

HIGHLIFE

BEST OF 2007

1317 Commercial Drive
Vancouver BC Canada V5L 3X5
Tel. 604-251-6964
Fax 604-255-3989
Email info@highlifeworld.com
www.highlifeworld.com

MAVIS STAPLES *We'll Never Turn Back* USA
In the spirit of the Staple Singers 60's classics, this new Mavis Staples CD revisits the civil rights era and its stories, presenting a panorama of music infused with the spirit of social justice. Sympathetically produced by Ry Cooder, and utilizing the sublime backing of Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the original Freedom singers, this is music that inspires and entertains us with its exuberance and beauty.

VIEUX FARKA TOURE Mali
The son of the late Malian guitar great Ali Farka Toure steps out on his own on this remarkable debut. His father adds his touch on a couple of songs, recorded shortly before his passing, and kora legend Toumani Diabate drops in, but the focus is on high energy Malian roots, with the occasional reggae flavor seeping in to good effect. One of the great surprises of the year.

GAUDI & NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN *Dub Qawwali* Pakistan/UK
Mix maestro extraordinaire Gaudi has taken some buried Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan recordings from the 60's and 70's and magically infused them with a dub/reggae vibe. The results are instantly infectious, with one of the 20th century's great voices presented in a fresh new light. One of our favorite albums of the year.

ANDY PALACIO *Watina* Belize
The leading light on the Belizean music scene delves into his 'Garifuna' roots to deliver this immensely satisfying slice of Afro-Caribbean music. The lilting melodies echo Cuban son, Caribbean calypso and various African traditions, while Palacio's warm vocals recall some reggae greats. This refreshing disc gets better with each listen.

FEDERICO AUBELE *Panamericana* Argentina

Federico Aubele's music is a seamless blending of hypnotic Spanish guitar, the dubby atmospherics of a Thievery Corporation production, and the sensuous vocals of Natalie Clavier. A lovely follow-up to his impressive debut.

BOLE 2 HARLEM Ethiopia/UK

Ethiopian song meets New York strut on this compelling musical project. A feeling of celebration permeates the entire affair, which expertly combines its traditional and contemporary elements. An instant party.

THE BUDOS BAND *II* USA

On their second outing, New York's Budos Band have fashioned a thrilling set of vintage sounding big band instrumentals, managing to echo both the Afrobeat energy of Fela Kuti, and the otherworldly sound of the Ethiopian groove.

MANU CHAO *La Radiolina* France/Spain

More musical mayhem from one of our favorite multi-cultural roots rebels. No one else sounds like this globetrotting renaissance man whose sonic arsenal includes reggae, punk and various strands of Latino music. This spirited, wide-ranging album offers an abundance of pleasures.

CINEMATIC ORCHESTRA *Ma Fleur* UK

On *Ma Fleur*, the Cinematic Orchestra augment their wonderfully atmospheric sound by enlisting the vocal and piano talents of Montrealer Patrick Watson, soul diva Fontella Bass and several other guests. The results are a deeply meditative late night listen, brimming with vocal and orchestral wonder.

COLOMBIA! Colombia

Colombia's rich musical culture reached a creative peak in the 60's and 70's, and this superb collection, drawn from the great Discos Fuentes label, brings together some of the high points of this golden era. From exuberant cumbias to propulsive salsa, this is music tailor made for maximum enjoyment and dancing ecstasy. Muy sabroso!

DREAMTREE PROJECT *Jadur Madur* Canada/India

Producer Adham Shaikh, one of BC's finest electronica maestros, meets sitarist Uwe Neumann on this lovely recording of subtly updated ragas. Incorporating flute, tabla and occasional beats, this 'East meets West' recording will appeal to Cheb I Sabbah fans.

FEIST *The Reminder* Canada

Leslie Feist, whose 'Let It Die' recording made us stop and listen, has, with 'The Reminder', delivered an endlessly entertaining album. Her resonant vocals, intriguing lyrics and inventive music all conspire to create some of the most original and satisfying pop music of its time. It's a joy to listen to such a gifted artist at the peak of her powers.

RUTHIE FOSTER *The Phenomenal*

USA

This talented soul singer, who has thrilled folk festival audiences here in Vancouver and seems to be better known in Canada than in her own country, delves deeper into the classic 60's soul, blues and gospel styles that inspire her. Whether singing her own songs or those of artists like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Son House or Lucinda Williams, the performances and retro-style production bring to mind Aretha in her prime.

