

As *Griot Classique's* title suggests, Mamadou's sixth album in a 15-year recording career is his equivalent to Toumani's *Mande Variations*. An exquisite collection of solo improvisations based mostly on classical Mande melodies, it's delivered not only with a deep knowledge of the tradition and total mastery of his instrument but also with thrilling versatility and innovation. He's also blessed with a mischievous sense of humour and titles one of the loveliest pieces 'Keep it Simple'. It probably is the most straightforward tune in the collection, but still sounds like a work of impossibly profound complexity to these ears. Nearer the mark is the title he gives to the closing piece, on which he sounds as if he's playing two or three instruments simultaneously – 'Master Kora Only'.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

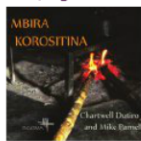
TRACK TO TRY *Nelson Mandela*

Chartwell Dutiro & Mike Parnell Mbira Korositina

Ingoma Records (49 mins)

★★★★★

All fingers and thumb pianos



Chartwell Dutiro is a well-known *mbira* (thumb piano) player, a former member of Thomas

Mapfumo's group, and a teacher of Shona music from Zimbabwe. He has teamed up with Mike Parnell, who is a student of mbira, but plays a concertina on this recording.

On the surface it may seem an unusual instrumental combination. However the colonial history of Zimbabwe saw the instrument carried there by missionaries in the late 19th century. It is therefore a highly apposite collision of sounds – the pump-organ sonorities of the concertina fitting well with the delicate repeated sounds of plucked metallic keys from the thumb piano.

Almost inevitably, the sound of the concertina conjures up the atmosphere of the sea shanty, though in this case it is a delightfully sleepy and gentle sea shanty, rather than a rousing singalong affair. The Shona vocals are multi-tracked by Chartwell Dutiro himself and their hypnotic and repetitive nature contributes to a very captivating ambiance. The track 'Tobin's', for example, is clearly a jig rather than a traditional Shona composition. Yet the mbira accompaniment and Shona lyrics fit perfectly with the concertina's sweet melody line. Dutiro and Parnell's *Mbira Korositina* is a very impressive fusion album of seemingly improbable sounds.

MARTIN SINNOCK

TRACK TO TRY *Tobin's*

Kamatana Remember

EchoLocation World Music (37 mins)

★★★★★

Intriguing bass lyre sounds



This is a style of music that has received little exposure outside of the Nyanza province in

western Kenya. It is specific to the Gusi tribe and performed on this disc by two musicians working under the name Kamatana. Samwel and Dominic Ogari play the *obokano*, a large traditional bass lyre that has a deep sound, often sounding more like a saxophone than the conventional harp-like sound of a lyre. The repertoire is a mixture of traditional Gusi songs and some of their own newly composed songs. However there is quite a contemporary feeling to the material – mainly due to the vocal style, which sounds upbeat and aggressive in an on-the-street fashion. It is highly infectious and thoroughly entertaining.

In addition to the buzzing and throbbing sound of the lyres there is a percussive rhythm provided by shakers and some additional instrumentation from animal horn and didgeridoo. Kamatana's *Remember* is a fascinating revelation.

MARTIN SINNOCK

TRACK TO TRY *Nairobi Sinai*

Magic System Africainment Vôte

Parlophone France (53 mins)

★★★★★

Music that will stick to you like zougou



Magic System, the Ivory Coast's most successful proponents of *zougou* – a mix of *zouk*, *ragga*

and *soca* music – return with their seventh album, sticking to the tried and tested but altogether enjoyable formula of their previous work.

Their marrying of synths and Auto-tuned vocals to a distinctly West African rhythmic basis makes for a hugely danceable and energetic record. The only reservations for this album concern *Africainment Vôte's* lead single 'Magic in the Air', which has done fantastically well commercially, but sounds overworked; it is an overtly self-conscious attempt at creating an anthem for the World Cup.

Their music works best when it's not trying too hard to be something it's not, and this really shows on the more modest tracks such as 'Kanga Leo' and 'L'Homme qui a Peur'. The manner in which the vocals glide across the beat in the latter is superb, and creates a fantastically funky feel to the piece. All in all, it's a great ▶

Les Ambassadeurs

Les Ambassadeurs du Motel de Bamako

Sterns Music (2 CDs, 115 mins)

★★★★★

Mali's models of musical diplomacy



What a joy it must have been to see and hear Les Ambassadeurs in the mid-70s, playing in the motel from which they took their name by the Niger river: an experience akin to seeing the Beatles at the Cavern or the Rolling Stones at the Marquee Club circa 1963. For, alongside the Rail Band who played across town at the Buffet Hotel, Les Ambassadeurs laid the foundations on which popular Malian music is still built to this day. Their eminence lasted only a few brief years before most of the band defected to Abidjan in 1978, but they left us half a dozen singles and two albums, all recorded at their peak between 1975 and 1977,

from which the 18 tracks in this evocative collection are taken.

The golden voice of the group's most famous son, Salif Keita, is heard on exactly half of the numbers, but he was only a part of the glory. Ousmane Dia, formerly of the Star Band of Dakar, sings on four tracks, and he wasn't far behind Keita in soulfulness. Then there are the spiralling guitars of Kanté Manfila and Ousmane Kouyaté, the atmospheric organ of Idrissa Soumaoro and the crack horn section, showing extraordinary versatility whether essaying thrumming Mande roots styles, swaying Afro-Cuban *charanga*, James Brown-tinged Afro-funk or rocking, Fela-styled beats. Essential.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Mali Denou*



▶ **GET THIS ALBUM FREE** Readers can get *Les Ambassadeurs du Motel de Bamako* when subscribing or renewing with Direct Debit. See CD flyer