

Mix and Match

Tales of diversity and non-conformity By Kevin Madigan

Bruce Cockburn—*Speechless* (Rounder)

Maverick artists are not exactly thin on the ground, but Bruce Cockburn still manages to convey more with a few simple songs than others conjure up in a whole career. On his new album *Speechless*, Cockburn takes on the mantle of instrumentalist, forsaking his familiar rich baritone and letting his acoustic guitar speak for itself. Without the rich imagery that his lyrics usually provide, we are reminded that Cockburn is a master of his instrument, a virtuoso demonstrating the strength of uncluttered music.

Cockburn, who once described his guitar style as being "half-way between India and Ireland," chose for *Speechless* a dozen tunes from different phases of his life's work, and also recorded three new tracks. The best of these is "King Kong Goes to Tallahassee," a piece that evokes the blues in a tribute to poet Robert Olen Butler. Another new composition is "Elegy" which features the dobro and is reminiscent of Django Reinhardt, one of Cockburn's main influences. Early Renaissance, Eastern and jazz are other forms of music that Cockburn has studied over the years and the results are felt here to wonderful effect.

Amadou & Mariam—*Dimanche a Bamako* (Nonesuch)

There is so much good music coming from the African Continent lately that it's hard to focus on any one place. From Mali we now have Amadou Bagayoko and his wife Mariam Doumbia, who together express joy and vigor in equal measure with a range of songs that demands attention as well as incessant tapping of feet. *Dimanche* is a thoroughly infectious hybrid of styles, passionately delivered and beautifully sung. Britain's influential *Mojo* magazine declared this record to be "African mod soul house funk of the year" and that description fairly sums up its eclectic mixture.

Defying you to sit still, the rock-solid beat of "Coulbaly" blends into the intense rhythm of "La Realite," and neither song would sound amiss in a dance club. "Politique Amagn" is a gentler track, but its message is a strident attack on corruption and ignorance in government. There's nothing slick about this record;

Producer Manu Chao has brought out the many strengths of these two wonderful musicians, shaping traditional Malian folk music to a wealth of influences. No novices, these two have been making music for three decades and were as surprised as anyone when the album stormed the pop charts in France last year and the pair, who happen to be blind, was justly awarded the French equivalent of a Grammy.



Bonnie Raitt—*Souls Alike* (Capitol)

The blues is still the metier, and the slide guitar continues to illustrate Bonnie Raitt's natural dexterity. On this latest album, her eighteenth, Raitt has chosen to highlight an unknown group of songwriters with whom she feels a special kinship, hence the record's title. While not deviating drastically from her standard path, the songs here are fresh and alive. "Love On One Condition," written by Jon Cleary, starts with a jarring off-note on piano and thunders ahead. The next song is "So Close," a ballad, something Raitt has always done well. Another fine example of this is "The Bed I Made," which closes the album on poignant note of self-recrimination. "I'm holding steady my crooked crown, knowing I'll lose it if I look down," she sings on "Crooked Crown," a study of emotional paradoxes and conflicting decisions. But perhaps the most powerful song on the album is the one that kicks it off: "I Will Not Be Broken," which Raitt chose after going through a difficult time in her life. In a career that goes back to the early seventies, Raitt continues to deftly pursue her craft, knowing what works and not letting fads getting in the way. More power to her.

Other worthy Releases: Jelly Roll Morton—*The Complete Library of Congress Recordings* by Alan Lomax (Rounder); this 1938 collaboration between the Morton, the jazz pianist, and Lomax, the folklorist, has been called the first oral history of jazz. *The Sound of White* (Reprise); a set of heartfelt songs from up-and-coming Australian songstress Missy Higgins. Beethoven, Mendelssohn Violin Concertos (RCA Red Seal); brilliant young player Nikolaj Znaider takes on the masters. ▶

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