



# Fusion REVIEWS



NO:

## Moonlight Benjamin Siltane

Ma Case (42 mins)



**Voodoo-driven blues rock from a Haitian in France**



After Mélissa Laveaux produced the first great Haitian album in an age earlier this year with *Radyo Siwèl*, here comes a second rather wonderful distillation of the island's clattering, rebellious spirit. Cue the joke about waiting for buses. The singer Moonlight Benjamin left Haiti for France some years ago, but she packed her voodoo melodies and rhythms with her and on *Siltane* she fuses them with a heavy, guitar-laden blues-rock vibe that owes something to the likes of the Black Keys and Alabama Shakes. Her voice has the power of Angélique Kidjo at her most intense as she shifts dramatically between deep trance and volcanic explosion.

Tracks such as 'Memwa'n' and 'Papa Legba' clothe the traditions of voodoo folklore in thundering electric beats. By contrast 'Simbi' is a stripped-down chant featuring only percussion and voice. Best of all, though, is 'Port-au-Prince', with its simmering rumba rhythm that recalls the work of Cuba's Los Zafros while Benjamin's voice booms with operatic emotion and Matthis Pascaud's twanging lead guitar lines evoke the work of Ry Cooder and Manuel Galbán on 2003's *Mambo Sinuendo*. The only complaint is that it would have been nice to have translations of the lyrics, which Benjamin sings in both Creole and French. Play as loud as you dare.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Port-au-Prince*

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OF THE  
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can technically do in a top-class studio. For a particularly depressing example, listen to 'Wordless', which combines keyboards, flamenco guitar, *duduk* and rock drumming for a very long four minutes over a dreary repeated chord sequence. Or, as Nitish Kulkarni would have it, 'a pan-global sound spanning all the continents.'

SIMON BROUGHTON

**TRACK TO TRY** Listen: *Mbira*

## Loxandra In Transition

Dalit Music (52 mins)



**Explorations in the eastern Med**



This is a very welcome return by the Thessaloniki-based group Loxandra. This recording has

many of the features that made their previous two releases so interesting and fun to listen to. And here they may even have gone one better. As before, the compositions cross a number of musical boundaries, from Turkey to the Balkans, taking largely traditional pieces and reworking them through well-thought-out arrangements that play to the strengths of the traditional instruments, but here with an

injection of Latin and jazz. Shot through with Balkan dance rhythms and a solid base provided by the percussionists, the tracks leave space for individuals to really shine.

While singer Ria Ellinidou is fantastic and it would be hard to imagine many of the tracks without her voice, I was really drawn to the instrumental 'Balkan Salsa'. It has everything from a lively bounce and energy, to some virtuosic playing from Makis Baklatzis on violin and Nikos Angousis on clarinet.

*In Transition* is a life-affirming and deeply satisfying recording that anyone with an interest in the eastern Mediterranean will enjoy greatly.

MARIA LORD

**TRACK TO TRY** *Balkan Salsa*

## Oi Dipnoi Pontos

NarRator Records (62 mins)



**Visionary Sicilians fuse trad with exploratory prog rock**



Dipnoi are living fossils: fish furnished with rudimentary lungs (which is why they're also called

lung fish), allowing them to take refuge in burrows during dry periods and breathe air. As an analogy for the group that takes their name, it asserts an enduring will to challenge the severe economic and cultural conditions hindering musicians to realise their art.

The trio comprises Valerio Cairone (on diatonic accordion, *zampogna a paro* bagpipes and vocals), Marco Carnemolla (fretless bass and vocals) and Mario Gulisano (percussion, Jew's harp and voice). The combination of timbres and techniques guarantee a creative result, with all the melodic and harmonic strength of the diatonic accordion and *zampogna* supported by the steady bass and percussion. A standout track is 'Terramatta', in which a catchy groove supports the bagpipe-led melody. In 'Suez/Om Jag Hade Vingar' the band's minimalism encounters the Swedish vocal quartet Kraja and Laura Cortese & The Dance Cards string trio. 'Ponte Dell'Ovest' is a fine waltz-time ballad, while 'Oceania' features various melodic and harmonic elements, which move from an intimate tune into a danceable number. A fascinating and accomplished fusion: you'll keep coming back to *Pontos*.

CIRO DE ROSA

**TRACK TO TRY** *Terramatta* ▶

