

CONTINENTAL RIFFS

Peter Margasak travels the world in search of subversive sounds.

Guinean saxophonist **Mamadou Barry** reaped the benefits of the country's Authenticité movement in the '60s, forming the state-funded Kaloum Star and joining in the frenzy for Cuban sounds on Africa's west coast (he even spent time on the island earlier, studying the son). As a reedist Barry has often led from beyond the spotlight's reach; in addition to directing Kaloum Star, he's played with Bembeya Jazz National and has been the musical director for Les Amazones de Guinée. Even on his overdue solo album *Niyo* (World Village) he doesn't exactly take center stage, though he solos extensively throughout. Other instrumentalists and a variety of singers help him survey a variety of Guinean melodies, as well as some bristling Afrobeat; he does strut his jazz chops on a pleasant Dave Brubeck tweak called "Africa Five."

Keletigui et Ses Tambourinis were one of the earliest and best products of the Authenticité movement, and the recent double CD *The Sylphone Years* (Stems), spanning 1968-76, wraps up a wonderful overview conducted by the label over the last few years. The gentle, percolating grooves are shot through with Afro-Cuban rhythms and jazz-informed harmony, but the core of the material drew upon native melodies, stories, instruments, and language. Indeed, the richly soulful griot-style vocals of members like Manfila Kante and the piercing, original sound of guitarist Linke Condé create a wonderful, biting contrast with the son structures—several pieces are covers of Cuban classics by Sexteto Habanero—and the easy-going polyrhythms. Classic material that hasn't aged a whit.

Also remarkably vital are the sounds captured on *Hot in Dar* (Buda), the latest installment in the Zanibara series surveying the music of Swahili East Africa. This new collection focuses on the Tanzanian muziki wa dansi (dance music) made in 1978-83—nearly all of it sponsored by various state organizations—where medium-sized bands churned out elegant yet propulsive and episodic tunes that featured exquisite call-and-response vocal harmonies, tight horn sections, and wonderfully liquid interplay between as many as three electric guitars. Though the infusion of many Congolese musicians into the region starting in the '70s had made the Afro-Cuban sound of soukous a big part of the sonic blueprint, more prevalent were native rhythms like the sikinde popularized by the great Mliamani Park Orchestra. With each subsequent volume of this series, curated by Werner Graebner, we're finally getting a better sense of the deep musical riches of this part of Africa.

On *Echoes Hypnotiques*, Analog Africa continues digging up the sadly ignored musical legacy of Benin, specifically the prodigious outfit of **Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou**. The fifteen killer tracks here were all made for the Albarika Store imprint between 1969 and 1979 with a lusty funk attack and scrappy, screaming guitar leads from players like Akadari Elias Moutalabi and Papillon. This is the fourth collection of the band's music—following titles on Popular Music Africa, Soundway, and another on Analog Africa, each capturing a remarkably different facet of the band's output—and these are some of the leanest and fiercest sides they ever cut. As usual label-owner Samy Ben Redjeb has not only spent years digging up and researching the tracks, but poured the fruits of extensive interviews into the voluminous, fascinating liner notes which are crammed with stunning photographs spanning the group's

history; each release complements the astonishing music with a veritable history lesson.

Over the last couple of years the guerilla ethnographers at Sublime Frequencies have directed much of their attention to deep Saharan grooves—a sound regrettably dubbed (by someone else) desert rock—with an emphasis on its raw, primal immediacy. *Treeg Salaam* is the second album they've released by Mauritania's **Group Doueh** (the current CD version follows out-of-print limited edition vinyl). The recordings were chosen by the label's Hisham Mayet from home recordings made between 1989 and 1996, ranging from merely lo-fi to tonally violent. On some of the tracks, such as the brutally stabbing "Ragsa Jaguar," you repeatedly hear the audience shouting and whooping in trance-like mayhem. The nasty guitar sound Salmou "Doueh" Baamar wings from his gear neutralizes any ill effect produced by the cheap drum machines and chintzy synthesizer patterns, and the epic 20-minute "Tazit Kalifa" is a swirl of chanted vocals, flanged electric guitar, organ-like arpeggios, and sporadic beat box, suffused with such murkiness that it sounds genuinely alien in its low-bore intensity.

As the muezzin at the Great Mosque in Aleppo, Syria, **Hassan Haffar** stands as one of the great monodists of our time, and on the monumental 3-CD set *The Suites of Aleppo* (Institut du Monde Arabe) he brilliantly navigates eleven pieces now found only in his home city. Backed only by spare hand-percussion and a six-strong choir that both responds to his voice and delivers precise unison sections, he's a model of sobriety and grace, imparting subtle microtonal inflections into each tightly coiled phrase and soaring, melismatic ascent. What distinguishes these suites from other like-minded musical movements is the focus on rhythmic shifts; within each section the tempo is fixed, but the transition from one piece to another is thrilling. The average Western ear, my own included, will probably need to spend a little extra time to adjust to the surface austerity, but it's worth the effort, as Haffar is a genuine virtuoso.

