

The Americas

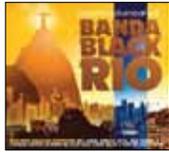
Banda Black Rio SuperNovaSambaFunk

Far Out

Full Price (68 mins)

★★★★

Brazil's brightest and best team up for a funky Rio rejoinder



Over a decade that's seen all kinds of obscure and often fantastic Brazilian funk prised from the archives, the band that first carried the black Rio sound abroad have been conspicuous by their relative absence. In fact it's been over a decade since William Magalhães, son of the band's late founder Oberdan, reformed BBR for the well-received *Rebirth* album. *SuperNovaSambaFunk* pretty much picks up where that record left off, albeit with a roll call of collaborators both crusty and contemporary. Predictably perhaps, Seu Jorge pops up within a couple of tracks, although if there's anyone who can recontextualise that vintage BBR sound it's surely him and 'Louis Lane' doesn't disappoint – a sun-bleached, P-funkesque monster with all its references down pat. Much of the rest of the album is smoother and more soulful, with Luaka Bop signing Marcio Local crooning his way through 'Quem Vem Lá' and the likes of 'It's The Time' reminiscent of vintage Talking Loud funky soul. With hypnotic standout 'Paname', however, Magalhães proves himself as far-sighted as anyone in São Paulo, brilliantly locating the ghost of Marvin Gaye in the electro-grinding, Francophone machine of Brazil-based Congolese rapper, Pyroman. The old guard are saved till last, as the former minister Gilberto Gil broods some wisdom into the Afro-Brazilian percussion of 'Ireré' and Caetano Veloso hovers tantalisingly over the really quite lovely closer, 'Aos Pés Do Redentor'. The flip side of all these collaborative sparks, alas, is the loss of the kind of seamless sonic vision that made the recent *Azymuth* album so intoxicating.

Brendon Griffen

Blind Boys of Alabama Take The High Road

Saguaro Road

Full Price (54 mins)

★★★★

Gospel legends take a Nashville vacation



There's an obvious parallel between the Blind Boys of Alabama and South Africa's Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Both are veteran vocal groups who have achieved considerable commercial success with an instantly identifiable style. But the tendency for their recordings to sound somewhat similar means record buyers

require a bit of extra persuasion that they need to own more than a single album by either group. To meet this challenge, record companies and management are constantly seeking to set their assets in a different musical context, in an attempt – a far too brazenly desperate attempt, sometimes – to broaden their appeal. This has led to LBM recording both a classical album and a horrid dance remix collection. In the case of the Blind Boys, it has resulted in duets with Lou Reed and reggae singer Toots Hibbert, a collection of Christmas carols and a contemporary rock album with Ben Harper. Now they've hightailed to Nashville to record a country collection. There are some interesting moments which draw out a common thread or two between black gospel and white Bible Belt styles, as country stars such as Willie Nelson, Vince Gill, Hank Williams Junior and Lee Ann Womack add their voices to a bunch of testifying songs, both ancient and modern. But the twanging steel guitars, country fiddles and mandolins too often sound like a gimmick, and the best material comes when the Boys are allowed to be their traditional selves without the guest singers, such as Muddy Waters' gospel-blues 'Why Don't You Live So God Can Use You' and the stirring, sanctified funk of 'Jesus Hold my Hand'.

Nigel Williamson

Juan Carlos Cáceres Noche de Carnaval

Manaña

Mid Price (42 mins)

★★★★

Morose tango man's piano gets a shiny polish



You have to give Juan Carlos Cáceres credit for productivity – and for effort. No sooner have we let one of his albums of riotous *murga*-laced jazz tango fade out than here he comes again with a fresh offering – and, as ever, we get the gloomy, nostalgia-laden

lyrics about tango's passing, the anti-gloomy plinky-plonky piano at the front, and a few deep-voiced exhortations to send us on our way. Where to is usually the same place, but the sure hand of the Mañana label owner and Gotan Project guitarist Eduardo Makaroff means this latest collection of 13 tracks is more polished and more considered than other recent Cáceres ventures. Opening with a Charleston isn't as surprising as it might be. Juan Carlos Cáceres is a deracinated ex-pat pianist and he finds a home wherever his vocal range fits. A couple of tracks on and we get a sweet, folklore-inflected song called 'Pachamama', a reference to the pre-Incan earth mother of the Andean high plains. Elsewhere it's Cáceres's usual brand of percussive tangos of varying rhythm, with gruff lead vocals by the big man and, on occasion, a chorus of male voices that are more football match than Welsh chapel. As an interpretation of the carnival idea, Cáceres is intriguing, not least because there's not much that's festive or fun-loving in the lyrics; but there is always feeling, and that drives the material along.

Chris Moss

Ahmed Dickinson & Trio Mestizo The Havana Suite

Cubafilin Records

Full Price (56 mins)

★★★★

Young ex-pat pays homage to an old master



With the current vogue for sharp-edged Cuban sounds – funky *timba*, relentless reggaeton, heavy duty *salsa dura* – showing no signs of abating, it's easy to forget that there are other, more refined works coming out of this most musical of Caribbean islands. This beautifully crafted release by the young classical guitar virtuoso Ahmed Dickinson is one such example. A sincere homage to Havana in

all its tumble-down, tourist-strewn glory, it sees the London-based Dickinson working alongside percussionist Hammadi Rencurrell, a fellow graduate of Havana's Superior Institute of Art who, like Dickinson, was awarded first-class honours, and the talented British-Spanish violinist Emma Blanco. The focus here is on the music of the hallowed, still prolific Cuban guitarist, composer and professor Eduardo Martin, whose compositions explore the links between a host of Cuban musical genres: *rumba*, *danzon*, bolero, *changui*, *chachachá* and *timba*.

That's the focus, then. But it's Dickinson who's the star. Routinely lauded for his technical brilliance, the artist has truly come into his own here. Pieces such as 'Canciones de Tropicales' and 'Trazos En El Aire' are delivered elegantly, melodiously, with a warm and easy fingerpicking style that belies its difficulty. Space is given where space is due; classical genres are brought to life, refreshed. The increasingly acclaimed Dickinson would do well to include a few originals on his next release. This one, however, is another marker on his ascent.

Jane Cornwell

Los Fabulocos featuring Kid Ramos Dos

Delta Groove Music

Mid Price (45 mins)

★★★★

Swinging, soulful norteño music



Los Angeles' population is now more than 50% Mexican. Yet if you follow the mainstream media you would believe that this great music city is home only to Katy Perry, Snoop Dog and countless dire indie rock bands. The excellent Los Lobos have been the only Mexican Angelenos to attract attention – and they broke through almost 30 years ago. Mexicans love music and have one of the strongest traditional music cultures in the Americas: in the US the vast majority of Mexican American musicians earn a living performing for their own community. Los Fabulocos – four veteran Chicanos – look likely to win a broader audience. Their sound remains largely that of *norteño*, the accordion-powered polka music, yet into this they add Kid Ramos' tasty electric guitar playing. Songs are sung in English or Spanish and are delivered with a forcefulness that suggests Los Fabulocos are very much in tune with contemporary realities. Strong vocals and dynamic ensemble playing add a real element of urgency to the music and Jesus Cuevas' soulful vocals demand attention, especially on 'The Coffee Song' and 'Un Puno de Tierra'.

This is an album for both dancing and



Trio Mestizo: Ahmed Dickinson (right) with Emma Blanco and Hammadi Rencurrell

DAN PLUCK