

fROOTS

DJELIMADY TOUNKARA

Railriding With The King

CESARIA EVORA

The Cape Verde Crusader

Susanne Lundeng

Maggie MacInnes

Sanscapes

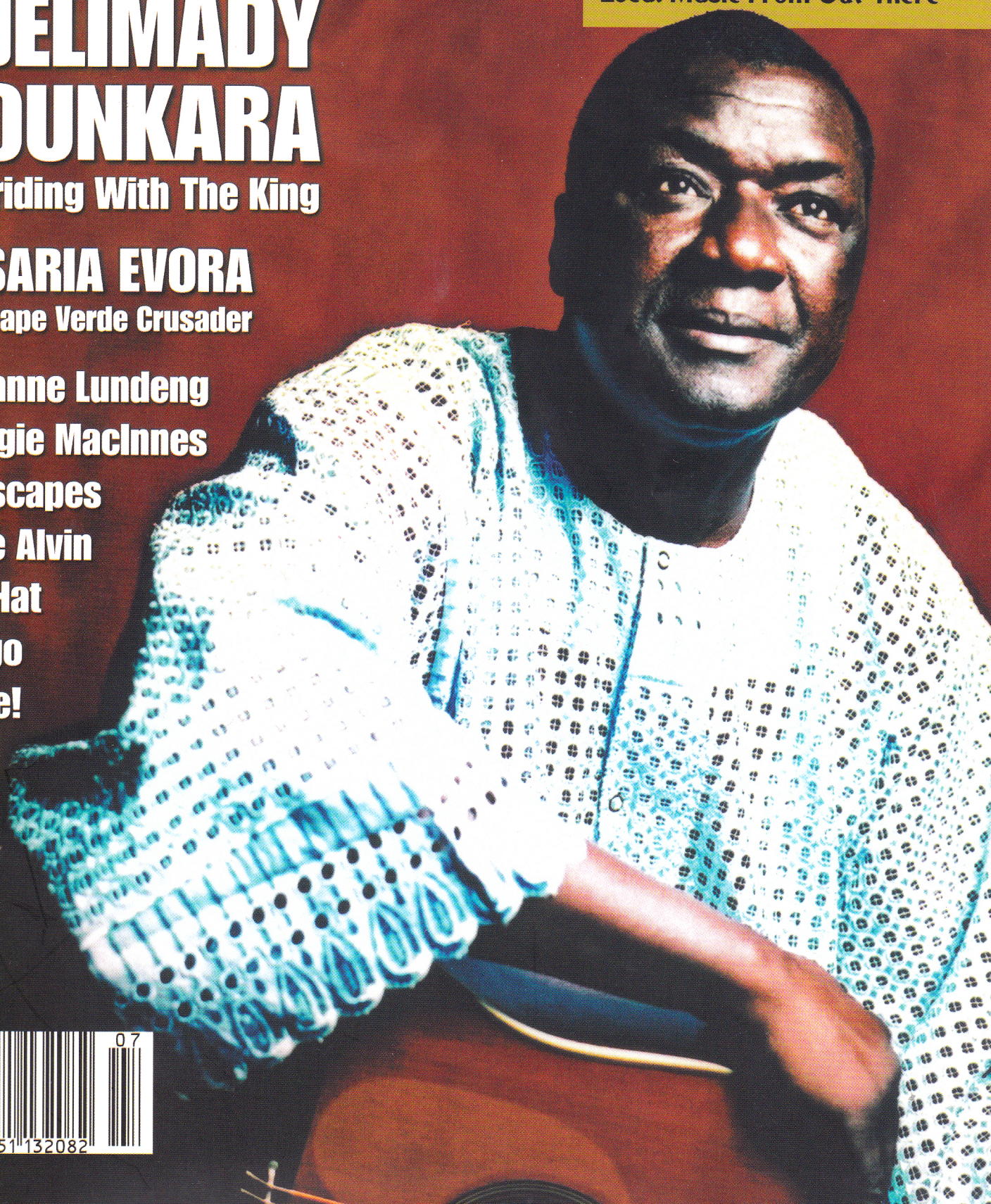
Dave Alvin

Old Hat

Tango

more!

Local Music From Out There



TRY THIS AT HOME

Arthur Wood introduces the US phenomenon 'house concerts'.

