Done right, calypso conveys succinct unpretentious pleasure. In the wrong hands, though, it can be murderously bad. Thankfully, there is no over production or lyrical inanity to interfere with the simple, timeless enjoyment of this consistent collection from 1950s West Africa.

Honest Jon's have released a ton of worthwhile compilations recently. *Sprigs of Time* was packed with variety, and

*Living is Hard*

uncovered a forgotten creative history of Caribbean immigrants in Britain.

*London Is The Place For Me*
documented the 1950s Soho scene and now

*Marvellous Boy*

offers a unique snapshot of the West African musical landscape from the same period.

Until music becomes a gentically modified nightmare disparate seeds will be blown off course and bloom in unexpected places. Calypso was first recorded in the Caribbean in 1913 (Lovey's String Band). Its West African counterpart did not blossom until the early 1950s in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in the hands of both Ebenezer Calender and also Famous Scrubbs. Ebenezer has four tracks here, all are fabulous, fleetfooted odes to free living. Famous Scrubbs has two tracks: the opening *Poor Freetown Boy*; and the unconvincingly self-depreciating *Scrubs Na Marvellous Boy*. Scrubbs may claim to be an average Joe the Calypso Singer but I'm not buying it!

In a collections as solid as this there are gems at every turn. Steven Amechi gives delightful, if outdated, wooing advice on *Nylon Dress*. Presumably, in the 1950s, nylon was hip, and ironing [the more comfortable cotton] was square. Bobby Benson And His Combo gives us a gorgeous call and response tune *Taxi Driver (I Don't care)*; as well as an almost-instrumental *Calypso Minor One*; and the breezy genius that is *Gentleman Bobby*; - a message to husbands and parents not to let their wives or daughters be exposed to either the alluring calypso rhythms or the overwhelming personal
magnetism of Bobby Benson! They can't say they weren't warned...

And so it goes, weaving highlife, swing, military brass bands, Afro-Cuban jazz, into a hell of a compilation. I like that the majority of tracks are sung in English but the others are easily infectious and as relaxing as soft waves trickling over aching feet. My favorites (for today) are E.T. Mensah And His Tempos Band's tale of unusual love &quot;The Tree And The Monkey&quot; and The Rhythm Aces spacey instrumental &quot;Mami&quot;.

Before the Caribbean musical influences in West Africa were all but extinguished by US Soul there was still time for the majestic Godwin Omabuwa to cut some essential sides. His &quot;Dick Tiger's Victory&quot; commemorates the bout which made a World Boxing Champion from Nigeria. Omabuwa's approach to vocals on this track sums up the atmosphere of this disc. He shows scant regard for precise rhythm and exact metre and the effect is as if we were being serenaded by the kindest, hippest official from the Nigerian Tourist Board while being massaged by ultra-hypnotic uber-beings from our most delightful dreams.

Some compilations of early Calypso, such as Calypso Calaloo, are so good that I thought they could never be matched. But Honest Jon's have added to the highest order of this simple music of heartbreaking celebration.

dsamples:

- Godwin Omabuwa - Dick Tiger's Victory
- Famous Scrubbs - Scrubbs Na Marvellous Boy
- E.T. Mensah - The Tree and the Monkey