



Tinariwen

and Cuban sounds to Haiti, furthered by Haitian migrants who cut sugarcane seasonally in both neighbouring lands. The style known as *compas direct* ('direct beat') had its mid-1950s genesis with Nemours Jean-Baptiste (*Ti Carole*, 1966, whose cumbia-like framework incorporates phrases from the Russian folk song *Dark Eyes*), followed by the cadence rampa of Jean-Baptiste protégé, saxophonist and bandleader Webert 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 took shape in the 1960s.

This is the era documented by *Haiti Direct*, compiled by Sofrito DJ and vinyl gleaner 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 distinguished from Dominican merengue), rara (with bamboo folk trumpets, flared tin horns and myriad percussion), compas, cadence, mini jazz, voodoo jazz, Cuban son and mambo, salsa, 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 Bénin, 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-compas meringue *Mal Élève*), Djete-X's *Jive Turkey* (taking the Eagles' *Hotel California* on a tropical cruise), Super Jazz des Jeunes (the haunting 1962 voodoo jazz hit *Côté Mouné Yo*) and Rara de Léogane, whose *Gade Mouné Yo* takes the preceding title back to its rara folk routes, while manifesting a striking fraternity 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 *Amasskoul*. It was with *Amasskoul* that the desert rockers 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 scoured into the global collective unconsciousness.

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 *Toumast Tincha* 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 *Imdiwanin Ahi Tifhaman*, an infectious fusion of bluegrass fiddle and Saharan soul, and *Sendag Egh-lalan*, an intonation of the deepest of blues. *Aghregh 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 Alhabib 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.

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Photo: Jak Kilby

Andy Irvine

The background information cites such influences as the Tamil singer-songwriter MIA and US voice artist Meredith Monk, and studies with the bansuri (bamboo flute) player GS Sachdev and sarodist Aashish Khan. It also refers to American blues and jazz and her mother teaching at Naropa University at Boulder, Colorado – once home of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. It's an intriguing backcloth.

Jazz influences creep in on *Peacock* (based on an Assamese folk song) and *Saraswati* with wafts of cool jazz trumpet (played by Clinton Patterson, the album's producer). On both she sings and plays western harp. Mainly though, the music steers towards devotional Hindu music, principally kirtan praise song. Her *Kham-maj*, credited to her and Patterson (nothing unusual or untoward about taking credit for a composition in a r̄ag), is a deft instrumental with her bansuri against Masood Ali Khan's hang (a UFO-shaped idiophone of Swiss origin). There are times when a narrower or sharper focus might have suited better. The *Mahishasura Mardini Stotram* ('Prayer to the Goddess [Durga] who killed [arura or power-bent anti-god] Mahishasura') gets some distracting Balkan-beat wind instrumentation; it feels as if it loses the plot. Nevertheless, a thought-provoking debut where sparks fly with a real feeling for Hindu divinity.

www.sheelabrini.com

Ken Hunt

ANDY IRVINE with RENS VAN DER ZALM

Parachilna 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.

Here we find our hero in company with his long-term Mosaic collaborator, Dutch multi-instrumentalist Rens Van Der Zalm, camping out in the Australian outback among desert and mountains recording in various woolsheds, shearers' huts and school rooms. This is, thus – and will probably become recognised as – Andy's Australian album with the mix of, mostly, traditional and two self-composed songs reflecting the stories and environment around him. For all that, the sound is hardly primitive – this is no Michelle Shocked *Texas Campfire Tapes* – and it sounds like a studio recording, but the feel is appropriately relaxed and sparse. This, of course, is invariably Irvine's way: the ultimate troubadour, still infused with the spirit of Woody Guthrie, telling real stories of real people, and while the geography may change, the ethos is unwaveringly true.

The title is the name of a tiny town in South Australia and the songs here resonate with a sense of remoteness and alienation, often mournfully reflecting the tribulations of the traveller in a strange land. *I Wish I Was In Belfast Town*, for example, is a gloriously melancholic opener... so simple, so telling, so familiar to the Irish psyche, so Andy Irvine. Parallel themes of emigration, travel and disorientation emerge on hefty story songs like *Farewell To Kellswater*, *The Dandenog*, the Depression song *Sergeant Small* and two original Irvine compositions *Billy Far Out* and *Douglas Mawson* – true tales respectively of a mischievous car and an intrepid Antarctic explorer – but so naturally crafted they wield an indivisible link with the tradition. With another heart-wrenching song, the late Alistair Hulett's deeply affecting lament *He Fades Away* thrown in for good measure, it's a powerfully affecting set. Refreshingly unussy arrangements and the warm sincerity of Irvine's own delivery make it all sound so easy... and that, at its heart, is the incomparable majesty of both the man and his music.

www.andyirvine.com

Colin Irwin

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 movie 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 musics with long-established performers like Loretta Lynn (outstanding on the opening, banjo- and fiddle-accompanied *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 hot-shots including Pokey LaFarge, Shovels & Rope and (representing Oldham, Lancs!) Karen Elon (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* (Angel Snow), *Wildwood Flower* (Sam Amidon), to more obscure (to these ears) gems like a sparkling American version of *The Mermaid Song* (Jorma Kaukonen and the splendidly-titled *Hell's Broken Loose In Georgia* (Bryan Sutton).

Everything here is of absolutely the very highest quality, with not a single duff track 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 John Cohen essay 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 prejudice," that feels like a missed opportunity in an otherwise laudable achievement.

atorecords.com

Steve Hunt

CHALACHEW ASHENAFI & ILILTA BAND

Fano Terp Records AS-24

BAHRU 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 *Éthiopiennes* series on Buda. But you need Amharic to unravel the layers of meaning sung by Ethiopian azmaris, of whom Ashenafi – born 1966, died 2012 – was an outstanding recent example. Azmaris are singers and composers of sharp and witty songs, performed in more or less disreputable cabarets called azmaribets. 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, Ashenafi's voice blazing and ripping in call and response with his one-string masinko fiddle. Supporting are krar lute and kabero drum – a tiny orchestra that generates a huge surge of 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 Ashenafi was the young pretender, Bahru 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, Bahru Kegne may be not as instantly grabbable as Chalachew Ashenafi: his songs take a little longer before ignition happens, built