

**Rajery, Sissoko
and El Maloumi**



piano, and the surefooted bass/drums team of Zoltan Dekany and John Perry. The tight, familiar turns of some of these themes sometimes make you wonder whether you're sleepwalking in a melange of post-1980s nu-bop albums you've heard somewhere before, but this high-class band traverses much-trodden ground with plenty of character. **JF**

**Rajery, Ballaké
Sissoko, Driss
el Maloumi**

3MA



(Contre-Jour, Harmonia Mundi) £12.99

The title is explained by the geography. Here are three great artists who come from across Africa, from the "3Mas": Madagascar, Mali and Maroc (Morocco). They are all exponents of stringed instruments that played a crucial role in their countries before the arrival of the guitar, and this gently exquisite set explores the links between their styles. Mali's Ballaké Sissoko is the best-known of the three; he ranks alongside his friend Toumani Diabaté as one of the finest kora players in the world. He's joined here by Driss el Maloumi on the north African/Middle Eastern oud, and

Rajery, a master of the valiha, which is a tubular zither constructed around a hollowed piece of bamboo and one of the national instruments of Madagascar. There are occasional vocals, such as some cheerful scat from Rajery, and virtuoso solo tracks from all three, including a rhythmic workout from El Maloumi. But what makes this set special are the collaborations and interplay between the musicians, as they switch between lead work and gently sturdy backing, on stately or reflective tracks that echo their backgrounds, from the Sahara to the Indian Ocean.

Robin Denselow

Pinetop Perkins

Pinetop Perkins
and Friends



(Telarc Blues) £12.99

Pinetop Perkins is one of the great survivors, and one of the last great Mississippi bluesmen from the generation who moved with the music, from the delta up to Memphis and then Chicago. He's a fine pianist and singer, and his extraordinary career included a 12-year stint with Muddy Waters and collaborations with other legendary players, from Sonny Boy Williamson to John Lee Hooker and Howlin' Wolf. He turned 95 last month and he's still in remarkable form. He shows off his rolling, upbeat boogie piano style, and still-gutsy vocals, on the self-written standard *Take It Easy Baby*, and there are more impressive vocals, and slower, delicate blues work on the final *Bad Luck Baby*. He's joined by a suitable array of celebrity guests including BB King, who provides lead guitar and backing vocals on *Down in Mississippi*, and Eric Clapton adding some impressively understated guitar on the best track, a medley of *How Long Blues* and *Come Back Baby*. It all makes for a solid, entertaining set, even though he revives all the predictable old standards, from *Got My Mojo Working* to *Hoochie Coochie Man*. Even at his age, he makes it sound just a little too easy. **RD**

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