



User Functions

- [My Calendar](#)
- [Forum Features](#)
- [Account Information](#)
- [Preferences](#)
- [Log Out](#)

World Music News

- [Film Reviews](#) (1/0)
- [General News](#) (381/1)
- [Interviews](#) (28/0)
- [Articles](#) (128/2)
- [CD Reviews](#) (493/2)
- [Book Reviews](#) (18/0)
- [Editorials](#) (15/0)
- [Dis.Chord.ia](#) (2/0)
- [Tour Announcements](#) (132/1)
- [Concert reviews](#) (71/0)
- [Events](#) (400/2) »
- [New Releases](#) (515/1) »
- [Awards](#) (56/0)
- [Obituaries](#) (115/0)

World Music Resources

- [Artist biographies](#)
- [Booking agents](#)
- [Distributors](#)
- [Local Music Guides](#)
- [Record labels](#)
- [Mailing Lists](#)
- [World Music Media](#)
- [Organizations](#)
- [Trade shows](#)

Live music:

- [Venues](#)

Education:

- [Dance schools](#)
- [Ethnomusicology](#)
- [Museums](#)
- [Music schools](#)

Glossaries:

- [World dances](#)
- [Musical genres](#)
- [World Instruments](#)

Humor:

- [Humor](#)

Gangbè Brass Band in Seattle

11/09 09:46PM

Contributed by: [WMC News Dept.](#)

Author:

Patty-Lynne Herlevi



Gangbè Brass Band
The Triple Door
Seattle, Washington
Earshot Jazz Festival
November 5, 2005 (early show)

It's the rainy season in Seattle and many of us here are begging for a sunny day or two. Fortunately, for us, the [gangbe Brass Band](#) (gong-bay) supplied us with 75 minutes of musical sunshine. With only 11 dates on their U.S. tour, seeing Benin's Gangbè Brass Band in concert is like winning the lottery. This musical import from the small West African country, Benin ([Angelique Kidjo](#) also hails from Benin), offered Seattlelites an enticing recipe of military brass, New Orleans jazz, Afro-Beat and voodoo ritual chants, sometimes all appearing in the same song.

The band is comprised of 10 musicians. Three of the musicians Benoit Avihoue, Crespin Kpitiki and Jean Gnonlonfoun pounded out polyrhythms on traditional West African drums and percussion while the remaining 7 musicians including James Vodounnon on tuba, plied the audience with a sizzling cacophony of very brassy horns. Instead of the usual conga line, the musicians formed a horn line and at times, they paraded around the stage as if it were the middle of carnival season. Certainly the New Orleans jazz came in handy and these musicians doled it out to their hungry fans in large doses.

The musicians took to the stage in their bare feet, igniting ecstatic drumming, and polyphonic horns which alternated with call & response vocals. The audience members for the most part already seemed intimate with the Gangbè musicians, most likely due to radio airplay on two African music shows that grace community airwaves in the Seattle area and a promotional effort by the folks with the Earshot Jazz Festival. A handful of audience members, some of West African descent seemed rather brazen climbing up on the stage and dancing with the band members. One woman in particular climbed up on the stage several times pasting bills onto the musicians' foreheads. After all, this is a custom in West Africa and one that I wish would catch on for Seattle musicians who struggle to make ends meet. The dancer started a trend and soon, others mustered up the courage and climbed on stage, placing bills on the musicians like children pinning the tail on the donkey.

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It was a bit distracting, but the musicians seemed to enjoy the audience response to their wildly delightful music. At least they played along with it, never losing the glint of their gleeful smiles and never losing a beat even when their eyes were blindfolded with money. But this band isn't about money. Their music is too authentic and heart centered to be about money.

[GBB](#) featured several songs from their latest recording, [Whendo](#) (World Village) including a rousing Johodo that was followed by a solo performance of a hypnotic ritualistic voodoo chant. I am not sure if audience members knew what they were experiencing, but they applauded enthusiastically nonetheless. They could have waited a few beats however before interrupting the trance-like atmosphere the musician had created with his musical magic. The song Glessi came off as an odd marriage between a Mexican ranchera and a New Orleans jazz circus. I felt geographically disorientated--we're we in West Africa, New Orleans or Mexico?

"Awhan-Ho" featured a cappella call & response in a true tribal fashion. However, the show stopper, "Remember



Fela" was the real darling of the evening. The tuba transformed into funky bass, the horns took on more punch than in previous songs and the polyrhythms were pure ecstasy on this Afro-Beat send-up. One of the vocalist even rapped in the middle of the song. This was the song that got audience members up on their feet and moving. Certainly we were experienced the musical climax of the set. I couldn't stop thinking how empty I would feel returning to my cold apartment after experiencing this sizzling music. GBB ended the show with "Noubioto," but I could have stayed all night listening to this band play.

Throughout the evening, the musicians played their songs without commentary. But at the end of the show, one of the musician spoke to us in halted English. Music translates into any language and GBB's repertoire translates into the language of joy. I doubt there was anyone leaving the Triple Door without a huge smile on their face. It will be a long time before we forget GBB if ever and this was just the first show of the evening. The second show was sold out and the fans standing in line were champing at the bit. Bring 'em back!

by Patty-Lynne Herlevi, [Cranky Crow World Music](#)

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Gangbè Brass Band in Seattle

Authored by: [SpinTheGlobe](#) on 11/09 11:34PM

Oh, yeah - it was an amazing show. It was amusing watching the festival staff agonize over what to do with the audience members who wanted to dance or spray the musicians with \$\$\$. In the end, they pretty much just let it happen. It would be amazing to see this group in a more intimate setting, with less of a barrier (physical and social) between stage and audience.

For my own blog take on gangbe Brass Band, check out [SoundRoots World Music & Global Culture Blog](#).

And your wish appears to be the [International Children's Festival](#)'s command - they've already booked gangbe for the 2006 festival, and the Benin brassmen will be doing shows all week, as well as in Tacoma. The festival runs May 15-20 in Seattle, and May 22 in Tacoma. It's mostly a daytime festival aimed at schoolkids, but well worth the trip for any world music/dance lover.

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