During recent decades the gradual demise of the legion of coffee-houses and listening clubs that sprang up across America during the rise in commercial popularity of folk music during the late fifties and early sixties, has, thankfully, been balanced by the arrival of a new underground factor. Across the continent, ordinary folks have begun opening their front doors to welcome performers, friends, acquaintances and strangers into their homes. Their common bond is predilection for listening to acoustic music performed in intimate surroundings. Preferably on premises where 'no smoking' signs are posted, the bar tab doesn't necessitate re-mortgaging your home and the focused attention of the clientele to the performance is, pretty well, guaranteed. Individuals who attend house concerts are also in search of the spirit of community, a human trait that is being suffocated by the rise and rise of the human stampede toward instantaneous, push button gratification. Taking the time to listen and contemplate is becoming a lost art.

Of course, the phenomenon is not some startling new invention. Rolling the carpet back (if there was one in the first

place), clearing the furniture to the edges of the room and inviting some, preferably musical, friends around for a ceilidh, is a centuries old tradition. Ceilidhs, of course, involve dancing and storytelling. In the New World, the modern day pied piper is remunerated for playing tunes and, hopefully, furnishing the listener with an insight into the creative process.

So how does one go about organising a house concert ? Assuming that you already possess (or have access to) a home, two factors are, pretty well, essential – a performer and an audience. With regard to the former and depending on the stature of the individual, this may involve contacting the musician directly or dealing with a booking agent. In either case, before making any such contact, establish the maximum audience size that can be accommodated in the performance area. Most musicians perform without amplification, although the size of the room may determine otherwise. You should also consider having food and drink (usually coffee) available at the event. A pot luck meal, where audience members bring along a plate of food, is a tried and tested formula Stateside and further cements the sense of shared community I referred to earlier. Finally, you may need to consider offering overnight accommodation for the performer.

There are no set rules as to the time of which day a house concert can take place as long as it is mutually convenient to the performer and the homeowner and has the potential for generating an audience. An evening house concert will probably be the performer's only opportunity to earn money that day. A daytime show usually allows the performer to appear at a local venue that evening. Once a date, a time and the amount of remuneration are settled, the house concert promoter can calculate the admission to be charged at the door and decide if the event is a viable proposition.

Once your house concerts become established, a policy regarding promoter's expenses will evolve. Many house concerts are financially bank rolled by the host(s), often rabid enthusiasts who give the performer 100% of the door. But the outgoings on telephone calls, food and drink, and mailing expenses should not be taken lightly and most performers will

enquire if you had any expenses. With recordings and other merchandise available for sale, the performer's income can be further boosted.

Next, you require a clientele. Public awareness of the event is the key to success. Even music business professionals ignore this essential element to their cost. The potential revenue created by the event will determine how you approach the subject of advertising. After word of mouth through those friends you keep meeting at clubs, then local newspapers, independent radio stations, the internet, and bookers at local acoustic music venues are your best allies at the outset. Once your house concerts become established, the mailing list that you circulated at the first one (and every one since) will become your most valued promotional avenue.

In deciding to proceed with a house concert, you have accepted that not only friends and acquaintances, but complete strangers will be present in your home for a number of hours. Most American series of house concerts are reservation only. This allows the host(s) to pre-screen the audience. The majority of house concert promoters approach this thorny area by providing only a telephone number as the initial point of contact. Once a ticket is purchased, directions to your property can be provided. Even with these precautions, security and access in the performance area, and to other parts of your property, on the day of performance, must be given careful consideration.

Rather than create some quango to coordinate these events, as the phenomenon proliferated Stateside, enthusiasts established a network of what could be described as best practice advisory centres. The web site www.houseconcerts.com is a prime location to learn about this social revolution. Based on assessing their experiences, you can pick and choose which facets of a house concert best suit the property you own.

One point to remember is that you have now created what could be viewed as a commercial undertaking. While you can witness to your altruism by proving that the performer was given 100% of the ticket sales, you will probably have contravened a number of local by-laws by holding the event in your home. In truth, house concerts have not yet become an issue Stateside. Acceptance and tolerance by public authorities, and the occupants of neighbouring properties appears to be the par currently. Of course, scheduling concerts in your home on an almost daily basis would doubtless see that tacit level of acceptance alter radically.

To conclude, a quote I must use comes from Tim & Lori Blixt, New Jersey based promoters of the Log Cabin Concert series. "For all that putting on these shows can be a chore, the payoff is that the audience gets a once in a lifetime experience that you just can't get elsewhere." So consider the possibilities. You may end up conversing with the performer at the buffet table. The artist may decide to perform a request only set, including songs never performed in public before. Those once in a lifetime possibilities are truly legion.

