

following her debut *Nueva Era*, was recorded at Havana's famous EGREM studios and EGREM's Miramar outpost, produced by Arocena and British dance remixer Simbad, with DJ Gilles Petersen as executive producer. Starting off slowly with Horace Silver's 'God of Yoruba', *One Takes* foregrounds piano, sax, bass – just about anything but its singer. 'African Sunshine' gives her a little bit more space to make the most of her range. The third track, a cover of Los Brito's 'EL 456' is a funky, smoochy, dance-floor dead cert, but the vocal line remains muted, a detail in the flow.

Arocena brings a natural jazz singer's fluidity to Cuban music, but she needs bolder songs with more lyrics – and less breathing and soft-edged scatting. Peterson seems set on displaying the slickness of the mix and the considerable gifts of the vast army of percussionists, trumpeters, sax-players and trombonists he's assembled. It's an intriguing offering, then, but not the showcase this emerging singer deserves.

CHRIS MOSS

**TRACK TO TRY** *Asking Eyes*

### Aukai

Aukai (42 mins)

★★★★★

**Rocking the ronroco (mandolin) in an ambient style**



Aukai is German multi-instrumentalist and composer Markus Sieber; his stage moniker is a

Hawaiian word meaning 'traveller'. His ambient-hippy instrumental music is intended to conjure inner stillness and beauty. It often does so, unfolding slowly from a plain opening theme on Sieber's guitar or strummed ronroco, a curiously shaped South American mandolin. This instrument, with its distinctive treble pitch, is something of a calling card across the album, blending with strings, piano and subtle electronic effects to create a rolling, familiar texture.

Sieber's music is deliberately conceived for pairing with other art forms and some tracks are particularly filmic in their evocativeness: the yearning melodic ronroco figure at the heart of 'Alto Paraiso' and atmosphere of uncertainty in the finely woven cello melody in 'Agua Azul'. But there isn't enough inspiration here to sustain repeated listening to *Aukai*: Sieber's compositional footprint is small, and the occasional crescendo to

a synthesized climax (as in 'Cachoeira' and 'First of March') reaffirms the overall lack of rhythmic variation.

TIM WOODALL

**TRACK TO TRY** *Alto Paraiso*

### Karolina Cicha & Shafqat Ali Khan Poland-Pakistan: Music Without Borders

Karolina Cicha (60 mins)

★★★★★

**Energetic mix and match of languages and styles**



*Nine Languages*, the debut CD of Polish singer Karolina Cicha was an award-winning disc in which she sang songs in the languages of minorities living in Poland. So she's clearly open to interacting with other cultures. This recording, with Pakistani ghazal singer Shafqat Ali Khan, was made in the Polish embassy in Islamabad. It includes songs in Hindi, Urdu, Polish, Yiddish and Ukrainian.

A good collaboration shouldn't leave you wondering why it was done, it should sound inevitable, like the collaborative tracks with Indian and Iranian musicians on the upcoming Warsaw Village Band album. But here you are left wondering quite what the point is. On the opening track, sung by Shafqat, Cicha just adds some rather fey vocalisations. Elsewhere she takes a more leading role, and they each delve into each other's worlds.

But it always ends up being less than the sum of its parts, despite nice *rubab*, *sarangi*, electric cello and throat singing from her accompanying musicians. The group are performing in Europe, so it will be interesting to see if the project works better live.

SIMON BROUGHTON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Tum Bin*

### Dagadana Meridian 68

Karrot Kammando Records (49 mins)

★★★★★

**A mash-up at the meridian**



We are getting used to wild and wonderful global collaborations. But this must still be a first; a Polish-Ukrainian band collaborating with Chinese and Mongolian musicians. This is Dagadana's fourth album and they have rather dialled down their previous jazz elements with regional folk music elements from Poland and



Rebecca Meek

TOP OF THE WORLD



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### Richard Bona & Mandekan Cubano Heritage

Membran/Quest Records (41 mins)

★★★★★

**A Cameroonian maverick's answer to Buena Vista?**



World Circuit set the bar challengingly high for the fusion of West African and Cuban musical traditions with 2010's *AfroCubism*, an album that brought together several of the stars of Buena Vista Social Club with some of the biggest names in Malian music. If that recording felt like a summit meeting, the eighth album by the Cameroonian singer, bass player and songwriter is more singular and ambitious. Backed by five veteran sessioners of New York's Latin music scene whom he has dubbed Mandekan Cubano, *Heritage* is very much one man's take on Cuban music, filtered through Bona's African sensibilities.

Covering 'Bilongo', which appeared on *Buena Vista Live at Carnegie Hall* under the title 'Mandinga', invites a direct comparison with World Circuit's celebrated heroes; but the remaining 11 songs are his own compositions and Bona also produced and mixed the record. 'Matanga' is a mellow ballad that marries the sounds of Cape Verde and the Caribbean. 'Jokoh Jokoh' sways to a trumpet-fuelled salsa dancefloor groove. 'Cubaneando' is jazzier while the piano-led 'Santa Clara Con Montuno' ventures into Rubén González territory. 'Essewe Ya Monique' offers a more experimental kind of fusion with a rocking, syncopated rhythm buoyed by Bona's inventive bass patterns while 'Kivu' is a gorgeously sung *bolero*. It's about time Bona got his due as one of world music's true visionaries and this fine album should help raise his profile beyond his existing cult fan base.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Essewe Ya Monique*

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