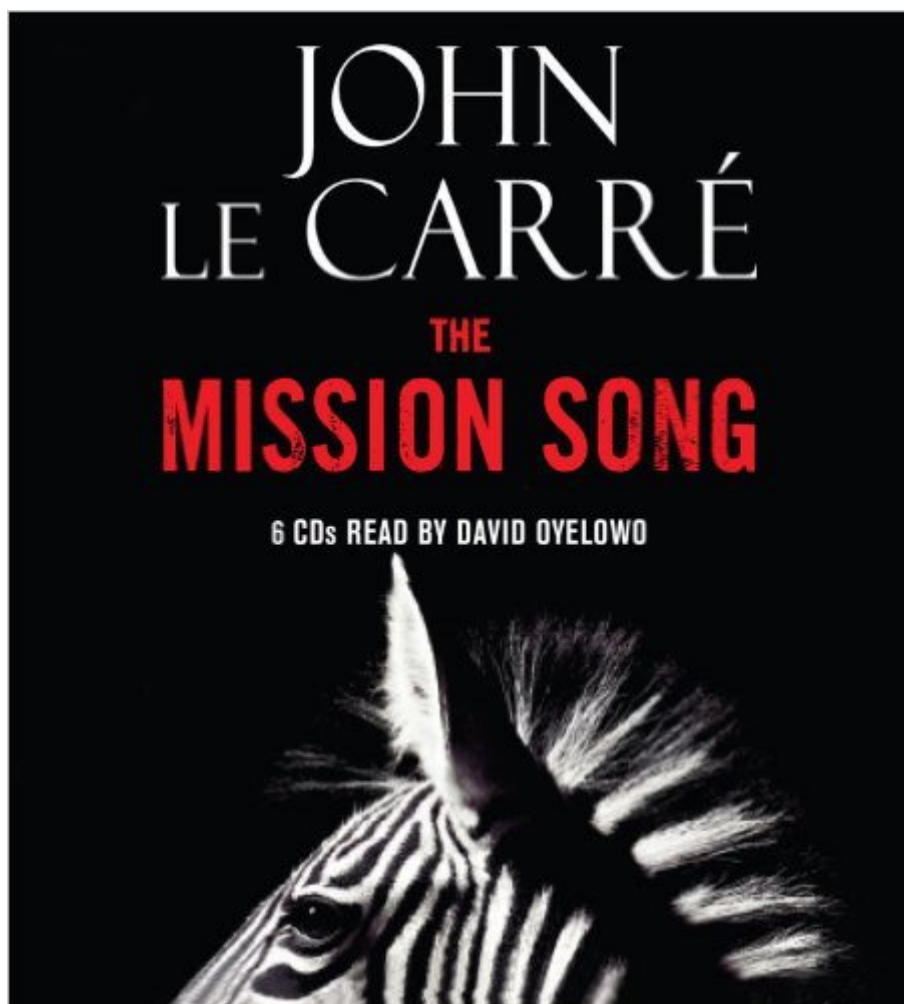


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The Mission Song: A Novel



Synopsis

"Think of David Oyelowo as a single musician playing all the instruments in a symphony. That is essentially what he manages in this inspired performance of John le Carré's suspense novel about a planned coup in the Congo and the interpreter of mixed parentage who wrestles with his conscience and his past to determine what he is to do about it. The cast of characters is wide and exotic, and Oyelowo's capacity to invest them not only with sumptuous accents but also distinctive, often biting personality is matchless. Can it really have been only one man in the narrator's recording booth? This virtuoso performance makes that seem impossible." --AudioFile Magazine
WINNER OF AUDIOFILE EARPHONES --This text refers to an alternate Audio CD edition.

Book Information

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Authors, A-Z > (L) > Le Carre, John #623 in Â Books > Books on CD > Mystery & Thrillers #1280 in Â Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > General

Customer Reviews

In Le Carre's latest thriller, an expert interpreter of various African languages learns of a nefarious plot involving the Congolese government. At first I was intrigued with the fact that the protagonist Salvo is an interpreter. Nice twist, and I have some experience in both interpreting and in African language study (Swahili). But the narrator is so obsessed with his status that it becomes both distracting and annoying. Consider, for example, the following excerpts from the book: "I am...by profession a top interpreter of Swahili," "the code of your top interpreter is sacrosanct," "Never mistake, please, your mere translator for your top interpreter," "my top interpreter's ear," "your top interpreter responds without premeditation," "Salvo the top interpreter is there beside them," and there are many more. I mean, Come on! A major portion of the book (maybe a third) takes place at a

meeting of Congolese elites and European mercenaries making plans. The meeting drags on forever, and with the exception of a brief interlude of torture, it gets pretty tiresome. No action, no interesting suspense. In fact, it reminds me of many meetings I've attended (some of which have taken place in Africa); but that doesn't make it interesting writing. The plot doesn't really pick up until the last third of the book. At that point, it moves along at a decent clip. The prose is okay but nothing special; I made the mistake of listening to this audiobook immediately after Jumpa Lahiri and before Margaret Atwood, two masterful wordsmiths. Lastly, some information at the end of the book leaves the reader feeling that much of the book was completely futile, which felt totally unsatisfying. All in all, the book had its moments and some interesting twists and turns along the way, but I was unimpressed.

"The Mission Song" is a great book, somewhat along the same lines as "The Tailor of Panama". John le Carr  depicts the harsh reality of some of the human species' least admirable traits, presenting them as seen through the eyes of loveable but misguided and idealistic individuals. And despite the tragedy of the situation he maintains a positive and often humorous tone. I was planning on writing a full review of "The Mission Song", but after reading the wonderful review by Philip Caputo of the Washington Post (see above under Editorial Reviews), I figured that it would make more sense to simply recommend that review. "... corporate giants that know no boundaries, moral or geographical", remarks Mr. Caputo, and he's hit the nail on the head. One wonders sometimes of our future, when all of the raw materials have been plundered and the environment destroyed. I do have a few remarks about the audio version of "The Mission Song", read by David Oyelowo, a British actor of Nigerian descent. When I started listening to this book I was thinking, "what a poor reader, it sounds like he's half-asleep!" Very dull and almost monotone, especially at the very beginning. It turns out that this was an intentional technique. Bruno "Salvo" Salvador tells the story in the first person, and at one point he remarks that he is proud that he has made his English as characterless as possible, so nobody will think he's trying to sound upper-class or as if he belongs to any particular group of Englishmen. Furthermore, once you get to the end of the story you realize that there is a good reason why Salvo tells the story in a rather tired and depressed voice. But the amazing thing about David Oyelowo's reading is the dialog.

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