



RHYTHM QUEEN

The look is somewhat Californian rock stuff, but Ashley Muler is something of a scholar when it comes to rhythm and groove. Member/leader of British post-punk, Muler got her studies in Los Angeles to live in London. The result of her debut LP, *Ashley Muler*, isn't quite like anything else in this year's releases. It's all warm and smooth world music scaled down to single melodies and unassuming hooks. Since Muler has done her homework, surrounding rhythm is the National Sound Archive and absorbing herself in the fabric of African drum techniques, there's an authenticity about it which elevates the project above the usual colonial appropriation. Her voice can be a little such as hers, and a few songs such as 'Wah Child' ooze Jamaicanity like Kane Beek's country, but it's an appealing free step and a pleasantly vibrant alternative to Peter Dinklage on the whole-corn market.

■ RICHARD COOK



ASHLEY Maher could so easily have gone the beady, hippie way of countless Californian golden girls before her had she not taken a short cut through Berkeley's music department one fine summer's morning.

Coming from one of the windows was the sound of master Ghanaian drummer CK Ladzokpo. She was so impressed that she promptly ditched her medieval studies course and left for London to write and sing, lured by the cosmopolitan promise of the capital's music scene.

She now resides in Portobello Road, a handy base from which she can continue to assimilate ethnic rhythms—especially African ones. "I love African rhythms. They are an integral part of my work. I can never perfect them. I am not African," she reveals, not entirely surprisingly. Does it worry her at all that she could be accused of capitalising on African culture à la Paul Simon?

"Well, I haven't really capitalised on anything yet," she replies wryly, an oblique reference to her so-far-limited success. "If I become successful it won't be on the

Drum punch

Lured by the rhythms of Africa, Californian student Ashley Maher dropped the medieval for the ethnic, and followed the beat to London

back of someone else's skill. My multicultural interests are personal—although, inevitably, their influence has a far-reaching effect on my music. I work with a lot of musicians from different cultures, but for me it is a learning experience rather than one where I borrow and don't pay back." —JJ

• You can catch this embryonic star on Thursday at Ronnie Scott's between 8.30pm and 7.30pm at a special private showcase party where she will be playing with her eclectic range of musicians.

48 — MONDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 1990

METROPOLIS



Ashley Maher: "I love African rhythms. They are an integral part of my work"

Evening Standard
London's only paid-for
daily newspaper
circulation: 400,000
www.thisislondon.co.uk

★★★★ Q Magazine

Ashley Maher

hi

Virgin V2611

“Unusual and intricately wrought fusion of shimmering African and Caribbean rhythms, from an American newcomer now resident in London. The 10 tracks are built upon Maher’s secretly innocent vocals, taut Ghanaian percussion, funk guitar, beautifully trilling native flutes, and wild saxophones. Side one’s Dreaming and So Many Times could hit both the world music and new age booms, while Honeycomb Grey recalls Sade at her languorous smokey best; Eddie is a more lighthearted skit on a Casanova shoeshiner, and Tick Tock a slightly sinister township chant with hints of the armed struggle. The flip’s Jumping Mouse and Hush Child weave a softer, more pastoral mood, full of strange open plains echoes and twilight campfire charm.”

****Q Magazine

Q Magazine

U.K. glossy monthly

music magazine

circulation: 172,000

www.q4music.com

MUSIC

DE « BOUL BAYEKOU » À AMINA

ASHLEY MAHER

LISSA

Elle sait chanter et danser le « mbalakh »

Pour vous, elle vient de mettre, à votre disposition, sur le marché, Amina. Elle, c'est Ashley Maher, « toubab » danseuse de sabar extraordinaire. « Amina », cinquième produit par André Manga, est « sa chanson d'amour dédiée au Sénégal ». « Amina » est l'une des plus belles tentatives par un artiste occidental d'intégrer l'univers musical sénégalais et de s'y confronter. Selon ses propres dires.

Charisme moulée dans les sons et mélodies depuis le berceau rythmé par un éventail musical évasé quoique mêlé de sons rock, pop américains et britanniques, de symphonie classique, d'une grande gamme de romance latine avec un goût plus farci sur une information brésilienne, Ashley est née au Canada. Mais, elle sera très vite arrachée à cette terre pour s'installer à Los Angeles où ses

parents d'origines britannique ont déménagé. Elle avait juste cinq ans étudiante à l'Université de Californie à Berkeley, elle découvre par hasard un cours donné par CK Ladzekpo, grand batteur de djembé ghanéen. « Ça a été, pour moi, une révélation. Chaque cellule de mon corps s'est embrasée », se souvient-elle. « J'ai vécu une véritable épiphanie dans cette entrée. J'ai su que je venais de trouver un sens à ma vie », dit-elle.

Ashley Maher étudiera les polyrythmes avec Ladzekpo pendant deux ans, sentant qu'exprimer ces sons et ces rythmes était pour elle une chose incroyablement naturelle, et ce depuis le premier jour.

son diplôme obtenu, Ashley décide d'aller à Londres où elle intègre le groupe de jazz pan-africain appelé Backlash (formé par des membres du légendaire Osibisa, grou-

pe afro-rock), tout en collaborant avec d'autres musiciens africains basés sur place ou en tournée. Ashley aime citer Youssou N'Dour, Baba Maal, Salif Keita, King Sunny Adé et Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan comme influences majeures ainsi que d'autres inspirations telles Simon, Gabriel, Sting et Joni Mitchell. Ses premières démos, enregistrées avec l'un des meilleurs ensembles discographique et rythmique de Londres, Adzido, reflètent cette dualité créative. (...) Cela aboutit à des sollicitations de cinq labels, dont Virgin, avec lequel elle signe. Deux albums, « Mi » (1990) et « Pomegranate » (1992), paraîtront chez Virgin et seront encensés par la critique.

