. Kora virtuoso Yacouba Sissoko was brought on board to help recreate the spirit of passing stories from generation to generation. The result-unlike anything previously heard-is a haunting and beautiful compliment to Regina's sumptuously seductive violin.

Without the support of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation, which "awards unrestricted fellowships to talented individuals," Reverse Thread might never have been realized. As a MacArthur Fellow - a recipient of what is commonly known as the "genius grant" - Carter was armed with the funds and the freedom to follow her muse.

Regina turned to the [World Music Institute](#) in New York City, in which she found a diverse and inspirational resource for material, including ethnographic field recordings. Regina looked not just to the music, but also the accompanying sounds and nuances of everyday life from anthropological and sociological perspectives which informed the spirit of the new arrangements.

"There is an immense amount of amazing music coming from all around the world, much of which is barely accessible," emphasized Regina. "Reverse Thread gave me the opportunity to explore and celebrate a tiny portion of music that moved me."

Both "Hiwumbe Awumba" and "Mwana Talitambula" are based on field recordings from the Ugandan Jews, a community in eastern Uganda who although are not genetically or historically Jewish, practice the Jewish religion. Setting the inspirational tone for the album, the first track "Hiwumbe Awumba" originates from a field recording of a group singing, "God creates and then He destroys." Although the title is dark, the uplifting quality and spirit of the voice on the recording inspired Regina, and the final arrangement is a paean to the resiliency of the human spirit.

Using the field recording of a woman singing "Mwana Talitambula" as a departure point, Regina's bass player Chris Lightcap split the melody between the violin and bass with a hypnotically emotive result.

*Reverse Thread* also embraces music of the African Diaspora. As but one example, "Un Aguinaldo" skillfully layers the rhythmic aspects of African music with harmonies originating in India and Puerto Rico.

Through her albums, incessant touring and various guest appearances and collaborations, Regina has developed into a distinctly diverse musical personality. She has repeatedly toured throughout the world, was the first jazz artist and African American to play Niccolo Paganini's famed Guarneri "Cannon" violin, has been featured with several symphony orchestras and performed with artists as diverse as Aretha Franklin, Lauryn Hill, Billy Joel, Kenny Barron and Mary J. Blige.

#### **Regina Carter's Reverse Thread Tour Dates:**

June 11th Virginia Beach, VA Sandler Center for the Performing Arts  
June 12th Virginia Beach, VA Sandler Center for the Performing Arts  
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## The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

# Top Picks: Spoleto Festival, Regina Carter, Cooking Channel, and other recommendations

Spoleto Festival USA opens, violin virtuoso Regina Carter's new album, the new Cooking Channel launches, and more top picks.



Darrell Scott's latest album release is 'Crooked Road.'

(Courtesy of Scott Simontacchi/Full Light Records)

### Violin Virtuoso

Violinist Regina Carter, the first jazz artist and African-American to play Niccolò Paganini's famed Guarneri "Cannon" violin, has performed with symphony orchestras and with artists as diverse as Aretha Franklin, Billy Joel, and Mary J. Blige. With her new album, "Reverse Thread," an eclectic but haunting reimagining of African folk songs, this MacArthur "genius" grant recipient establishes herself as a world-class soloist with a singular imagination.

### Uncommon courage

The Korean War, often called the "forgotten war," ushered in a new era of racial relations in the military when it anointed the first US Marine of Chinese descent to lead US troops into battle. Lt. Chew-Een Lee fought not only communism and hypothermia, but racism and prejudice to become a war hero, leading 8,000 trapped US soldiers to safety after being encircled by Communist Chinese forces. "Uncommon Courage: Breakout at Chosin," airs on May 31, at 8 p.m. on the Smithsonian Channel.

### A festival to delight

The Spoleto Festival USA opens its 17-day arts bonanza May 28 in Charleston, S.C., at the newly renovated 300-year old Dock Street Theatre with a reprise of the ballad opera "Flora" – the first opera ever performed in the American Colonies. The festival's lineup, always a mix of well-known names and newer faces, includes Brazilian jazz singer Fabiana Cozza and Georgia's National Ballet.

## War's home front

Nominated for two Academy Awards, "The Messenger" is about two Army officers assigned to break bad news to next of kin. With terrific performances from Woody Harrelson and Ben Foster, director Oren Moverman captures the fear factor in the lives of these men without turning them into the usual home-front head cases. Out on DVD May 18.

## Crooked road

Singer, musician, songwriter, producer – Darrell Scott has put them all to good use on his latest album "A Crooked Road" (Full Light Records, \$16.99) released May 25. The Nashville native wrote all 20 songs and played all the instruments in a mix of ballads and love songs drawn from "the crooked road of [his] own life," as he puts it in the liner notes.

## Foodie alert

Master your fears of global cuisines from the Caribbean to Chinese and Indian. Cook alongside the pros 24/7, getting tips on everything from healthy eating, travel, and farm-to-table dining. The new Cooking Channel, brainchild of the Food network creators, launches May 31. For food people and by food people, it will feature shows from stars such as Aida Mollenkamp ("Foodcrafters"), Chuck Hughes ("Chuck's Day Off"), and Roger Mooking ("Everyday Exotic"). Due later this year: shows from Rachael Ray, Bobby Flay, and Emeril Lagasse.

