

AfricaREVIEWS

Eneida Marta

Ibra

Algeventos (50 mins)

★★★★★

Diva from Guinea-Bissau offers a tribute to late kora player



With a warm blast of flute curling over gentle birdsong, the stage is set for the fourth album by Eneida Marta from Guinea-Bissau, who is descended from a long line of artists including her Cape Verdean father. Marta has previously explored a host of styles – flamenco, gospel, jazz, Guinean *gumbe* and the Cape Verdean *morna* blues – with lyrics sung in Portuguese, Guinean-Creole and occasionally Arabic. Here she pays tribute to the (recently late) Guinean *kora* genius Ibrahima Galissa, himself one of a long line of maestros and her favourite musician.

A host of supporting players on instruments including piano, cello, percussion and guitars (among the latter is Manecas Costa, one of the first artists to present the rich musical heritage of this tiny West African country tucked between Senegal and Guinea) buoy a voice of almost cleansing purity and light, most effective on slow, spacious tunes including that beautiful opener 'Alma Na Fala', the sensuous 'Amor' and 'Paulo Nanki', a gentle rocker that morphs, joyously, into a salsa-fied dance piece. Standouts include 'Homis di Gossis', a piano-led ode to present fathers, and the heartfelt, string-laden 'Pena'. A gorgeous work marred only by the occasional heavy-handed production of Athanase Koudou (Salif Keita, Richard Bona), who should have known better.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Paulo Nanki*

La Musique d'Issa Sow

Aynaabe

homerecords.be (58 mins)

★★★★★

Album of Senegalese one-string fiddle: Issa good one!



The traditional bowed violin of the Senegalese Peul shepherds is called *nianiorou* or *riti*. Former shepherd

Issa Sow is perhaps the most successful exponent of the instrument having collaborated with artists like Youssou N'Dour and Baaba Maal. This is the follow-up to his excellent 2009 release *Doumale* in which he spectacularly

combined his instrument with a full orchestral string section. On *Aynaabe* he again works with classical violinists but this time stripped down to just two: Wouter Vandenabeele, who appeared on *Doumale*, and Shalan Alhamwy.

Together the two violinists weave some beautiful passages around the guitar, *kora* and percussion of Sow's Senegalese musicians. Principal vocalist Abdou Camara has some of the power and vocal inflection of Youssou N'Dour when at his most traditional. This is highly melancholic and pure Senegalese music – far removed from the fizzing modern dance grooves of the likes of the Star Band and Orchestra Baobab. Perhaps the most notable thing about this album is how the contrast exists between the pair of classical violins and the traditional *nianiorou*. To the unsuspecting Western ear the traditional instrument is strident and coarse in comparison to the conservatory style of a classical violin. At times, particularly on a couple of tracks towards the end of the album, Issa Sow's playing becomes almost uncomfortably challenging. It's a fascinating ride that at times requires perseverance in order to gain reward.

MARTIN SINNOCK

TRACK TO TRY *Yéwende Jubo Ka*

Algothe Oho & His Sounds of Joy

Mam Yinne Wa

Philophon (37 mins)

★★★★★

Joyous gospel from Ghana



Algothe Oho is a Frafra gospel singer who cut his musical teeth performing in churches and

festivals all over Ghana, two experiences that conjoin on this sunny album that marries the devotional with the frivolous, all the while exploring some altogether unexpected musical directions. His all-female choir accompaniment, aptly called Sounds of Joy, live up to their name by bringing a high-energy (and high-pitched) euphoria to the tracks, frequently flipping the usual solo-chorus lines to take the lead, followed by Oho and the brass-led rhythm section, who are audibly enjoying themselves throughout.

The opener, 'Mam Yinne Wa' (God, You Love Me So), sets a surprisingly sultry tone, the faux-woodwind keyboard sounds and bubbling Frafra percussion lines joined by a scurrying



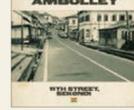
Gyedu-Blay Ambolley

11th Street, Sekondi

Agogo Records (46 mins)

★★★★★

Playful grooves from Ghana: it's a good highlife



It is refreshing to know that the career of highlife singer and multi-instrumentalist

Gyedu-Blay Ambolley appears to be on a roll. Reissues of his old albums, an ongoing live tour and new recordings are keeping the veteran (born in 1947) in the public eye. *11th Street, Sekondi* refers to the area in the city of Sekondi-Takoradi in west Ghana where he grew up and is an album of all new material. It follows his 2017 release *Ketan* on the same label.

This is a beautifully relaxed album that gently swings between highlife and Afrobeat. Ambolley is vocally masterful, leading a super-tight band. He seems to be more comfortable

performing this cooler mix rather than on some of his earlier recordings in which he dabbled with disco, attempted to be a jazz crooner or, rather unwisely, tried to cover Fela Kuti's 'Lady'. Ambolley's version of Afrobeat is lyrically pithy but more humorous and good-natured than Kuti's. 'Black Woman' affectionately tackles the 'problem' that African women have with their hair. Titles like 'I No Dey Talk I Do Dey Lie', 'Ignorance', 'Who Go Pay', 'Woman Treatment' and the magnificent 'Who Made Your Body Like That' all indicate what the English/Pidgin subject matter might be. Brilliant musicianship, superb songs and great female backing vocals.

MARTIN SINNOCK

TRACK TO TRY *Who Made Your Body Like That*

Carmen Souza

The Silver Messengers

Galileo Music (46 mins)

★★★★★

A Cape Verdean tribute to a legendary jazz pianist



When one hears of Cape Verdean roots music mingled with jazz it is hard not to shudder with trepidation. The word 'fusion' usually results in the most uninspired clashes between two