and Cuban sounds to Haiti, furthered by Haitian musicians who cut salsacorne seasonally in both neighbouring lands. The style known as compas direct (‘direct beat’) had its mid-1950s genesis with Nemours Jean-Baptiste (of Cubadisco, 1955, whose chart hit ‘La Framba’ framework incorporates phrases from the Russian folk song ‘Dark Eyes’, followed by the cadence rhapsody of Jean Baptiste protege, saxophonist and band leader Robert Sicot (Ambiance Cadence, 1978), with its brassy, percussive Latin big-band sound). The popularity of these and the myriad artists heard here gave rise to an island-based recording industry that operated in the 1960s.

This is the era documented by Haiti Direct, compiled by Sofrito DJ and vinyl galler Hugo Mendez. He cuts a compiler’s course through the period with a core sample of sonic syncretism from this oft-neglected African diaspora crossroads. Listeners will find a unique stylistic mash-up on this luxurious and informatively packaged two-CD, 27-track set, with Haitian meringue (as distinguish from Dominican merengue), rara (with bamboo folk trumpets, flared tin horns and myriad percussion), compas, cadence, mini jazz, voodoo jazz, Cuban son and mambo, samba, calypso, R&B, rock and Latin big band. If regional music aficionados don’t immediately recognise these offerings as Haitian, it’s because the primary markets of the time were in Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and immigrant France, along with Benin, Ghana, Senegal and Ivory Coast, while newer Miami, New York, Boston and Montreal markets reflect a continuing Haitian exodus.

Haitian popular music history thus says much about how music has long circulated in the Atlantic world, and thanks to preservationists and late enthusiasts, new listeners can hear how Haitian traditional forms combined uniquely with overseas influences in the work of artists such as Raoul Guillaume (the pre-compa meringue ‘Mai Elevé’), DjejX’s ‘Live Turkey’ (taking the Eagle’s Hotel California on a tropical cruise), Super Jazz des Jeunes (the haunting 1962 voodoo jazz hit ‘Cote Mounde Yo’) and Rara de Léogane, whose ‘Gate Mounde Yo’ takes the preceding title back to its rara folk routes, while manifesting a striking intimacy with the music of eastern Cuba (just spin up something by the Creole Choir of Cuba and behold). There is much more here, and if Haitian revival bands start cropping up in unlikely places, you’ll know why.

www.strut-records.com
Michael Stone

TINARIWEN
Emmaar PIAS

It’s hard to believe ten years have passed since Tinariwen’s breakthrough record Amassakoul. It was with Amassakoul that the desert rovers really caught, for the first time, the imagination of a global audience. Since then, many have come in their wake and the unique sound of the Tuareg blues has been firmly secured into the global collective unconscious.

And, while there are many fantastic pretenders to the throne, with Emmaar Tinariwen prove that they are still the granddaddies of the desert blues. From the slow, hypnotic opening salvo of Toundra Tinch to the upbeat scattergun riffs of Chaghaybou, this is a record that proves Tinariwen can still blow your mind.

There are definite nods however to other elements of the Tuareg scene. The sublime acoustics of Tahalamot are reminiscent of some of Bombino’s work. Other stand-out tracks include Imediwan Ahi Tifahman, an infectious fusion of bluegrass fiddle and Saharan soul, and Sendad Eghialan, an intonation of the deepest of blues. Aghehre Medin also is not only a beautiful track, but a lesson in how to make the humble acoustic guitar sound like something from another world.