Ashley quittera le label Virgin après son rachat par EMI et continuera de se produire en Europe. Elle fera partie de chorales sur des enregistrements de Youssou N'dour, Myriam M'baraka et de l'Afro-Celt Sound System. Son troisième album, totalement indépendant, « The Blessed Rain » (1997), continue dans le même esprit que « Pomegranate ».

Après douze ans à Londres, Ashley Maher revint s'installer à Los Angeles (...) Elle se produit avec la bourgeoise communauté de musiciens, danseurs et percussionnistes africains et latins de la ville. Son quatrième album, « Flying Over Bridges » (2006), est produit par le camerounais André Manga et présente un brillant ensemble de musiciens world jazz du Cameroun, du Sénégal, du Brésil, du Venezuela, de l'Uruguay et des États-Unis. L'engagement artistique profond d'Ashley envers les diverses cultures musicales du Sénégal a été motivé par son amitié de longue date avec Youssou N'Dour, mais c'est aussi récemment manifesté comme composante de sa personnalité musicale. En 2007, Youssou N'Dour incorporera une chanson co-écrite par Ashley, « Boul Bayekou », à son album « Rokka mi rokka », publié chez Nonesuch Records/Warner Music. Danseuse de sabar remarquable, Ashley Maher a depuis fait des apparitions sur scène en compagnie de Youssou N'Dour à Dakar ainsi qu'au Grand Bal de Bercy.

Spectator

the arena review



MUSIC: ASHLEY MAHER

Arena
U.K. monthly
mens' magazine
circulation:
32,000

An intriguing front-runner in the current crop of heart-and-soul baren, Ashley Maher doesn't feel the need to mumble New Age spells like Ingrid Chavez or Tori Amos. Her roots are in Canada but, following traditional migratory patterns, she moved south to Los Angeles. Temporarily settled at this epicentre of urban tribalism, she studied West African drumming. And were it not for a further migration in search of some gritty London experiences, the entire biographical trek would be heading inexorably in the direction of a Joni Mitchell's "Jungle Line"-type Afro-Hollywood situation. On the first album (entitled "H", just to be really gauche), the Joni Mitchell comparison was not exactly confounded, thanks to some sustained and flattened vowels, as well as a bunch of songs about friends who throw pots, write poetry and draw with charcoal. Maher's approach was original and accomplished enough, however, for her to attract attention and warrant another album, "Pomegranate". Her fluent mixing of West African influences with jazz bass, fuzzy guitar and introspection on this new collection remains novel, particularly on tracks like "Throw My Heart". Elsewhere she submerges herself in accountant-inspired Sting-isms. If there's a third album Maher should ditch the menthol musos and employ some dirty musicians. The sales figures will be similar, if not better, and the talent will flow freely. David Toop

Vivir verano

MÚSICA Conciertos de verano

Chiclana marca el ritmo étnico

Esta noche comienzan los conciertos del Fimec '09 con las mujeres como protagonistas. El festival musical durará hasta el sábado y en total actuarán ocho grupos de los más diversos estilos

R. López / CHICLANA

El recinto del Colegio Público Las Albitas de Chiclana acoge un evento más los conciertos incluidos dentro del programa del Festival Internacional de Música Étnica (FIMEC) que tiene al arte y a la cultura como eje. En esta ocasión, se ha planteado expandir un poco más el festival por diferentes lugares de la ciudad. Después de una semana de exposiciones y proyecciones, llega la música con las actuaciones de ocho grupos entre los que hay de ley y mañana.

Las protagonistas de esta noche estarán protagonizadas por mujeres. La que ha sido denominada la noche indígena de la mujer contará con cuatro grupos liderados por féminas. "A lo largo de la historia



Andrea Morpugo, creador y organizador del Fimec, junto a la cartelera del festival chiclanero.

procedentes de Iriguiá, Malí, Guinea, España y Mauritania, y dentro de su espectáculo no solo hay música, también hay danzas, canciones y trago-fuegos. Después de Borras Tambo, actuarán los italianos Pierola Banda Dora, una apuesta personal del organizador, Andrea Morpugo, que define la música de sus compañeros como "un gran homenaje al Mediterráneo que transmite mucha fuerza en las actuaciones en vivo".

El plato fuerte de la noche será Abdeljalil Kodsi, un marroquí descendiente de antiguos esclavos africanos, referente artístico y humano indiscutible en el terreno de la fusión musical, que reúne a su antiguo grupo Niam Marrakech en exclusiva para el Fimec.

Para poner el punto y final a la edición del Fimec, el público podrá

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GRUPOS

Éste es el número de agrupaciones que actuarán este fin de semana en el centro educativo chiclanero

el jazz andaluz que ha empujado la mujer para expresarse libremente ha sido la música. Otras actividades también tienen ocurrencias, como la noche indígena de Ayba, así que una programación interesante dedicada la noche del viernes a las mujeres", comenta Andrea Morpugo, organizador del festival.

