

# Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, Living Like a Refugee

(Anti)

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**Robin Denselow**

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An album should be judged on its own merits, but anyone listening to this unexpectedly exuberant set should first try to see the award-winning documentary of the same name. It tells how the musicians involved fled the horrors of the civil war in Sierra Leone to a refugee camp in Guinea, wrote songs to document their history and raise their morale, and eventually managed to return home to record.

It's a story made all the more remarkable by the strength of their songs. The Refugees play West African styles from highlife to soukous, but their main influence is reggae, with the light, melodic approach of Jimmy Cliff matched against lyrics in English that would have impressed Bob Marley. Songs such as Refugee Rolling (about being moved from camp to camp) or Bull to the Weak (about facing hunger) are not laments but joyful, defiant anthems of survival.