

Summer Sounds

Hot new world music CDs

Something about summer — maybe the brief hint of tropical climes, maybe the many outdoor concerts — just gets the world music mojo working, so let me pass on a few recommended new CDs. You may have seen **Ska Cubano** at the Oregon Zoo last week. On their zany new release, *iAy Caramba!* (Cumbancha), this UK-Cuban collaborative project “imagines what would have happened had Jamaica ska blended with the big band blasts of classic Cuban mambo and son.” The group includes some of London’s finest Jamaican and Cuban musicians, including singer Natty Bo, guitarist Benhy Billy (who insists he’s a reincarnation of the great Cuban singer Beny Moré), Japanese sax mistress Megumi Mesaku and legendary session trumpeter Tan Tan Thornton, who played on tracks by The Beatles, Stones, Hendrix and more.

I’ve enjoyed the haunting vocals of Persian-Indian chanteuse **Azam Ali** since she co-founded Vas a decade ago and released her solo debut, the Euro-medieval sounding *Portals of Grace*. Her newest, *Elysium for the Brave* (Six Degrees), features musicians such as King Crimson’s Trey Gunn (a former Eugenean) and her current bandmates in Niyaz, and adds electronics and English-language vocals to its traditional instrumentation.

On her self titled debut disk on the Triloka label, Canada’s **Kiran Ahluwalia** draws on similar Indian-Iranian influences (she studied Persian sung poems — ghazals — and Indian classical music) and added touches of folk (Cape Breton fiddler Natalie MacMaster appears) to create a vibrant, melodic hybrid that should appeal to fans of Anoushka Shankar and other cross-cultural musicians.

On *Balancé* (Times Square), another bicultural singer extraordinaire, Cape Verde’s **Sara Tavares**, proves herself more than a worthy successor to her countrywoman, Cesaria Evora, mingling Afrobeat, reggae and other global styles with gorgeous melodies. Tavares, who now lives in Lisbon, calls the album “lullabies to myself” but her



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sultry vocals won’t put anyone to sleep.

Still another global diva, Ethiopia’s **Gigi**, scored an international breakthrough with her self-titled debut on Palm Pictures (featuring collaborators as august as jazz legends Wayne Shorter, Henry Threadgill and Pharoah Sanders) a few years ago. Now, the album’s producer, world music Svengali Bill Laswell, has “reimagined” it as an ambient soundscape called *Illuminated Audio* (Palm Pictures), and it works as well as his re-envisionings of Miles Davis and Santana.

I wish Michael Ramos’s **Charanga Cakewalk** had been around when I lived in Austin in the ’80s and ’90s. On *Chicano Zen* (Triloka), the well known session musician enlists collaborators like Ruben Ramos and Patty Griffin plus disparate global influences (Tejano, merengue, reggaeton, flamenco, ska) to produce some of the hookiest sounds I’ve ever heard. I’d hate to see this inventive concoction pigeonholed as merely Latin or lounge; its global grooves should be enjoyed by everyone. **EW**

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Tyler Fortier is making his mark on the ever-growing Eugene music scene. With the release of his first studio album entitled “When the Sun Hits the Water”, Tyler Fortier shows the maturity of many attempts and side projects during the last three years as a solo artist. See him live Wednesday, August 16th. Check EW’s Nightlife page and www.myspace.com/tylerfortier for more details.

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