La banda cubana Estrella Polvora será la primera en pisar el escenario de Las Albitas a las 23:00 horas. "Esta banda se dedica a última hora para tocar en el Fimec. Conocí a través de un amigo de mi familia, la asociación chiclanesa de ayuda al pueblo saharaui" señala Morpugo. Después de la actuación actuará Pata Fe, una artista que acompaña a la madre indígena por los alrededores, que espera



La estadounidense Ashley Maher.

rá un toque de blues siguiendo el estilo de Janis Mitchell o Janis Joplin. Otra estadounidense, Ashley Maher, será la siguiente en el cartel. Maher viene desde Los Ángeles para mostrar al público del Fimec su fusión de música africana y folk americano.

Las encargadas de cerrar la noche indígena de la mujer serán las chicas de Genia 4, que harán un

paseo a la música popular de las islas caribeñas de una forma hasta ahora inédita en el festival. Estas cubanas, antiguas integrantes del Coro Nacional de Cuba, cantan a capella boleros, guinechans, sones y jorás. La de Genia 4 ha sido colocada como la última de las actuaciones a referir, "por respeto a los vecinos. Siempre poníamos al grupo más ruidoso el último, pero

este año nos ha parecido más correcto cerrar la primera noche de un modo más suave", comenta el organizador del festival.

Los que quieran disfrutar de más música la noche del sábado, a partir de las once, podrán apreciar nuevas actuaciones con una temática más variada, moderadas por la del grupo Borras Tambo. Este grupo está formado por artistas



Abdeljalil Kodsi será el protagonista del sábado.

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EDICIONES

El festival se celebra desde mediados de la década de los noventa, atrayendo a más público cada año

disfrutar del que probablemente sea el grupo con más proyección de todos los que pisarán el escenario de Las Albitas. En total 200 es una agrupación artística que no solo se basa en el aspecto musical, sino también en el visual. Entre los hitos fueron los ganadores del certamen de marroquíes Sin Fronteras de este año organizado por el Fimec. Su propuesta, una mezcla de folklore, rock, ritmos latinos y experimentales, apuesta por las proyecciones de vídeo y la danza, les ha llevado a tocar en otros prestigiosos festivales como Enxoxa. Además, los Pischadicos Sin Fronteras estarán en el Blue Pub de la calle Arroyado para continuar con la fiesta una vez finalizadas las actuaciones.

RECORD

RM

MIRROR

Record Mirror

INDEX

● THE MAHER THE MERIER

After many Manc musos, how about Montreal madness? Well, OK **Ashley Maher** (pronounced Mar) was only born in that Canadian city before moving to LA with her British parents, and her nomadic background may well read like a Sunday supplement travel guide, but it got you reading this far, didn't it?

Ashley's music reflects this varied upbringing, drawing on both traditional western folk sounds and African and Latin percussion and vocalising, indicating her great love of what, back in the dim and distant days of the Eighties, some people tried to term 'world music'.

Having moved to London to become immersed in the multi-cultural music scene over here, the ex-medieval studies scholar is about to release her debut album, '95'. The first single from it, 'Step By Step', due out in May, is a strange affair that sees Ashley wearing her musical influences on her kiltan sleeves, but undeniably charming at the same time. Ashley describes it as "a big ethnic jumble", but standing above it all are the vocals, full of the kind of heartfelt power and emotion that begs you to take the time to listen.

Do just that, and you too will want to say '95' to Ashley Maher.

Eleonor Levy



Record Mirror
Glossy monthly U.K.
music magazine
including mainstream
and alternative artists,
now out of print

MUSIQUE

Quand une Californienne chante et danse le mbalax

Après un petit tour du monde, cette anglaise est tombée amoureuse du Sénégal. Chanteuse d'abord, elle est devenue danseuse de mbalax. Style qui occupe une bonne partie de l'album qu'elle vient de produire.

Ashley Maher est une musicienne californienne de Los Angeles. Auteur-compositrice, elle a une carrière de plus de vingt ans et compte, dans sa discographie, cinq albums, chacun fait avec de grands musiciens français, anglais et américains, dont le dernier, conçu au Sénégal, comporte une bonne dose de mbalax, car elle a longtemps baigné dans les traditions populaires africaines. En effet, née au Canada de parents britanniques après déménagement à Los Angeles alors qu'elle avait cinq ans, cette artiste qui aime bien danser également, vient de mettre sur le marché un album de dix titres intitulé *Amina*. Selon elle, «j'ai séjourné en Guinée et au Mali, mais la musique qui m'a le plus marquée est celle du Sénégal, depuis onze ans que je vis dans ce dernier pays». Ayant vécu pendant douze ans à Londres, elle y a réalisé ses deux premiers produits, avant de retourner en Californie y produire le troisième. En 2006, elle écrit une chanson que Youssou Ndiour a reprise sous le titre wolof de *Bul bayyaka*. Un an plus tard, quand l'artiste sénégalais est allé à Los Angeles pour un concert, elle a dansé pour lui. Elle y a bien réussi, parce qu'elle a suivi des cours de sabbars pendant onze ans. *Bédu*, celui-ci n'avait à venir danser au concert de

