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Jazz Plus: Worldbeat, blues edition

January 11, 2013 by [Ron Wynn](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



Angel D' Cuba: *Heritage* (Rax Trax)

Angel D'Cuba's energetic, powerful voice was formerly featured in Mezcla, a flamboyant Cuban supergroup whose tunes were equally divided between classic and contemporary material. D'Cuba's no less diverse as a solo performer, with his newest release mixing and matching the vintage sounds he heard growing up on the island with songs reflecting the numerous genres he's heard and often explored since relocating to Chicago. The disc's most ambitious fare include a whirling salsa piece "Herencia," and spiraling cumbia piece "Sone con Colombia." He turns sentimental on "Amor Anonimo," which wouldn't be out of place on adult pop Spanish-language radio. Then there's "Juana la Cubana," his venture into the reggaeton sphere. D'Cuba also reconfigures a soul staple with a worthy cover of Earth, Wind and Fire's "Can't Hide Love." The message cut "Una Samba en Chicago" celebrates his past and present connections. *Heritage* illuminates all the elements that make Angel D'Cuba a Cuban music master.



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Bongos Ikwue: *Wulu Wulu* (Blk)

Nigerian singer/songwriter Bongos Ikwue has been a star for decades on the African continent. *Wulu Wulu*, (Feb. 15) features the 70-year-old's first session designed for global release, and it's a showcase for both his bombastic, rangy baritone and the Double X band. This ensemble provides shimmering, constantly shifting backgrounds and accompaniment. Ikwue's idiomatic blend extends from the title tune's township jive framework (his vocal's in Idoma and his daughter's in English) to the controversial "Mustapha and Christopher" that highlights religious conflicts, and "Kongo Soldier" which explores a soldier's responsibilities. That one also includes a marvelous violin solo and Ikwue's tremendous lead vocal. Ikwue and Double X weave in and out of settings that intersperse high life, reggae, Afrobeat, even rock and funk. It's emphatic and delightful music, and this disc should bring wider recognition to both Bongos Ikwue and Double X.

Saffron" *Dawning* (Palmetto)

Many fans become instantly suspicious whenever the term "fusion" is used to describe a group or performer. It's widely seen as a stylistic compromise that's low on substance and high on whatever trend might get the release in question some radio airplay. But Saffron's a band whose work represents the best of a musical union. The quintet ably meshes its members' divergent backgrounds, as they capably find a comfortable merger of Eastern and Western sources. *Dawning* also draws on

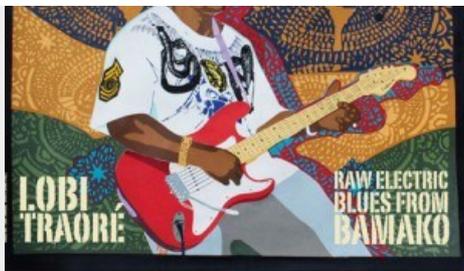


Persian Sufi poet Rumi's passionate work for inspiration. Saxophonist Tim Ries and pianist Kevin Hays hail from the jazz and rock worlds, while Shujaat Khan's masterful sitar playing has earned praise and Grammy recognition. Vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi grew up in Iran, where she initially discovered Rumi's work. Goudarzi's ethereal vocals and Khan's masterful sitar nicely interact with Ries and Hays' phrases, solos and responses, while Abhiman Kaushal's tabla brings an additional dynamic rhythmic component. Such stunning selections as "Dawning," "Tease" and "Nomad" are the best examples of Saffron's compelling presentation.

Lobi Traore: *In The Club, Vol 1 – Raw Electric Blues From Bamako* (KSK vinyl 12-inch)

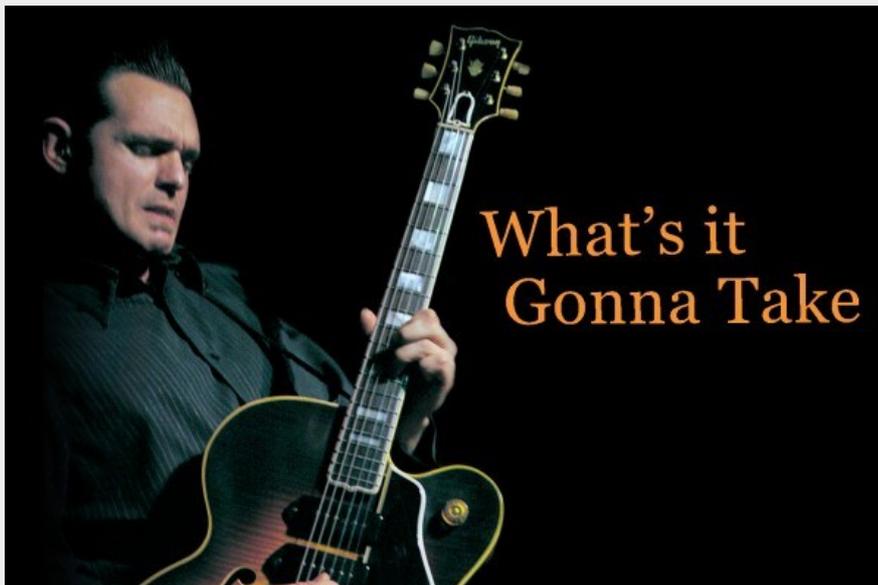


The late Malian guitarist Lobi Traore was a dazzling soloist, whose angular, percussive approach combined a rocker's adventurous edge with a bluesman's piercing sensibility. The set's six selections



