

E4

WORLD MUSIC REVIEW

A Band Ignores Geography

By JON PARELES

New Orleans and Lagos both seemed equally close to Benin when the Gangbe Brass Band made its euphoric New York debut at Joe's Pub on Wednesday night. The band has the world in its grasp; its music leaps among the many ethnic traditions of its home, Benin, and beyond to Africa and the New World's African diaspora, segueing from traditional voodoo rhythms to jazz without missing a syncopated beat.

"Gangbe" means "metal sound" in the Fon language, and at Joe's Pub the band didn't pick up its trumpet, trombone or saxophone until its second song. The metal sounds that started the set came from the tapping of bells, large and small, and from a piece of metal, which looked like a chunk of a girder, that was attached to a band member's cap and played with his hands over his head.

From there the songs could trans-

form themselves at any moment. Tubalike vamps on euphonium carried tunes shared by trumpets and trombones, with Samuel Gnonlonfoun's puckish trumpet solos cementing the connection to New Orleans brass bands. Vocal harmonies often interlocked with complex drum patterns akin to Nigerian juju, while at times the music took on the three-chord lilt of Ghanaian high life.

The musicians chanted together over drums, then picked up instruments to riff like the horn section of an Afrobeat funk band; members stepped forward to dance barefoot, sing or rap.

At one point the band took up the swing standard "Night Train," joined by the jazz trombonist Roswell Rudd, before shifting back into African rhythms.

Each song stayed unpredictable to the end, when, likely as not, the horns would toss off a tricky little tag and suddenly stop, as if to suggest that the band's musical bounty had barely been tapped.