Sometimes it can be hard for elder statesmen in music to grow old and bow out gracefully. And, when Ibrahim Ag Alhibaba chants in English about walking through the desert, some might be put off by Tinariwen’s uncritical engagement with their own mythology. The sheer musical ability on display however allows them to get away with it – a luxury lesser artists wouldn’t enjoy.

tinariwen.com/
Liam Thompson

SHEELA BRINGI
Incantations White Swan, no cat no

In October 2012 the Colorado-raised singer and instrumentalist Sheela Bringi launched a crowdfunding video on YouTube. It’s a niftily edited three-and-a-half-minute burst of self-promotion and an ear-pleasing plea for funding for a ‘travel harp’ and the finances to finish her debut album. Well, this is it.
ANDY IRVINE with RENS VAN DER ZALM
Parachina - Andy Irvine AK4

No huge surprises here and, given such a proud track record from one of acoustic music's most consistently consummate performers, nor would we want any. From Sweeney's Men to Planxty to duets with Paul Brady, Donal Lunny, Mick Hanly and Dick Gaughan to Patrick Street to Mosaic to LAPD, the voice of Andy Irvine has been a constantly reassuring and reaffirming thread in the journey of modern Irish folk song... with various forays into America and Eastern Europe along the way. A man whose never-tire-of-the-road philosophy remains an inspirational beacon and vindication of almost the whole folk music ideology.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Divided & United. The Songs Of The Civil War Ato Records

This two-CD set, marking the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, is the vision of music supervisor Randall Poster, acclaimed for his soundtrack work for a string of big name directors including Martin Scorsese and Wes Anderson. The list of featured artists reads like a who's who of American roots music with long-established performers like Loretta Lynn (outstanding on the opening, banjo- and fiddle-accompanied version of 'Take Your Gun And Go, John'), Ralph Stanley, Dolly Parton, David Grisman, Chris Hillman and (the recently deceased) Cowboy Jack Clement rubbing shoulders with newer artists including Pokey LaFarge, Shovel & Rope and (representing Oldham, Larkins!) Karen Elson (with a smouldering Dixie).

The songs and tunes range from the very familiar – 'Marching Through Georgia' (Old Crow Medicine Show), 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home' (Angie Snow), 'Wildwood Flower' (Sam Amidon) – to more obscure (to these ears) gems like a sparkling American version of The Merry Widow Song (Jorma Kaukonen and the splendidly-titled 'Hells Broken Loose in Georgia' (Bryan Sutton).

Everything here is of absolutely the highest quality, with a collection of songs that is as strong among the 32. That being said, it’s notable that among the vast legion of Grammy award winning artists represented on Divided & United, the African-American acts number precisely two (Taj Mahal and Carolina Chocolate Drops). For a project of this magnitude and importance, and one that comes with an accompanying essay in Cohen’s Esquire article stating: “This record aspires to erase the legacy of segregation and through music seeks reconciliation instead, in order to celebrate a great musical heritage of America, born in pain, war and prejudices, that feels like a missed opportunity in an otherwise laudable achievement.

storerecords

Steve Hunt

CHALACHEW ASENHAFI & ILLITA BAND
Fano Terp Records AS-24

BAHRI KEGNE
In Memory of Ethiopia's Greatest Azmari
Terp Records AS-23

Even without the language, these CDs contain glorious and physically affecting music. It won't sound strange to anyone who has enjoyed the Ethiopiques series on Buda. But you need Amharic to unravel the layers of meaning sung by Ethiopian azmari, of whom Asehafi - born 1966, died 2012 - was an outstanding recent example. Azmari is singers and composers of sharp and witty songs, performed in more or less disreputable cabarets called azmari. Their songs are made up on the hoof in response to what's going on in the room, in the town, on the planet. The style is immediate and abrasive, Asehafi's voice blazing and ripping in call and response with his one-string masinko fiddle. Supporters are krate lute and kabo drum - a tiny orchestra that generates huge energy. Sometimes female backing singers smooth and soothe the paint-stripping ferocity of his vocals.

Both CDs come with an excellent booklet, all the information you need on this musical tradition, its role as the voice of free speech in Ethiopia, a country not always free with such commodities.

When Chalachew Asehafi was the young pretender, Bahri Kegne was the old master. The two did actually play together. "You're almost as good as me," said Kegne reportedly.

On the strength of these recordings, recorded between 1988 and 1966 for cassette release, Bahri Kegne may be no as instantly grab-bable as Chalacheh Asehafi: his songs take a little longer before ignition happens, built

www.shelabrin.com

Ken Hunt