Bercy (France) de 2008, après celui de Sarno (Dakar). C'est par la suite qu'elle a sollicité les musiciens du Super Étoile pour son nouvel album. Pour en trouver les moyens financiers, elle a sollicité ses amis disséminés dans tous les coins du monde (Brésil, Italie, Allemagne, Finlande...). En un mois, l'opus est presque fini. Après sa finalisation en Californie, la musicienne est revenue démissionner la promotion à Dakar, par reconnaissance, car, selon elle, «le cœur de la musique du disque est au Sénégal». Même si les paroles de ce produit son en anglais, pour la plupart, les thèmes sont inspirés d'expériences vécues au Sénégal. Par exemple, le titre éponyme parle d'une femme qui porte un lourd fardeau, de lourdes responsabilités, qui a, un jour, décidé de tout déposer pour se sentir libre. L'artiste parle aussi des émigrés clandestins qui prennent la mer, à leurs risques et périls, pour l'Europe où ils ne sont pas sûrs de réussir, s'ils arrivent à destination. Malgré le courage dont ils font preuve, elle pense que le mieux serait qu'ils restent dans leur pays qui a le plus besoin de leurs forces et de leur intelligence. Elle se souvient aussi d'un esclave qui, un jour, devenu coiffeur de ses merveilleuses ongles, s'est repenti. Ce qui l'amène à donner

des aux populations d'assumer les erreurs qu'elles ont toujours tendance à cacher aux autres. Ceci, pour permettre à tout le monde de s'entendre. Amoureuse de la paix, elle s'est inspirée du désert de la Californie qui évoque souvent des champs de bataille dans lesquels les Indiens ont été massacrés avant que la paix n'y revienne, pour penser aux déserts en Irak. Tout pour se dire qu'un jour, le Golfe connaîtra la paix et le bonheur, car «tout passe». Ashley fait aussi la comparaison entre un paysan africain malade et la publicité du luxe sur les télévisions américaines. Un luxe dont il n'a pas besoin, lui qui a juste besoin d'un médecin pour recouvrer sa santé et pouvoir travailler dans le but d'entretenir sa famille. L'artiste ne marque pas de parler de l'union, avec l'énergie qui que les différents membres de la société peuvent échanger, même si, parfois, certains actes demeurent impossibles entre eux. Elle pense aussi que parfois, la mort peut faire tomber les frontières entre les peuples, entre les races. Après toutes ces réflexions, l'album finit par un appel à la danse, à la joie. Selon l'artiste, «il y a des moments où il faut tout oublier, se mettre ensemble pour s'éclater».

Demba S. DIA

AUDIOSCREEN

RATINGS:

- ★★★★★ Treasure it
- ★★★★ Must have it
- ★★★ Buy it
- ★★ Borrow it
- ★ Avoid it

CD OF THE MONTH



Buddy Rich

Argo, Emery and Verne Small Group Sessions
Mosaic

Eighteen years after his passing, Buddy Rich is at last justly celebrated in this seven-disc boxed set, with a lavishly illustrated and annotated booklet, from Jaxtrophile label par excellence Mosaic. Having risen to prominence as a sideman in big bands of the Swing era, Rich ultimately became a star in his own right, successfully running his own big band long after most bandleaders were unable to keep their organisations together.

These lovingly re-mastered recordings cover the period 1953 to 1960, showcasing Rich's heavyweight playing in smaller group settings: quartet, quintet, sextet and so on, his sidemen, all top-drawer jazzmen of the time, range from established names, like Oscar Peterson and Harry "Sweets" Edison, to emerging young players of the day, like vibraphonist Mike Maneri. The sessions cover a wide range of material, from meaty swing and blues to Tin Pan Alley standards, and even some pretty modern sounding bebop charts.

There are many staggeringly dexterous drum solos. The aptly titled 'Monster' reflects Rich's views that "a drummer had to be a powerhouse". He can hold back when necessary, as he does on ballads like 'Willow Weep For Me'. But it's his explosive energy - check either take of 'Strike It Rich' - that steals the show. Rich is a Jazz Juggernaut! From the heavy swing of 'Broadway', to the crisp, scorching Bop of 'Pent-Up House' this set's a real treat, full of passion. Mosaic's beautiful collection is a limited edition of 10,000 pressings, only available via their website: www.mosaicrecords.com. A fitting tribute to "the greatest drummer to have ever drawn breath" as Gene Krupa put it, snap up a copy of this drummer's dream come true, it's well worth shelling out for.

★★★★★



Ashley Maher

Flying Over Bridges

(Sonn 3333 Records SWCD-03)
www.ashleymaher.com

Over the last fifteen years, Ashley Maher has released four consistently enjoyable CDs. The quality of her music is matched by the quality of the drummers she chooses including Vinnie Colaiuta and Paco Sery on 'Pomegranate' and 'Blessed Rain'. Maher's music is world-influenced pop with a strong African element and is catchy, memorable and uplifting. Vinnie and bassist/producer Andre Manga lock for some great grooves, particularly on 'Taxi', aided by the grooving rhythm guitar of Federico Ramos. A refreshing and highly recommended CD.

★★★★



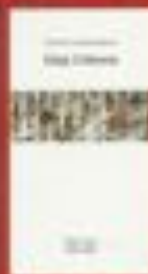
Journey

Generations

Sanchar

Deen Castronova, swell chap that he is, would be the first to tell you that nobody follows a drummer like Steve Smith and comes out alive, but make no mistake, Castronova can slam with anybody, and goes from simple groove, to stair-falling fills, to tribal toms on the anthemic lead-off track 'Faith in The Heartland'. And yes, new vocalist Steve Superi sounds shockingly like Steve Perry, but that's nothing compared to Castronova's lead vocal (you heard right) on the plaintive 'A Better Life' - a song that would have ruled the charts 20 years ago. Fine effort from a multi-talented musician.

