

VARIOUS ARTISTS
*The Rough Guide to African
 Roots Revival*

Konono No.1, Staff Benda Bilili, Bedouin Jerry Can Band, Mbira DzeNharira, Bassekou Kouyate, et al
 Plus bonus disc: *Introducing... Kenge Kenge*
 World Music Network RGN1269CD (2 CDs).
 2012. Phil Stanton, Dominic Raymond-Barker,
 compilation prods.; Lawrence Cedar,
 mastering. AAD. TT: 2:09:06

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

The unifying theme of this Rough Guide compilation is rough indeed: African musicians reviving or reinventing traditional styles (except when they don't), often (but not always) performing on original homemade instruments.

The most compelling tracks are by the groups Konono No.1 and Staff Benda Bilili, both from the Congolese capital of Kinshasa and both featured on the Belgian Crammed Discs label's series of *Congotronics* albums. Konono No.1's crudely amplified thumb pianos suggest highly syncopated electronica, while Staff Benda Bilili's funky electric guitars are augmented by a one-string lute made from a paint can. But while the results are exhilarating, neither band revives anything especially traditional. Similarly modern and likewise appealing are the Kasai Allstars, also from Congo, and Jagwa Music, from Tanzania. Other artists use traditional instruments in novel ways, such as Zimbabwe's Mbira DzeNharira, whose members play thumb pianos in an ensemble rather than individually, or Mali's Bassekou Kouyate, who applies new techniques to the banjo-like *ngoni*.

Ironically, the group that best fits the roots-revival theme is the one on the accompanying bonus CD: Kenge Kenge, from Kenya, who reinvent their country's popular *benga* style by replacing electric guitars with traditional instruments of the Luo people. —Larry Birnbaum

JAZZ



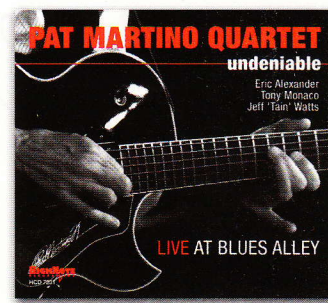
**ARUÁN ORTIZ & THE CAMERATA
 URBANA ENSEMBLE**
Santiarian Blues Suite

Aruán Ortiz, Katya Mihailova, piano; Zoe Hillengas, flute; Francisco Salazar, Luis Casals, Machiko Ozawa, violin; Samuel Marchan, viola; Brian Sanders, cello; Pedro Giraudo, Anthony Morris, bass; Mauricio Herrera, percussion
 Sunnyside SSC 1302 (CD). 2012. Aruán Ortiz, prod.;
 David Stoller, eng. DDD?
 TT: 35:19

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Whether he's arranging *charanga* classics for flutist Mark Weinstein (on *El Cumbanchero*) or interpreting Charlie Parker and Ornette Coleman on his latest Fresh Sound quartet disc (*Orbiting*), pianist Aruán Ortiz is shaping a personal approach to the Afro-Cuban jazz tradition. His *Santiarian Blues Suite* is more ambitious still: the five-movement work for flute, piano, strings, and percussion lasts only 35 minutes but evokes a world of color and mood. The suite combines the earthy groove of the clave with the high dissonance and warm sonorities of a modern chamber piece. It's not a piano showcase—in fact, percussionist Mauricio Herrera steals the show with galvanizing and textured rhythms, beautifully captured on this recording from Brooklyn's Samurai Hotel Studios.

Hailing from Santiago de Cuba, Ortiz is of Haitian descent and brings a variety of Afro-Haitian influences to bear. *Diaspora*, the opening movement, establishes flutist Zoe Hillengas as a dominant voice over legato strings and clacking percussion. *San Pascual Bailón*, based on *tango haitiano* rhythms, sounds like a marriage of Chick Corea and Béla Bartók. *Sagrado* is slow and dark, with gorgeous flute/strings interaction and tense percussion motifs that lead inexorably to *Jubilee/Comparsa*, the 11-minute showstopper of a finale. The breaks and unison passages at the climax are astonishing—imperfect yet full of life. It's the sound of a band at its limits, confronting challenges and emerging victorious. —David R. Adler



PAT MARTINO QUARTET
Undeniable: Live at Blues Alley

Pat Martino, guitar; Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; Tony Monaco, organ; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums
 HighNote HCD 7231 (CD). 2011. Pat Martino, Joseph Donofrio, prods.; Kirk Yano, eng. DDD? TT: 59:04

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

It's a genre set in stone. You don't go to organ-combo jazz for intellectual challenge. You don't go to your favorite greasy spoon for haute cuisine. You go to both for trustworthy repeatable fulfillment of a recurring hunger.

But one of the miraculous facts about jazz is that, in the right hands, all valid genres are capable of releasing revelations. On *Undeniable*, we are in the right hands. These four guys (including the least famous, organist Tony Monaco) are all erudite world-class musicians with nasty streaks.

Pat Martino's rarefied chops are respected by all living jazz guitarists, but his roots are in take-no-prisoners organ combos led by people like Brother Jack McDuff and Don Patterson in clubs like Smalls Paradise, in Harlem. Six of the seven pieces are his, and if none is technically the blues, it doesn't matter. Everything here has blues truth and body heat. In tunes like "Side Effect" and "Lean Years," Martino's solos are soaring arcs within the blues idiom, fierce with ideas. His sidemen deserve much of the credit. By the time Martino takes over on "Goin' to a Meeting," Monaco has already incited a riot. Alexander is insidious on slow blues like "Double Play."

This is high-level party music, sweaty and communal. It needs to be recorded in a joint, not a sterile studio. *Undeniable* comes from Blues Alley, in Washington, DC. Blues Alley must be a righteous hang. Wynton Marsalis, Hod O'Brien, and Stanley Turrentine made some of their best records there. Add Pat Martino to the list. —Thomas Conrad