

VANITY FAIR

Asa Captures the Soul of African Music

by Bill Bradley

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Nigerian singer-songwriter Asa played at le Poisson Rouge in Manhattan on Friday night as part of the **New Africa Live** series, sponsored by the New York Foundation for the Arts. Raised in Lagos, Asa now lives in Paris, where she was born, and you can hear the African rhythms in her music and the expatriate fire in her voice. BLK JKS, a South African band whose music defies genre, opened for Asa and set the tone for a night of reggae-inflected songs that carry weight beyond the walls of a Manhattan club.

Asa wears tightly cropped dreadlocks, glasses, and a big smile, and carries a guitar that's almost too big for her. And she's a natural raconteur. It's as if Lauryn Hill and Bob Marley had a lovechild — one with a serious knack for leading singalongs. According to its mission statement, the **New Africa Live** series is dedicated to "carving out a cultural space of belonging for contemporary African artists," but that [might be] one thing Asa seems capable of doing all by herself.