★★★



King Crimson

The 21st Century Guide to King Crimson

(Volume Two 1981-2003)

This four-disc retrospective features many memorable moments from Bill Bruford and Pat Mastelotto. Bruford lays into the up-tempo swing of 'Neurotica', pedantically propels the 3/4 'Three of A Perfect Pair', and receives counterpoint from Mastelotto on 'B'Doom'. Mastelotto shines through the spacey swamp of 'Prozac Blues' (live from Tokyo, 2003) and 'The Construction Of Light'.

★★★★



Bill Frisell

East/West

(Nonesuch Records 7559-79863-2)

Guitarist Frisell returns with a superb live offering where he reworks his back catalogue and offers Johnny Cash, Dylan and Marvin Gaye covers. Disc one, features long time Frisell cohort Kenny Wollesen (drums) and occasional collaborator Václav Kravský (bass) in a set that captures the more muscular side of Frisell's playing, in contrast to the new York set which is a mellower, more contemplative affair with Kravský replaced by Tony Scherr. Frisell uniquely blends jazz, country, loops and Americana in a recipe that is all his own with another first class album.

★★★★

Artists & Music

POP • ROCK • R&B • RAP • DANCE • COUNTRY • LATIN

Female Acts Find Niche In Britain *Crossing Atlantic Called Way To Labels*

■ BY PAUL SEXTON

LONDON—This time it's not the British Invasion, it's the British Invaded.

For reasons part sociological, part geographical, and part coincidental, the first quarter of 1992 has seen the emergence of several female, North American singer/songwriters who have relocated to England, been signed to labels here, and had their music released long before it is available back home.

Foremost among these adopted-English chanteuses is Tori Amos, a North Carolina native whose "Little Earthquakes" album was released in the U.S. Feb. 25 by Atlantic after debuting in the British top 20 and achieving silver status (sales of 60,000) there on East West. Ken-

tucky-born Betsy Cook, who shares Amos' U.K. label, has had her debut album, "The Girl Who Ate Herself," released here to favorable critical response.

Ashley Maher, Canadian-born and Los Angeles-raised to British parents, has yet to take her U.S. bow but is already on her second album for Virgin U.K., "Pomegranate." And, for more than just good measure, seasoned Canadian Cree Indian siren Buffy Sainte-Marie has recently made a spectacular return to the British top 40—after 20 years away—via her U.K. signing to Ensign, a subsidiary of Chrysalis Records.

Ensign managing director Nigel Grainge, who signed Sainte-Marie after then-Chrysalis U.S. West Coast A&R head Kate Hyman brought him her demos, says of the Atlantic-strad-

dling signing trend: "It's always been a lot easier to break things in Britain, because it's a small country, and you can work things through the press in the way Warner has done with Tori."

East West U.K. managing director Max Hole, responsible for signing longtime friend Cook and for "adopting" Amos, goes further: "There is a confidence and a charisma about American singer/songwriters, and both Betsy and Tori have got it. Buffy's got it too."

Maher's experience is perhaps the most cross-cultural of all: Raised here, as well as in the U.S. and Canada, she recently married an African resident in England, and musicians from the Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Cameroon appear on "Pomegranate."

Contending that Britain offers a
(Continued on page 30)

26 Maher builds music from a life of bridges crossed

BY LAUREL AARVOLD
CORRESPONDENT

World-music singer/songwriter/dancer Ashley Maher (rhymes with "far") has created a special music out of the places she's been and the bridges — real and metaphorical — that she's crossed. She has described it as a blend of "African/Latin/folk/world/jazz" influences picked up in her journey. She even titled her latest album "Flying Over Bridges," which features musicians from Senegal, Cameroon, Venezuela, Uruguay, Brazil, and the U.S.

Although born to British parents in Canada, Maher, who counts Jost Mitchell as an artistic influence, was transplanted to and grew up in Southern California. It was evident from the start that she had a singing voice meant to be heard.

She crossed and recrossed the musical landscape, singing jazz, folk and classical music. She studied opera in Italy for a year and medieval music at UC Berkeley. It was there when she heard Ghanaian master drummer C.K. Ladzekpo's music pouring out of an open classroom window one day. Transfixed, she fell in love with the music, crossed a musical bridge, and enrolled in his class.

Next, bachelor's degree in hand, Maher packed her bags and moved to London, which in 1990 was a center of African music. She crossed that bridge,



BERNARDO ALPS / STAFF
Singer Ashley Maher, who recently visited Palisades Park in Santa Monica, will be performing at the San Gabriel Street Festival.

too, first by joining an African drumming and dancing troupe, and then, after it broke up, by persuading a friend to let her have enough studio time to record a demo. She found some Pan African drummers and asked them to lay down five different rhythmic tracks.

"In the hills and valleys of the music," she said, she found her voice, the sound "FolkWorks" magazine called "the perfect balance of diversity and cohesion." A recording contract with Virgin UK soon followed.

