

Africa

the ambience that the group generate on stage. They may have bought themselves some designer clothing but musically nothing much has changed, which is a blessing. It'd be a travesty if they were to go the way of many other Congolese groups and add a synthesizer to their organic sound.

For those unfamiliar with Konono No 1, they play a range of *likembés* (thumb pianos) that are amplified in a crude, distorted and exciting way. Accompanied by a mixture of traditional drums and homemade percussion, and spiced up by animated vocals, they are an awesome reminder that traditional street music can be an infectious, raucous, trance-inducing experience. The effect of the multiple thumb pianos is similar to Indonesian *gamelan*, but spectacularly more raunchy. The incessant buzzing and scratching of the percussion underpins some adept *likembé* interplay and the vocals shout out encouragements to anyone who wishes to join in the celebratory dance.

Nothing beats seeing a band like this in the flesh but this live recording is a very good second best.

Martin Sincock

Lucky Dube Respect

Gallo LUCKY15

Full Price (65 mins)

★★★

Dube steps out from Bob's shadow



The title-track of Lucky Dube's latest album is as good as anything the South African reggae champion has recorded in his 20-year career. A seething, ranking roots anthem, it opens with one of those ringing, circular Zulu guitar patterns that never lets up. There are the usual 'conscious' messages overtly influenced by Bob Marley, such as 'Shut Up' and 'Political Games'. But as with Marley's own sons, who have finally realised they need to do something more than a karaoke version of their old man, Dube expands his musical horizons in a subtle fashion. Most *Songlines* readers will probably pass over 'Changing World', a stadium rock ballad that confirms Dube wasn't kidding when he once nominated Toto and Aerosmith as his favourite bands. But the gospel-tinged 'Shembe Is The Way' and a further dose of Zulu-reggae on 'Monster' hit the mark. It has to be said that such tracks are hardly typical of the entire album and if you didn't know better you'd still probably locate the likes of 'Celebrate Life', 'The One' and 'Never Leave You' in Kingston circa 1975. Nothing wrong with that either, for it remains a fine place to be.

Nigel Williamson

Habib Koité & Bamada Afriki

Cumbancha CMDCD5

Full Price (46 mins)

★★★★

Long awaited follow-up from questing griot



If you've been wondering what the gentle giant of Malian music Habib Koité has been doing since his beautiful album, *Baro*, was released six long years ago, he quietly sneaks a fresh dose of acoustic Mali onto the market. Listening to the record is like having an old friend coming to visit, full of great tales and smiles. Only a few minutes into the album you almost forget that it hasn't always been part of your record collection. It brims with all those comforting things that set the experimental *griot* Koité apart from most of his contemporaries. The husky voice, catchy choruses, trickling guitar patterns and clever jigsaw of Mali's myriad musical traditions – all are there. Even the quality of the mix reflects his earlier works. Koité was one of the first artists to break the mould of the thunder-voiced song and ancient repertoire associated with the Mande griots, Mali's traditional praise singers. He preferred to search the length and breadth of his home country, collecting ideas and inspiration from a huge variety of traditional sounds. Others have since followed in his footsteps, yet Koité's musical universe remains entirely his own. On *Afriki*, almost every corner of the country is nodded to in the intricate guitar and percussion patterns that carry all of his songs. There are touches of desert blues, of the griot's *ngoni* (lute), and even an eerie chorus of hunters' antelope horns that softly caresses the clever arrangement of 'Nta Dima' and lifts it to a rare level of musical bliss. A slice of heaven wanting to be owned.

TOP
OF THE
WORLD
ALBUM



Katharina Kane



Habib Koité couldn't be any happier

Mohammed Jimmy Mohammed Hulgizey: In Concert

Terp AS14

Full Price (57 mins)

★★★

A fond farewell from Jimmy



The voice of Mohammed Jimmy Mohammed, the blind Ethiopian singer, always evoked the more heartfelt and mournful end of East African blues, but this CD comes tinged with more sadness than usual as it ended up being his last. Having suffered from poor health for much of his life, he passed

away last December. All proceeds from this live CD will be put into an education fund for his two children. It is a memorable swansong, and a much stronger set than last year's *Takkabel*. Mohammed is backed by the instrumentation of the *azmari* (Ethiopian singer-musicians): the five stringed *krar* (lute) and loping percussion that ably bear up his earthy tones and occasionally guttural delivery. The *krar* playing oscillates between light picking and aggressive strums that beautifully complement Mohammed's range. Each track gets more intense, as backing vocals flesh out the songs before a grand finale that has saxophonist Brodie West adding some haunting minor melodies.