

Africa Express

Many Western pop stars develop a fascination with African music but their interest seldom goes much further than incorporating an Afrobeat rhythm or a Touareg guitar groove into their own work. Blur's Damon Albarn was determined to take the process to another level with Africa Express, creating an open-door platform to bring together African and Anglo-American musicians. Over the last decade, Africa Express has curated a series of fascinating collaborations, both onstage and on record, as the likes of Paul McCartney, Paul Weller and Roots Manuva have jammed with Amadou & Mariam, Bassekou Kouyaté and countless others, exposing African music to a mainstream rock audience as never before. *NW*

+ RECOMMENDED ALBUM:

Various Artists, *Africa Express Presents Terry Riley's in C Mali* (Transgressive, 2014)



Balkan Brass

There's been a big boom in Balkan brass in recent years, kicked off by Emir Kusturica and Goran Bregović in the landmark film *Underground*. It's become an international party music led by Serbia's Boban Marković, Macedonia's Kočani Orkestar and Romania's Fanfare Ciocărlia. The huge Guča festival has become symbol of Balkan brass in all its intoxicating excess. But the music is nothing new. It was born from a fusion of the military bands of the Ottoman Turks and the Habsburg Empire in the 19th century. *SB*

+ RECOMMENDED

ALBUM: Boban & Marko Marković Orchestra vs Fanfare Ciocărlia, *Balkan Brass Battle* (Asphalt Tango, 2011)



Cumbia

Originating in Colombia's Caribbean coastal region, the rhythms of *cumbia* are said to lie in a courtship dance practiced among African slaves, but were swiftly fused with Hispanic influences to create a tropical Afro-Caribbean dance style that went viral across South America. The golden age of traditional cumbia came in the mid-20th century when its influence reached North America and the likes of Nat King Cole recorded cumbia songs. But in recent years the music has been given a contemporary, urban twist to enjoy a thrilling revival on club dance floors as *tecnocumbia* and *nu-cumbia*, incorporating elements of hip-hop, dancehall, dub and electronica. *NW*

+ RECOMMENDED ALBUM: Various Artists, *The Rough Guide to Cumbia* (World Music Network, 2013)



Ulrich Griesmer, Joe Miller, Françoise, Hans-Martin

Diabaté dynasty

West African musical heritage has for centuries been preserved by a hereditary *griot* caste that has handed down traditional knowledge and virtuosity from father to son. Toumani Diabaté, currently the poet laureate among the world's *kora* players, claims a griot lineage of family musicians stretching back 71 generations. His father, Sidiki Diabaté, who originally hailed from the Gambia, was a *kora* player of legendary fame and his younger brother Mamadou Sidiki Diabaté is a prominent virtuoso. Toumani's son, also named Sidiki, is the latest recruit to the family tradition, recently recording a spectacular album of *kora* duets with his father. Another branch of the family, the Jobartehs, continues to dominate Gambian *kora* playing. *NW*

+ RECOMMENDED ALBUM: Toumani and Sidiki Diabaté, *Toumani & Sidiki* (World Circuit, 2014)

Éthiopiennes series

The golden age of Ethiopian music ran from the 1950s to the 70s, when the likes of Mahmoud Ahmed, Tlahoun Gèssèsè and Mulatu Astatke (pictured) filled the nightclubs of Addis Ababa with an intoxicating style of Ethio-jazz, which hypnotically blended pentatonic Ethiopian scales with Western instrumentation.



This spectacular but fading heritage was brought back into the spotlight by the award-winning *Éthiopiennes* series of CD reissues, launched by the French ethnomusicologist Francis Falceto on Buda Musique in 1998, and which now runs to a treasure trove of 29 volumes. *NW*

+ RECOMMENDED ALBUM: Various Artists, *The Very Best of Éthiopiennes* (Manteca, 2007)

Fado

There's been a recent revival of Portuguese *fado* as a new generation of young artists have become interested in its melancholic

beauty. The music was born in Lisbon in the early 19th century, became internationally famous in the 1950s, thanks to Amália Rodrigues, but was seen as tainted by the fascist regime after the revolution that overthrew the dictatorship in 1974. That's now forgotten and singers like Mariza, Ana Moura, Cristina Branco, Carminho and Gisela João have driven a spectacular rebirth in Portugal and increasingly around the world. Male singers seem less exportable but Carlos do Carmo and Ricardo Ribeiro are superb. And *fado*'s secret weapon, of course, is the tingling beauty of the Portuguese guitar. *SB*

+ RECOMMENDED ALBUM: Mariza, *Transparente* (EMI, 2005)