In the audience at a London concert of Malian music, Maher was dancing wildly, "which one tends to do," she confided, when a young man motioned for her to dance with him. "Look no further," he said. And she didn't. Sidibe

ASHLEY MAHER AND HER BIG GLOBAL BAND

Performing free with two Senegalese dancers at the San Gabriel Street Festival, San Gabriel's Mission District, 250 S. Mission Drive
8 p.m. Sunday
(626) 578-2525 or (626) 308-2525
www.ashleymaher.com

and Ashley have been together ever since, crossing national, cultural, and racial bridges to form a strong marriage and family.

Life in their flat near London's Portobello Road with their preschooler son Sundiata, born in 1992, was wonderful. But even as Maher's third record garnered great reviews, she received the tragic news that her mother was battling terminal cancer. Maher came home to care for her, and her family decided to stay and make a new life and home in Southern California, where daughter Koyan was born in 2001.

Family responsibilities became the next step in Maher's journey, one that could sink many a career, but she faced them with equanimity, continuing to write music and, for the last seven years, to study Senegalese sabar and djembe dance. Describing the performance hiatus, she said, "Moving back to the U.S. from England, taking time

out to have children ... some years just got away."

Maher's music is an expression of her life, so that her mother's death led to the tribute "Gracefully." After Maher and her family visited her husband's relatives and friends in Mali, she wrote "Lucky" about his struggle to live, however happily, in one culture while still deeply nostalgic for another.

Calling the experience humbling, she explained how it was: "Let's have tea," their friends would say, sending one boy to get a teabag, another to get some coal for a fire and a third to the market to get sugar. The whole process of the simple act of having tea took on a new meaning.

Maher feels a cellular pulse of joy in Africa, a spiritual connection to the music and the dance, and performs in many musical configurations in different settings. As described in FolkWorks magazine, the greatest experience is Maher with a full band and West African dancers.

"During these shows, Maher is joined by a number of other dancers in an explosion of color and sound," according to the magazine. "Dressed in bright costumes, the dancers perform both choreographed and solo spots, with audience participants much encouraged. It's the ultimate culmination of Maher's global musical vision, and what defines her as a truly original musician and songwriter."

PORTRAIT

Ashley Maher, cette occidentale amoureuse du Mbalakh

Ashley Maher est une artiste complète, qui excelle aussi bien dans la chanson que dans la danse sénégalaise. Cependant, sa particularité réside dans le fait qu'elle est devenue, par la force des choses, une chevronnée de notre rythme national le Mbalakh. Aussi paradoxal que cela puisse paraître, Ashley qui vient de sortir un album titré «Amina», compte bien se faire connaître du grand public. Retour sur le parcours atypique de cette grande dame au talent indéniable.

Ashley est chanteuse depuis deux décennies. Elle a déjà à son actif cinq albums. Ses deux premiers opus ont été produits par Virgin, la maison de disque qui avait lancé Youssou N'dour en Europe. C'est d'ailleurs cette structure qui a permis la jonction avec le Roi du Mbalakh. C'est au moment où Youssou enregistre son disque «The Lion» qu'elle pu se rapprocher de l'enfant de la Médina qui était chaperonné, à l'époque, par Peter Gabriel. Par la suite, elle a choisi d'évoluer en free-lance, après avoir commis deux albums avec la célè-

bre maison de disques. Elle a alors choisi délibérément de travailler avec des musiciens en provenance de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Contrairement à la plupart des artistes occidentaux qui utilisent le Mali comme porte d'entrée dans la musique africaine, à cause de quelques proximités avec le Blues, Ashley a jeté son dévolu sur le Mbalakh. Celle qui prend comme référence Youssou N'dour qu'elle considère comme le plus grand artiste africain du moment, pense que notre musique dispose d'énormes potentialités. Ashley qui avait de bon-

nes dispositions pour s'intéresser au Mbalakh, ne prend pas de gants pour se lancer à fond dans sa nouvelle passion. En 2006, notre artiste a réalisé un de ses vieux rêves, en écrivant un titre pour Youssou N'dour. Il s'agit du morceau «Boul Bayikou». Une année plus tard, à la venue de Youssou à Los Angeles pour les besoins d'un concert, elle a effectué un solo de danse du Sabar, qui a impressionné plus d'un. En 2008, l'enfant de la Médina l'invite et elle devient son invitée pour des spectacles à Sorano et à Bercy. Par la suite, elle a contacté certains musiciens du Super Étoile, dans le but de sortir un album. Elle s'en est ouverte à Jimmy Mbaye, en lui affirmant qu'elle rêvait de venir enregistrer son cinquième disque à Dakar avec le soutien de la crème des musiciens du pays. Un souhait qui

sera exaucé un an plus tard. Par suite d'une donation de ses fans éparpillés à travers le monde, elle a réussi à disposer de fonds pour enregistrer son disque en novembre 2008. Avec la complicité de son producteur camerounais, André Manga, elle a fini les derniers réglages. L'album de dix titres est intitulé Amina ; et Ashley y chante dans un style purement sénégalais. Son Mbalakh percutant ne détonne pas au pays de Youssou N'dour. Le clip qui passe régulièrement au petit écran lui permet encore de faire étalage de ses immenses talents de danseuse. En compagnie des membres du groupe Gor Gorlou, elle prouve une nouvelle fois sa parfaite maîtrise de la danse préférée des filles du pays. Elle termine le tournage de son second clip au cours de cette semaine. En attendant du royaume l'année prochaine pour organiser un grand concert à Dakar, Ashley Maher continue de tisser sa toile et compte bien réussir son pari de se faire accepter par le grand public. Une ambition qui est largement dans ses cordes, au vu de la qualité du travail accompli. Bon vent à la «Toubato» spécialiste de la danse du Mbalakh !