JENN GRANT *Orchestra For The Moon*

Canada

Maritime Canada is home to many powerful musical cultures and singer Jenn Grant is the latest shining talent to appear from these parts. With a great voice somewhat reminiscent of Feist, and a beautifully orchestrated set of songs, Jenn Grant's recording has been one of the most pleasant surprises of 2007.

HERBIE HANCOCK *River: The Joni Letters*

USA

This tribute to Joni Mitchell by the esteemed jazz pianist is a work of great beauty. With Wayne Shorter on sax and Dave Holland on bass, Hancock utilizes an intriguing array of vocalists, from Norah Jones to Leonard Cohen to Joni herself, as they re-invent songs from Mitchell's jazzy period. A wonderful musical love letter from one master to another.

BEN HARPER & THE INNOCENT CRIMINALS *Lifeline*

USA

At the end of a 9 month tour, Harper and his band spent a week in a Paris studio and out came 'Lifeline'. Recorded live without overdubs, the music focuses on Harper's soulful side and manages to showcase his many strengths. A thoroughly satisfying listen.

IRON & WINE *The Shepherd's Dog*

USA

Sam Beam has fully emerged from his early understated guitar and voice recordings to this full flowering of his musical ambitions. His typically allusive lyrics here are surrounded by music that variously echoes 'Swordfish Trombone' era Waits, psychedelia and classic guitar-based folk. This is the sound of a gifted artist re-defining himself.

SHARON JONES & THE DAP-KINGS *100 Days, 100 Nights*

USA

The soul revival continues to pick up steam (Amy Winehouse, Solomon Burke, Bettye Lavette, etc.), and the New York based Sharon Jones' latest proves that soul is alive and as exciting as ever. Concentrating on classic 60's soul and backed by the superb Dap-Kings, this CD evokes the spirit of Etta James, Irma Thomas and Aretha in their prime.

BASSEKOU KOUYATE *Segu Blue*

Mali

A plaintive, soulful, hypnotic gem. Bassekou Kouyate is Mali's most in-demand player of the ngoni, a traditional stringed instrument most often heard in a supporting role. Here the instrument is allowed to step into the spotlight as a quartet of ngonis creates the backbone of this stunning debut. If you've enjoyed the music of Rokia Traore, Oumou Sangare or Toumani Diabate, you will love this recording.

RICARDO LEMVO *Isabela* Congo/Cuba/USA

Our favorite Afro-Latin artist brings in Congolese legends Papa Noel, Bopol and Nyboma, among others, to add their particular talents to his fifth album. Tasty accordion bumps up against flute, violin and steamy guitars on these Afro-Cuban workouts. With vocals in Lingala, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Turkish, this is a multilingual musical feast that sounds great in any language.

BOB MARLEY *Roots, Rock, Remixed* Jamaica/Various

These songs, taken from Marley's famous Lee Perry sessions from the late 60's, are ripe for the remix with their combination of lo-fi backing and some of the youthful Wailers best-ever vocal performances. These tracks satisfy with their subtle dub treatments and enhanced bass and drums, shining new light on some timeless classics.

NICKODEMUS *Endangered Species* USA

This great New York DJ has plugged into the beats of the Big Apple's multicultural melting pot to create one of our favorite globally infused electronica albums ever. Latin, African and Balkan beats meet funk, jazz and hip-hop on this unfailingly entertaining disc as the grooves keep on coming. A big winner at Highlife!

YOUSSOU N'DOUR *Rokku Mi Rokka* Senegal

One of Africa's greatest vocalists eschews the Mbalax style that he's best known for, as he concentrates on the sounds of Senegal's arid northlands. Joined by ngoni great Bassekou Kouyate from Mali and Senegal's terrific Orchestra Baobab, Youssou yet again re-invents his music in convincing fashion.

ROBERT PLANT & ALISON KRAUSS *Raising Sand* USA/UK

This unlikely pairing of the rock shouter and the bluegrass whisperer is an unqualified success. Producer T-Bone Burnett and guitarist Marc Ribot add their considerable talents as Plant and Krauss tackle some lesser known blues, gospel and roots tunes. Both artists venture into new musical territory and in the process create music of great beauty.

SHANTEL *Disko Partizani* Germany

The original Balkan re-mixer, who spearheaded the movement with his rollicking Bucovina club nights and CDs, returns with a crack band full of Balkan musical wizards. Wandering beyond his mom's Bucovina region, Shantel incorporates styles from Romania, Serbia and Greece on this 'mittel european' delight.