A promotional banner for Piperlime. On the left is a tan high-heeled shoe. In the center, the text "enjoy free shipping and free returns" is written in orange, with "on spring's new arrivals. [Shop now](#)" in smaller black text below it. To the right of the text are four daisies in white, orange, and yellow. Further right is a silver thong sandal. On the far right is the Piperlime logo, which consists of a green lime slice icon and the word "PIPERLIME" in green capital letters.

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## THE AQUARIAN

***Regina Carter***

*Reverse Thread*

E1 Entertainment

Violinist Regina Carter has crafted an intricate, poly-rhythmic journey steeped in African folk, with strains of worldbeat, gospel, classical, soundtrack (for a movie that doesn't exist) and even klezmer, but make no mistake about it. This is a jazz album.

It's trite to call her a genius but she won what's known as the genius grant from the MacArthur Foundation so she could properly effectuate her vision. To that end, she found Yacouba Sissoko, master of the 21-string kora, a cross between a lute and a harp indigenous to West Africa. Its sound, especially as played by Sissoko, gives *Reverse Thread* its street cred, so to speak. When combined with Carter's darting, skipping, flying violin, the effect is oftentimes dizzying, and alternately soothing, like a dreamy convivial raft ride down the Congo.

Now add accordion to the bubbling cauldron. Take that violin, kora and accordion triumvirate and put it in front—or in some cases on the side—of guitar, bass, and drums, and you have got one big ol' Major League piece of work from this Detroit fiddler who debuted in 1995, seven albums ago.

It's going to be hard for Carter to ever top this one: "Mwana Talitambula" was transcribed from field recordings in Uganda. "Hiwumbe Awumba" is taken from inspirational lore that god is meant to be feared (although there are no vocals within its 12 tracks, Carter actually communicates the dread but then the uplift of this particular track with her ax as an ode to human resiliency). "Un Aguinaldo" subtly layers elements of Puerto Rico and India into this Africa experience.

*Reverse Thread*, to be enjoyed properly, demands attention. It is the opposite of "lite jazz."

**In A Word: Serious**

—by Mike Greenblatt, May 14, 2010

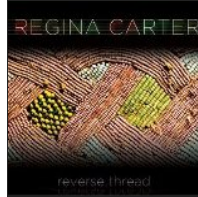


## Reverse Thread

Regina Carter | E1 Records

By [Mark F. Turner](#)

What does the award-winning, classically trained, jazz violinist Regina Carter do, after playing Niccolò Paganini's famous Guarneri "Cannon" violin in *Paganini: After a Dream* (Verve Music Group, 2003), or reinterpreting songs from the 1920s-1940s in *I'll Be Seeing You* (Verve Music Group, 2006)? She directs her interests and passion towards African folk music in *Reverse Thread*, a significant work in her already diverse discography.



A 2006 MacArthur Fellow, Carter took full advantage of the very generous funding to exhaustively research rich traditional music, that encompasses the reach of the African Diaspora. "Hiwumbe Awumba" is based on field recordings from Ugandan Jews, while "Un Aguinaldo Pa Regina" blends African music with harmonies originating in India and Puerto Rico, fresh interpretations of music from Mali or Madagascar, and the timeless sounds of ancestral instruments.

From the hinterlands in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, this is modern folk music that is global, traditional, and full of soul. It's a communion of sounds, articulated by Carter's resonating violin, along with a fine ensemble of noted jazz artists and brilliant additions including the old-world timbre of accordionists Will Holshouser and [Gary Versace](#), and Kora (21-string West African harp) master, Yacouba Sissoko.

What might sound like a jig, a polka, or Cajun rug cutting music, might actually come from an African folktale through the infectious rhythm of "Kanou." The soothing hypnotism of "N'Teri" is uplifting, as the melody is layered by contrasting instrument textures. The variety is abundant. Whereas "the elongated melody of "Kothbiro" moves gently, "Full Time" is Afro-pop dance music, with Carter bowing effervescently, propelled by Mamadou Ba's funky bass and Alvester Garnett's (Carter's husband) tight drum work. The global demarcation lines are blurred throughout, whether in "Un Aguinaldo Pa Regina" or the festivities in "Zerapiki," originally an accordion-based song brought from Madagascar.

A sense of spirituality is also present. The stirring rendition of the church hymn "Juru Nani / God Be With You" contains multiple styles and boundaries, exchanging ideas from Africa to America, while the haunting accordion/violin harmonies in "Mwana Talitambula" are based on a field recording of a woman singing in eastern Uganda.

There's a trove of jewels waiting to be mined in *Reverse Thread*. Thankfully, Carter's unquenchable thirst for new music has allowed her to produce this important recording.

**Track Listing:** Hiwumbe Awumba; Full Time; N'Teri; Artistiya; Un Aguinaldo Pa Regina; Kothbiro (Intro); Kothbiro; Zerapiki; Day Dreamin on the Niger; Juru Nani / God Be With You; Kanou; Mwana Talitambula.

**Personnel:** Regina Carter: violin; Yacouba Sissoko: Kora (2, 3, 6, 7, 11); Adam Rogers: guitar (1, 5, 8); Will Holshouser: accordion (1, 7, 8, 10-12); Gary Versace: accordion; (2-5, 9); Chris Lightcap: bass;(1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10-12); Mamadou Ba: bass (2, 3, 9); Alvester Garnett: drums, percussion; Joe Ferla: hand claps (8).

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