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MUSIC REVIEW | EXTRA GOLDEN

Afro-Pop Seasoned With Southern Rock

By Nate Chinen

Extra Golden was entering the home stretch at Le Poisson Rouge on Saturday night when Onyango Jagwasi, the band's lead singer, stopped asking nicely. "I want everyone to stand up," he said. He had been making the same suggestion to his seated audience throughout the show, but in a far less compulsory tone. Now it was a command, though it came with a friendly addendum: "Feel free to come close."

Mr. Jagwasi and his band mates were appearing under the auspices of **New Africa Live**, a nonprofit organization intent on challenging what it calls "homogenized notions of African cultural production." Extra Golden, with members from Kenya and the United States, readily suited that agenda. So did a low-key opening set by the Senegalese reggae singer Meta, performing with an acoustic guitar (and without his band, the Cornerstones): he sang mostly in English, with a message and demeanor borrowed from Bob Marley.

Extra Golden could be the house band for heterogeneity. Born out of academic interests — the guitarist Ian Eagleson first traveled to Kenya for doctoral work in ethnomusicology — the group has grown steadily more cohesive despite long pauses dictated by politics and geography.

Mr. Jagwasi occupies a role originated by Otieno Jagwasi, his older brother, who died of liver disease before the release of "Ok-Oyot System," the band's 2006 debut. Together with Mr. Eagleson and another American guitarist, Alex Minoff, he relies on the drive of Onyango Wuod Omari, an emphatically frisky drummer.

The band's specialty is benga, a guitar-based Kenyan pop music with myriad sources. But on "Thank You Very Quickly" (Thrill Jockey), its recently released third album, that style gets further entangled with Southern rock, which accounts for one undercurrent of Saturday's show. "Anyongo," the song that followed Mr. Jagwasi's crowd directive, featured a slide guitar part by Mr. Minoff, evoking the Allman Brothers. "Gimakiny Akia," another newer track, had guitars and vocals locked in a series of bluesy volleys.

Extra Golden also played two songs apiece from "Ok-Oyot System" and a high-spirited follow-up, "Hera Ma Nono," the first album to feature a contribution by Onyango Jagwasi. One of the more engrossing tunes was "Ilando Gima Onge," a sinuous vehicle for Mr. Omari's rhythmic embellishments, and for some good-natured guitar jamming.

Mr. Minoff and Mr. Eagleson have devised credible means of playing within the benga style, but their occasional bouts of singing were less appealing. Partly that's a testament to Mr. Jagwasi, whose style as a front man runs toward an amiable, easy extroversion. He seemed happiest during "Ukimwi," the encore — not because he had passed the vocal baton to Mr. Omari, but because he finally had the crowd dancing.