Mohamed Fadel Lo



PAGELLA



Giorgio Vanni Marco Crippa Giuseppe Vignati Paolo De Benedetti David Gahr Stefano Scaparro Marco D'Amico Enrico Sili Roberto Zappalà

Ashley Maher "Hi"	7	6	7	8	7	9	8	7	7
Anita Baker "Compositions"	8	6	6	8	8	8	7	6	7
Aztec Camera "Stay"	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5
Etta James "Stickie' To My Gun"	7	6	7	7	7	6	7	7	6
The Jeff Healey Band "Hall Ya Pay"	8	6	6	6	6	7	6	8	6
Martin Stephenson & The Daintees "Salvation Road"	5	6	7	6	6	8	6	6	5
Eric B & Rakim "Let The Rhythm Hit 'Em"	6	6	6	6	5	7	7	5	7
Comes "Real Men Wear Black"	6	6	6	7	5	6	6	5	7
Bob Geldof "The Vegetarians Of Love"	5	5	7	7	5	6	5	6	5
Bruce Hornsby & The Range "A Night On The Town"	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	5
The Pointer Sisters "Right Rhythm"	4	5	5	7	6	6	6	4	7
Crosby Still & Nash "Love Is Up"	4	4	5	5	5	5	6	5	4



ASHLEY MAHER • "Hi" • **Virgin** • Nonostante la grande età la musica non smette di produrre i suoi lavori. Era molto atteso questo mese il ritorno sulle scene discografiche di Anita Baker, la nuova regina del soul. A sorpresa e sul filo di lana della corsa della nostra pagella mensile taglia il traguardo per prima, con un leggero margine di vantaggio, le debuttanti Ashley Maher. Un davvero nuovo nella sua concezione, con suoni, ritmi e musicisti presi da varie zone del mondo. Una musica da villaggio globale come vuole la logica dell'ultimo decennio prima del duemila. Un disco che la redazione di *Rockstar* sottolinea, soprattutto per i più distratti, e consiglia caldamente per queste notti d'estate. Anita Baker viene subito dopo ma non sfigura certamente con le sue raffinatezze vocali e con le sue scale tonali. Anche gli Aztec Camera si dimostrano maturi e degni del terzo posto della nostra classifica mensile. Dietro tutti gli altri, quasi al completo oltre la sufficienza, trenino Bruce Hornsby, le Pointer Sisters e, fessolini di coda, i redattori Crosby Stills e Nash, baciati solennemente.

Ashley Maher til Teisen

Når artisten avlegger sitt første Norgesbesøk denne uken, tar hun turen til Teisen.

ELISABETH T. FAANE

Den amerikanske sangeren og låtskriveren er sterkt inspirert av vest-afrikanske og latin-amerikanske rytmer, og høster stor suksess i Senegal og USA. Hun har blant annet opptrådt sammen med Yousou n'Dour, en av nåtidens mest berømte afrikanske sangere. I dag tar Ashley Maher turen til Vaskeriet kulturhus på Teisen. Det gleder en av kulturhusets ildsjeler, Sara Pihl.

– Som kulturhus føler vi et ansvar for å tilby ulike arrangementer fra ulike deler av verden. Når det gjelder musikk er ikke det alltid lett, for artister som Ashley er sjelden i landet.

Lite utbredt

Sara Pihl kjenner derimot Ashley Maher selv gjennom sin mann Khadim Thiam, som også er en profesjonell musiker. Så fort Sara fikk nyss om at Ashley hadde planer om å besøke Norge, var hun



TIL TEISEN: Konserten holder hun allerede i kveld (Foto: Privat).

derfor ikke sen med å invitere henne til kulturhuset på Teisen.

– Heldigvis hadde hun tid. Kunnskapen om Ashley og hennes musikk er lite utbredt. Vi håper på denne måten å gjøre alle en tjeneste: Ashley fortjener fans i Norge, og Norge fortjener å høre god musikk, mener Sara Pihl.

Mangfoldig

Vaskeriet kulturhus feiret sin ettårsdag i begynnelsen av mai i år. Gjennom året har kulturhuset hatt en rekke arrangementer som viser til ulike kulturer.

– Vi har hatt det innmari moro, og vi treffer mange hyggelige og interessante mennesker. Vi får til ting vi ikke trodde var mulig da vi startet, forteller Sara Pihl.

Ønsker du å få med deg Ashley Maher er det bare å ta turen til Vaskeriet kulturhus i dag, onsdag 19. oktober. Dørene åpner klokka 19.30, og det er gratis inngang.

ASHLEY MAHER

'Hi'

(Virgin V2611/CD) ***½

FROM OUT of nowhere – well, almost – Ashley Maher has emerged with one of those audacious, fully formed first albums whose very self-confidence and completeness is kind of hard not to admire.

A Canadian who was raised in LA and is now a resident of London, her songs are densely worded affairs that invariably rely on the rhythmic tug of The Dark Continent in a way that Joni Mitchell hinted at all those years ago around the time of 'The Hissing Of Summer Lawns'. She even manages to sound a little like the woman, too, in the lower register; a combination that works rather better on record than it might sound on paper.

