

TD's Top Ten for 2003

My two favorite albums of the year were **Mambo Sinuendo** by Ry Cooder and Manuel Galban (retro-hip, quirky and unforgettable) and **The Beauty of the Rain** by Dar Williams (the fully realized, mature work her fans have always expected from her). There were also notable releases from a number of favorite artists such as Rosanne Cash (Rules of Travel), Al Green (I Can't Stop), John Hiatt (Beneath This Gruff Exterior), and The Jayhawks (Rainy Day Music). All are highly recommended, but have received too much critical attention to make this list, which celebrates my somewhat more obscure favorites of the past year, most on independent labels. They are presented below in alphabetical order.

Bembeya Jazz **Bembeya** (World Village Music) www.worldvillagemusic.com
The legendary Guinean groovemasters are back with their first recording in 15 years... and it was worth the wait. Just try sitting still while listening to these uptempo, pulsing tracks driven by four guitars, led by the amazing Sekou "Diamond Fingers" Diabate. Hypnotic!

Manecas Costa **Paraiso Di Gumbe** (Late Junction/BBC Radio 3)
From the tiny African nation of Guinea-Bissou by way of Lisbon, a celebration of the gumbe rhythm central to the region's Creole culture. The songs celebrate the joys of home and express the cost of dislocation and the needs of the people. Sparkling instrumentation featuring acoustic guitar and Venezuelan harp along with captivating vocals.

Caroline Herring **Wellspring** (Blue Corn Music) www.carolineherring.com
A wonderful follow-up to last year's excellent debut disc **Twilight**. If Kate Wolf had grown up in Mississippi, she might have sounded like this. Engaging story songs of love and loss that invoke the South and the West, with superb instrumental backing and production from Austin ace Rich Brotherton.

Los Lonely Boys (Pedernales/Or) www.ormusic.com
A true delight! Groove to the sweet, soulful harmonies and rockin' funky rightness of the Garza brothers on this impressive debut outing. Brother Henry burns the speakers on his Stratocaster in the honored Texas tradition. To be played at maximum volume!

Maktub **Khronos** (Velour Records) www.velourmusic.com
Seattle area faves update classic soul music for the 21st century, with occasional blasts of Led Zep dischord. Star alert: lead singer Reggie Watts has the charisma and vocal chops (not to mention one spectacular 'fro) to explode on the national scene. You can say you "knew him when he was still indy." Don't miss this one!

Over the Rhine **Ohio** (Back Porch Records) www.backporchrecords.com
Music for a rainy afternoon or for driving down a dark deserted highway late at night. The songs powerfully evoke place and its myriad dimensions. Karin Bergquist's extraordinarily expressive voice and the subtle yet effective instrumentation make this one memorable.

(more below)

Martin Pahinui **Ho'olohe (Listen)** (Dancing Cat Records) www.dancingcat.com

If you've never bought Hawaiian music before, this would be a nice start. The liner notes/booklet are like a mini-history of the genre. This long-awaited release from a living legend combines incredibly soulful vocals with superb slack key and steel guitar and a tour through a diverse repertoire from historic to contemporary pieces to a song for kids. Simple in production, this is a work of transcendent joy, beauty and longing.

Pernice Brothers **Yours, Mine and Ours** (Ashmont Records) www.ashmontrecords.com
Smart, catchy, affecting contemporary pop music... in English. It's got a great beat and you can dance to it!

Radio Mundial **La Raiz** (Palm/Rx Records) www.rxrecords.com

Zesty synthesis of traditional acoustic instrumentation and percussion, uplifting harmonies and a contemporary rock/pop/funk sensibility ... reflecting the band's Puerto Rican and Peruvian heritage and roots in the Bronx. While most of the numbers are in Spanish, the energy and excitement generated transcends potential language barriers.

Truco & Zaperoko **Musica Universal** (Libertad Records)

www.libertadentertainment.com

You like percussion? Well, give this a listen. This amalgam of two groups that are wildly popular in Puerto Rico presents a mind boggling array of complex rhythms ... but this is not an experiment in ethnomusicology. It swings fierce and hot!

Lagniappe (something extra)

If you're looking for a Christmas album with just a bit more funkiness than the usual fare, I highly recommend The Blind Boys of Alabama's new disc **Go Tell it OnThe Mountain** (RealWorld Records), featuring soul-stirring guest performances by the likes of Solomon Burke, Aaron Neville, Mavis Staples ... and Tom Waits.

If you're looking for the ultimate politically-conscious musical gift, you might consider **Drop The Debt** (World Village Music), a compilation by artists from around the developing world in support of cancellation of the debt of Third World countries to ensure shared, sustainable development. For more information see www.jubileeuusa.org or www.dette2000.org

Have a great Holiday season and a terrific 2004!

Tom David