German DJ and producer **Shantel** (né Stefan Hantel) created a niche for himself earlier in the decade through his Bucovina Club, a nightclub evening that cranked the engine making Gypsy music the new thing. On his latest album *Planet Paprika* (Crammed Discs/Essay) he flanks himself with Balkan ringers—including trumpeter Marko Markovic and clarinetist Filip Simeonov—to flesh out electro-driven stompers that brazenly mash-up disco, ska, and funk with Eastern European brass music, Greek rembetika (the voice of Anestis Delias, dead for 65 years, haunts "Sura Ke Mastura"), and turpopop. I don't mind that Shantel isn't concerned with stylistic purity ("Absolutely inauthentic / My style is egocentric," we hear on "Being Authentic"), but too often the throwaway, predominantly English-language vocals torpedo the album with silliness and shallow kitsch.

New York's **Slavic Soul Party!** brings an equally mongrel aesthetic to brass band music. Although the group's fourth album *Takeatron* (Barbès) still keeps the focus on Balkan sounds, the band, led by percussionist Matt Moran, has continued dipping into New Orleans funk (a smoking cover of Rebirth Brass Band's "Get It How You Live"), and this time out they tackle a Black spiritual ("Canaan Land") and even a flamenco tune ("Sancti Petri"). But elsewhere they put their spin on traditional Romani songs and modern classics as well as totally convincing original pieces in the same vein. With every album SSP has

sounded less like earnest devotees and more like a band with its own sound. The group's love for fat brass and driving rhythms isn't really affected by this style or that, so long as it moves.

Afro-Peruvian songstress **Susana Baca** pays homage to one of her greatest influences on her EP *Seis Poemas* (Luaka Bop), Chabuca Granda. Granda, who died back in 1983 and who had a song on the same mid-'90s Luaka Bop anthology, *Afro-Peruvian Classics: The Soul of Black Peru*, that introduced Baca to the world at large, came late to African-influenced song following a successful career as a sophisticated pop singer in her homeland. But her decision to begin incorporating the more propulsive rhythms of Afro-Peruvian folk music exerted a strong impact—another Peruvian singer, Eva Ayllon, is also a major exponent of Granda's work. Half of the six tracks here are Granda tunes, but all of the performances are stripped-down and beautifully poetic, with Baca's forceful voice caressing subtle melodic contours in the most delicate, lyric manner.

Dominican singer **Puerto Plata** (né Jose Cobles) didn't launch his international career until he was 84, and now, at 86, he's back with his second album *Casita de Campo* (IASO). With avuncular charm and restrained soul, if less than precise intonation, he navigates old-fashioned sones, boleros, and early merengue supported only by acoustic guitars and spare percussion. Among the musicians are the great guitarists Edilio Paredes, a master of bachata music, and Joan Soriano, a young practitioner of the same rustic, old-school approach, but here they resort to a simpler, more romantic style. Cobles was popular as a youngster, but dictator Rafael Trujillo's love of merengue was so strong he virtually banned all other forms, forcing Cobles underground. Thanks to producer and label owner Benjamin de Melil he's gotten another chance, and while the music is steeped in nostalgia, Cobles is providing a link to a sadly forgotten (and largely undocumented) past.

On his fourth and best album, *Certa Manhã Acordei de Sonhos Untranquilos* (Nublu), the Brazilian singer **Otto** moves even further from his Manguebeat roots in favor of an unexpected focus on slow-moving, sentimental material, both in the form of brega and mawkish power balladry. But the killer arrangements—played by a knockout band featuring members of Nação Zumbi and the extraordinary guitarist Fernando Catatau—the remarkably catchy, dynamic songs, and the singer's lusty exuberance make it work. Brazilian thrush Céu turns up for a duet on "O Leite," but it's the Mexican pop singer Julieta Venegas who steals the show on two stunners, especially the sultry "Saudade." Elsewhere "Janaina" struts along on a sly Jamaican groove, while "Naquela Mesa" harks straight back to the early work of Jovem Guarda icon Roberto Carlos, replete with twangy guitar and subterranean organ lines.

With his fine second album *Correnteza* (Biscoito Fino) the Rio singer and songwriter **Edu Krieger**, who first made a name for himself penning tunes for Maria Rita and Roberta Sa, steps further into his own with an accomplished and gripping mixture of pop songcraft and samba grooves. It's a stripped-down effort that perfectly frames the singer's gentle, precise voice with an elaborate but unfussy matrix of guitar patterns, brisk percussion, resourceful piano counterpoint, and effective electronic textures that makes it all sound classic and thoroughly modern at once. His voice emphasizes the preternatural rhythmic