Could a circuit of house concert venues be created on these islands?

BILL MORRISSEY

Something I Saw Or Thought I Saw Philo
11671-1227-2

By way of a tribute to his (career) mentor, *Songs Of Mississippi John Hurt*, which included covers as well as traditional material, was released two years ago. It helped bridge a gap, since you have to backtrack to 1996 and *You'll Never Get To Heaven*, to locate Morrissey's previous disc to feature self-penned material. Although not as vocally wasted as Tom Waits, or the (current and uninspiring) roots based, coterie of enfants terrible that includes Jim White, Johnny Dowd and Tom Ovens, Bill's delivery features a pronounced and appealing croak. Ted Drozdowski's liner notes describe Bill's voice as stony, so I guess we agree that it possesses a unique edge. What's more, with Morrissey the end result is always richly melodic.

The title *Something I Saw Or Thought I Saw* hints at the power of illusion. The two ghostly figures are featured on the main liner

photograph – one male, one female. Given free reign, the human imagination possesses the power to deceive and confuse. Self produced, a first, the dozen Morrissey originals here are impressionistic portraits that, subjectively, favour scenes from the underside of life. In that regard, Morrissey's songs, once more, feature a rich diversity of characters – barflies and worldly wise barmaids (*Harry's Last Call* and *Travelling By Cab*), hobos (*Judgement Day*) and anguished lovers. As for humour, that has always been an ace in Bill's hand. In *Winter Song* it proudly rears its head with the lines "Drag her underneath the cover and show her where the hound dogs bay." Book ending this powerful collection, (and return to form,) are a couple of love songs. The meeting of former lovers in the opening *Twenty Third Street* is heartrending in the extreme, while the element of doubt posed in *Will You Be My Rose?* is assuaged by the lines "You found a place from me, a place I belong."

Available from Rounder Records Corp., 1
Camp Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140,
USA or in the UK via Proper Distribution.

Arthur Wood

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Kids, Cars & Campfires Red House RHR 147

Subtitled *A Collection Of Family Folk Music*, all of the material featured has appeared on previous Red House recordings. With Ma and Pa and the youngsters bundled into the family saloon, the fourteen cuts here are by way of an aural encouragement for the whole family to indulge in a singsong as they head off down the highway on some incredible adventure. While Tom Paxton's *Your Shoes, My Shoes* and Spider John Koerner's *Froggie Went A-Courtin'* lend themselves to that aim with ease, the melodic pace and introspective lyrical

content of a number of the other selections act as a damper on the intended proceedings. Other contributors here include Greg Brown, Dave Moore, John Gorka and Suzzy Roche. Available from Red House Records, PO Box 4044, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104, USA and in the UK from Koch Distribution.

Arthur Wood.

STEVE GILLETTE & CINDY MANGSEN

A Sense Of Place Redwing Music RWMCD 5409

Spanning the past decade, *A Sense Of Place* is the third, self produced, duo recording by this Vermont based couple. Interspersed between the foregoing releases, has been an ongoing series of solo projects. Mangsen is also a member of the occasional trio, Voices – Anne Hills and Priscilla Herdman being the other participants. Mangsen and Hills also work as a duo.

While Mangsen's feet have always been firmly bedded in the traditional genre, Gillette has also flirted with contemporary folk composition. And, truth to tell, that's pretty much the mix of the dozen cuts featured here. Oh yes – I should add, neither stint when it comes to covering a worthy song from whatever the source – traditional, or by a modern day scribe.

Tide And The River Rising, a song about the richness of the cycle of life, penned by traditionalist, Cindy Kallet, and included on her 1989 album *Dreaming Down A Quiet Line* opens the proceedings. By way of crossing that folk/ country divide, there are also contributions from Jack Hardy and Jon Ims. Gillette's guitar and Cindy's use of accordion and dulcimer add colour to the traditional, instrumental selections *Reel Beatrice* and *Shenandoah Falls/ Cincinnati Rag*. Completing this varied recipe is a couple of self-penned originals from each participant. Cindy's *Sunrise* was inspired by story related by our own Bob Copper in his book, *A Song For Every Season*, while Gillette proves once more that touching love songs are a speciality with, *When The First Leaves Fall*.

This recording is available from PO Box 577575, Chicago, Illinois 60657-7575, USA and www.compassrosemusic.com

Arthur Wood