

each other, and as relevant to who we are now and who we'll become in the future."

Kokoroko members – there's also drummer Ayo Salawu, synth/keys player Yohan Kebede and bassist and synths/keys player Duane Atherley – have vastly different backgrounds. Take the jazz education of Edgeworth, a former bedroom producer and beats-loving teenager from north London for whom jazz wasn't cool ("As a kid, when everyone's doing grime, picking up a trumpet is a brave thing to do"). But then came J.Dilla and his samples of Ahmad Jamal and other jazz greats, and that chance meeting with Maurice-Grey at art class.

"I never knew anyone my age who played jazz in London until I met Sheila and others in that little community. My mum had her Miles Davis records," he says with a grin, "but mostly she'd play aggressive stuff like Fela Kuti or Buster Rhymes, especially when she was cleaning."

That same cathartic freneticism (and a bit of orchestral dreaming) informs 'War Dance', a standout track on a new album filled with them. "It kind of reminds me of krumping," says Maurice-Grey, referencing the expressive, exaggerated full body twerking associated with Los Angeles hip-hop. "Just trying to shake off your bad mood and break free, you know?"

Nevertheless, like all of Kokoroko's music and writing – variously involving group discussion, ideas proffered for exploration, songs intended for reshaping and songs coming in ready made – *Could We Be More* is largely focused on notions of home. Where that home is, is again up for debate – especially when being black British means you're considered other when visiting your parents' or grandparents' homeland in Ghana, say, or Nigeria. There's London and its musical melting pot as home, of course, and then there's the sense of ownership that comes from hearing something as a kid and loving it all your life.

"When I hear Nigerian music playing elsewhere there's a certain sense of pride and energy filled with it. It's like 'This is a piece of me and this is where I come from,'" says Edgeworth, who helps his fellow band members recreate a guitar-driven Afrobeat vibe on the multi-textured 'Ewa Inu', a Yoruba word that may or not mean 'the beauty inside' ("Everyone we ask says different things").

Kokoroko recorded in situ at Echo Zoo in Eastbourne, a boutique studio famed for its vintage era equipment and proximity to the sea. Producer Miles James got their vibe, they say, and encouraged a flow that involved



Photo: courtesy BBC Proms

recording late into the night between swims and meals cooked by a friend. There with them, in spirit, as they replicated their beloved highlife and Afrobeat were Ebo, Pat and Fela, buoying their passages of call-and-response, meeting of rhythm and melody and journeying through structures so familiar that – as with recurring tracks 'Blue Robe (pt1)' and 'Blue Robe (pt2)' – they could put their own spins on them.

The album's aesthetic is overwhelmingly beautiful, imbued with a sort of organic delicacy that softens the harshness of Afrobeat, makes it enveloping, heightens the joy – nowhere moreso than on 'We Give Thanks', a gorgeous slice of outsider soul floating on female vocal harmonies, and 'Those Good Times', its rose-tinted nostalgia recalling '70s era lovers' rock. Peppered among the tracks are brief instrumentals – the 48-second 'Outro', the curious 28-second 'Reprise' – that feel like pauses. Or to borrow from sci-fi (a favoured genre of Kinoshí's), like portals, transporting the listener to another universe before yanking us back to reality. Maurice-Grey smiles. "There's this Earth Wind and Fire record with one synth track in particular" – probably, 'Interlude' from *That's the Way of the World* – "that sounds really weird. Miles told me they'd basically reverse the tape. So we did the same thing," she says.

Edgeworth leans forward in his chair. "It is really important for us to create a sound world and have people step into a space when they listen to the album. You lose so much with streaming: the punctuations, the nuances. Making an album to be released on vinyl means we can give the listener a proper experience," he continues. "We can pause, confuse them, make them uncomfortable, fill them with joy.

"It's all about the story. We've got a story we want to tell."

**Improvisation is vital  
to what we do**  
Sheila Maurice-Grey

**Kokoroko play We Out Here Festival  
which runs from 25-28 August**

