

GANGBE BRASS BAND

Togbe Contre Jour CJ 009

Two from Africa, both international debuts and both showing a lot of promise. Ejigayehu 'Gigi' Shibabaw is a US based Ethiopian singer of real soul. Already a rising star amongst the Ethiopian community, she's now going for the world with a funky Bill Laswell production featuring a roll call of big name jazz guests (Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Pharoah Sanders, Graham Haynes, Henry Threadgill and a good few more). She holds her own impressively in this company, with her cool but passionate vocals and knack for penning a good tune. Clearly she's been listening to a fair bit of US jazz and soul but equally her voice retains that typically Ethiopian elastic quality whatever the context. Favourite tracks include the haunting closer *Adwa* (featuring the unmistakable sound of Pharoah Sanders' sax) and *Guramayle*, just about the catchiest love song I've heard in an age. Throughout Laswell's production is beautifully textured with lots of unusual touches (tablas, accordions). This is his best work in a long time and feels like a labour of love. A crossover album that's worth the ride.

If Gigi's album has a whiff of the smoky New York jazz club about it then Benin's Gangbe Brass Band have something of a New Orleans second line shuffle in their sound, as well as echoes of anywhere else that bands get brassy (from the Balkans to Bombay).

Made up of a group of 10 young jazz musicians who got together in 1994 to explore and experiment with their roots, the Gangbes have honed a rich sound where fat brass nestles alongside a battery of percussion and warm melodic call and response vocals. These different elements are combined in various ways so that things never go stale. They get quite sophisticated one minute, deliciously rootsy the next. On this evidence, they'd burn it up live as well. Recommended.

Jamie Renton