SOUL JAZZ ORCHESTRA *Freedom No Go Die* Canada

The proliferation of 'Afrobeat' groups expanding upon the musical legacy of the late Fela Kuti is extraordinary and welcome. Here at Highlife we've long been lovers of this stream of afro-jazz-funk. The Ottawa group Soul Jazz Orchestra has come up with one of the most impressive Afrobeat CDs we've ever heard. Great horns, bass lines, singers and the ability to incorporate a variety of styles ensure a rewarding listen from beginning to end.

10 FOOT GANJA PLANT *Bass Chalice*

USA

From the opening bass line there is a sense that we are in for something special, and indeed, 10 Foot Ganja Plant has produced the most exciting original roots reggae album in some time. Propulsive instrumentals featuring wonderful interplay between guitars, bass and horns alternate with harmony vocal tracks by the legendary 'Meditations', making for a wide-ranging, highly satisfying listen that harkens back to the golden era of Jamaican music.

TINARIWEN *Aman Iman*

Mali

The group responsible for bring the Touareg desert music of the Sahara to the world bring us another display of their unique and compelling musical prowess. The crisp production, sparkling guitars and insistent vocals (including those haunting desert wails) speak of lives lived on the edge (war, refugee camps, etc.), transforming adversity into something life-affirming and beautiful.

WILCO *Sky Blue Sky*

USA

Returning to their alt-pop-country roots after a couple of experimental recordings, Wilco's latest is melodically rich and lyrically intriguing. With the spirit of John Lennon and other classic voices infusing the whole affair, the music finds ways to expand upon its inspiration, with stellar guitar work, compelling vocals and subtle production pointing the way forward.

WORLD CIRCUIT PRESENTS

Various

Since Highlife's inception nearly 25 years ago, quite a few 'world music' labels have come and gone. The World Circuit label stands head and shoulders above the rest, releasing great CDs one after another for the last 20 years. They celebrate their 20th anniversary with this wonderful double disc collection of some of their musical highs. Cuba and West Africa are featured prominently, and the selection, from Buena Vista Social Club to Ali Farka Toure to Orchestra Baobab, plays like a Highlife hits collection.

HIGHLIFER'S TOP PICKS

DENNIS NELLA

Feist *The Reminder*
Vieux Farka Toure
Gaudi & Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
Soul Jazz Orchestra *Freedom No Go Die*
Iron & Wine *The Shepherd's Dog*
Jenn Grant *Orchestra For The Moon*
Andy Palacio *Watina*
Ruthie Foster *The Phenomenal*
Joni Mitchell *Shine*
Nickodemus *Endangered Species*

KEVIN FINSETH

Cinematic Orchestra *Ma Fleur*
10 Foot Ganja Plant *Bass Chalice*
Wilco *Sky Blue Sky*
Vieux Farka Toure
Bassekou Kouyate *Segu Blue*
Andy Palacio *Watina*
Mavis Staples *We'll Never Turn Back*
Feist *The Reminder*
Ricardo Lemvo *Isabela*
Soul Jazz Orchestra *Freedom No Go Die*

DENISE RICHARD

Mavis Staples *We'll Never Turn Back*
Soul Jazz Orchestra *Freedom No Go Die*
Tinariwen *Aman Iman*
Andy Palacio *Watina*
Sharon Jones *100 Days, 100 Nights*
Gaudi & Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
Nickodemus *Endangered Species*
Bassekou Kouyate *Segu Blue*
Bole 2 Harlem
Robert Plant/Alison Krauss *Raising Sand*

NILS VON HAHN

Feist *The Reminder*
Bassekou Kouyate *Segu Blue*
Dreamtree Project *Jadur Madur*
Mavis Staples *We'll Never Turn Back*
Soul Jazz Orchestra *Freedom No Go Die*
Balkan Beat Box *Nu-Med*
Vieux Farka Toure
Sharon Jones *100 Days, 100 Nights*
Robert Plant/Alison Krauss *Raising Sand*
Andy Palacio *Watina*

RAUL ESPINOZA

Ojos De Brujo *Techari*
The Aggrolites *Reggae Hit L.A.*
Latin Jazz
Nickodemus *Endangered Species*
Midnite *Bless Go Round*
Budos Band *II*
Gaudi & Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
Up Bustle & Out *Mexican Sessions*
Toumast *Ishumar*
Bole 2 Harlem