are predominantly furious, uptempo workouts, with Traore's driving licks and riffs matched by multiple acoustic textures, beats and instruments. It's an expressive and joyous collection, one that's a great showcase for Traore's skills. He enjoyed experimenting with volume, feedback, and pace,

sometimes competing with band mates and other times playing off them. From the opening moments of the initial selection "Makono" to the finale "Mata Gasi Ka Bon," Lobi Traore and comrades played infectious, relentless songs that filled dance floors and highlighted his charismatic brilliance.

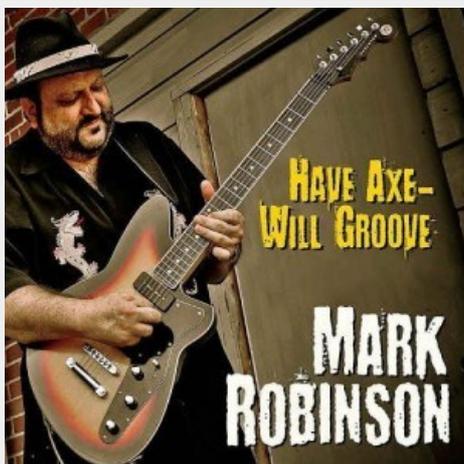


Blues discs

Doug Deming: *What's It Gonna Take* (Vizztone)

Guitarist/bandleader Doug Deming's at home with any and all types of blues and R&B. The group's latest release includes several fine Deming originals, among them the title track, "Think Hard," "An Eye For An Eye," and the playful "I Want You To Be My Baby." Deming's a capable singer and guitarist, while Dennis Gruenling's blazing harmonica licks prove a second key instrumental component (Anthony Smith takes a harmonica turn on "No Big Thrill"). Sometimes Deming and company sample shuffle blues, other times roadhouse R&B, but they always deliver a brand of blues that's fresh and captivating.

Mark Robinson: *Have Axe – Will Groove* (Blind Chihuahua)



Nashville's Mark Robinson's newest release features worthy tunes and stellar playing. Robinson's excellent on either electric, slide or acoustic guitar. His flexibility is a major asset as he explores heartbreak numbers ("Baby's Gone to Memphis," "Broke Down"), rollicking pieces ("Cool Rockin' Daddy," "Blue Moon Howl") and occasionally offers a new take on a classic composition ("Lonely Avenue.") He's joined by an array of exceptional musicians, from the core of bassist Daniel Seymour and drummer Paul Griffith to guests

like alto saxophonist Ben Graves, harmonica aces Ray LaMontagne and TJ Klay

and backup vocalists Vickie Carrico and Jonell Moser. Robinson even includes a glockenspiel within the blues sphere, but the best thing about *Have Axe-Will Goove* is his explosiveness and expertise.

Extra magazine discs

It's a bit late, but these magazines may still be on the newstands, and each contains a wonderful CD. The December issue of *Mojo* (Led Zeppelin on the cover) includes a 15-cut collection titled "Let's Move – A Heavy Blues Collection." There's a savvy blend of Chicago greats such as Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley, Junior Wells, Magic Sam and Jimmy Dawkins along with other giants like B.B. King, Lightnin' Hopkins and Elmore James. There's also such Memphis/Mississippi acts as R.L. Burnside and T-Model Ford.

Oxford American's annual Southern music issue spotlights Louisiana. The companion disc (the 14th in the series) is billed as "The Music of Louisiana." It's a 21-tune slice of everything in that state's vast catalog. Clarence Garlow's "Bon Ton Roula" leads it off and the Kid Ory Jazz Band's traditional New Orleans classic "Shine" concludes it. Between those poles, the set mixes stomping R&B, swaying Cajun/Zydeco, rock, swamp pop, blues, country, gospel, novelty pieces, even Dr. John's wild and weird "The Patriotic Flag Weaver." Just as the magazine's printed material spans the gamut, so does this CD, the perfect introduction to the state's distinguished musical legacy.

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About Ron Wynn

Ron Wynn is a music critic, author and editor. His features, reviews and articles have run locally in the Nashville Scene, The City Paper (Nashville) and on ArtNowNashville.com among others. Wynn is currently sports editor for the Tennessee Tribune and a contributor to Jazz Times. He is former editor of the New Memphis Star and former chief jazz and pop music critic for the Bridgeport Post-Telegram and the Memphis Commercial Appeal. Wynn has contributed to such publications such as *Billboard*, *The Village Voice*, *Creem*, *Rock & Roll Disc*, *Living Blues*, *The Boston Phoenix*, and *Rejoice*. He was the editor of the first edition of *The All Music Guide to Jazz* (1994), and from 1993 to 1994 served as the jazz and rap editor of the *All Music Guide*. Wynn is the author of *The Tina Turner Story*. He has contributed liner notes for numerous albums; his liner notes for "The Soul of Country Music" received a 1998 Grammy nomination.

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