



Gangbe Brass Band

Joe's Pub; Wed 18

The first few notes from the Gangbe Brass Band ring out like a clarion call: These musicians will celebrate anything that gets them drunk on sound. In the band's dizzyingly gorgeous horn lines, rolling vamps carry sunny African chorales, and polyrhythmic voodoo grooves host harmonies that slide in all directions at once. The music just plain sings.

The members of Gangbe are somewhat disciplined by their native Benin's colonial legacy of military fanfares, but they subvert even martial beats into a brisk efficiency of exuberance. Gangbe (which means "the sound of metal") features seven horns—trumpets, trombones, saxophones and a tuba as bassist—and three drummers. This rich instrumentation, along with striking costumes and choreography, introduces Gangbe as the modern cultural ambassadors of traditional Beninese song.

But beyond the unabashed goodwill, Gangbe's harmonic and rhythmic sophistication is so peculiar that it sounds like something an avant-garde jazz guy from Fort Greene might cook up. You could swear that the band has Henry

Threadgill's keyed-up carnival in mind, or maybe the extravagant tent show fantasies of the late Lester Bowie. But the music of Threadgill and Bowie is animated with ironic savagery, with a st of ammonia. Gangbe's unapologetically happy sound suggests a less self-conscious path of development. The group has a kinship with Fela's Afrobeat and the juju of King Sunny Ade, but the mambofied horn arrangements also recall that Cuban music was once the rock & roll of West Africa. And Gangbe sometimes explores the slave trade-established Bahia-Benin connection with contemporary Afro-Brazilian carnival music.

It all adds up to an Africanist musicologist's dream. And now that the Gangbe Brass Band is finally making its first U.S. tour, we can ask the group how Cuban cultural exports, the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Brazilian pop music might have figured into its development. Or we can just revel in the implications of a brass band from the southern forests of Benin arriving independently at a similar musical solution as urbanite jazz conceptualists. Or we can just get buzzed on the brass, which pours out sound like libations to music itself.—Michelle Mercer