Although conspicuously lacking in the hit single department to make an instant name for herself, the drifting focus of the voice – rich, deeply textured – settles into a comfortable niche somewhere within the parameters of what had better be called World and New Age Music for ease of reference. The opening tracks, 'Dreaming' and 'So Many Times', in particular dance stylishly against the lush, ethnically induced backcloth as though it's the most natural thing ever.

Given the chance, this is just the kind of gently persuasive noise that can get under the skin and stay there.

Peter Kane

Sounds

Now out of print,
weekly U.K. music
magazine for serious
music fans. NME's
competitor.

THE MUSIC OF ASHLEY MAHER

BY JIM LEE

In this melting pot of cultures that is Southern California, it's not surprising that an artist so culturally diverse as Ashley Maher would call Los Angeles home. Her music reflects a strong affinity with African music, with wonderfully complex rhythms and percussive backing with additional Latin American, jazz and folk elements.

Her songwriting is biographical in nature, drawing on her personal experiences to relate telling stories both moving and heartfelt. The expressiveness of her voice is another strong component of Maher's music. It's strong and supple, reminding one of Joni Mitchell. It lifts and soars, often adding subtle nuances to her lyrics.

Born in Canada to British parents, Maher's family moved to Los Angeles when she was five. She grew up singing jazz, classical, choral and medieval music, but found her true calling in African music while attending UC Berkeley in the late 1980s. After graduation, she was off to London, where in the middle of an African music renaissance, she immersed herself in the local music scene.

Maher's talent brought her to the attention of Virgin Records UK, who released two critically acclaimed recordings, *Al* in 1990 and *Pomegranate* in 1991. While commercial fame and fortune was not yet to be, her third recording, the independently released *The Blessed Rain* showed Maher moving on, undeterred.

Recorded in both Paris and London using some of the finest African musicians available, *The Blessed Rain* illustrated how well she fused her lyrics and melodies with African rhythms. The song *And I Believe* related the story of her first visit to her husband's family in Africa, and other songs like *Crown for Adwoina* and *Bahala*, illustrated the strength of her songwriting. Seven years on, this recording remains a powerful and moving statement, refreshingly undated and as valid today as the day it was recorded.

After the release of *The Blessed Rain*, Maher's career was slowed as she returned to Los Angeles to care for her ailing mother and to raise a family. She's now actively performing and writing again, and has released her first new recording in many years, *Flying Over Bridges*.

It's the opening track, *Lucky* that sets the tone and theme for the entire album. It's the story of her husband's visit to his hometown and contrasts the envy the young men have towards him because he lives in the west (and therefore must be rich) with how he longs for the simple pleasures found in his native home. This subject of contrasts, of transition, of bridges to newer things (for better or worse) is reflected throughout the recording.

...Musically, the opening track bridges the old (the African rhythms from

producer Andre Manga's bass and guitar work) with the new, the jazz undertones from pianist Otis Moore Raiz which adds a completely different feel to the tracks he's on. It's a vibrant, refreshing sound that shows Maher isn't averse to taking a risk to further her musical vision.

In fact, it is contrasts that make this recording work so well. Contrast the song *Seven* with it's multi-track vocals backed by just the subtle drums of Aziz Faye, with *Distant/Glazer Moon*, a song with a conventional 4/4 beat, smooth and melodic with a catchy chorus that wouldn't be out of place on commercial radio (if such a thing existed anymore) to the funky *Sundays* or the very rhythmic and up-tempo *One*. Credit this to how producer Manga lovingly mixed and matched the backing musicians and arrangements to suit each song, making each an individual statement.

As a lyricist, Maher shines especially bright on two songs, *Lift your Heels* about strolling with her brother in Canada, but with a deeper meaning about risk taking and having the courage to let oneself go, and the moving closing track, *Gracefully*, about her mother's death and how she faced the prospect with such dignity and resolve. It's a fitting ending to a recording by a remarkable artist.

As enjoyable as Maher's recorded efforts are, seeing her perform live is an additional treat. Her live shows take on many different facets. She can perform in an acoustic setting, usually with Latin guitarist Roberto Montero, with a strong focus on the lyrical and melodic nature of her songs. There are also many different group settings. One features a band with a world jazz influence. Another larger group with backing vocalists uses more improvisation from the musicians. But the most exciting and vibrant is the full band with West African dancers.

During these shows, Maher is joined by a number of other dancers in an explosion of color and sound. Dressed in bright costumes, the dancers perform both choreographed and solo spots, with audience participation much encouraged. It's the ultimate culmination of Maher's Global musical vision, and what defines her as a truly original musician and songwriter. It's not to be missed.

[Further information about live performance dates and where to purchase Ashley Maher's recordings can be found at www.ashleymaher.com.

Jim Lee is a contributing editor, reviewer & photographer for *Dirty Lives Magazine*, and has also written for *Blues*, *the Irish* magazine *TDrych* and the *Folk Alliance Newsletter*.

SATURDAY - APRIL 22nd • 8pm

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CD REVIEW

Artist: ASHLEY MAHER
 Title: THE BLESSED RAIN
 Label: SPIN WILD RECORDS

BY LARRY WYNES

I can't often that you find a CD that finds the perfect balance of diversity and cohesion, or one with so many tracks that stay with you. After a few spins of *The Blessed Rain*, you find yourself singing or humming one of the many melodic lines or tapping out one of its rhythms. During the recent rainy season, I found myself wanting to hear the title track over and over, in tandem with the drops striking the roof.

This album is a standout, solidly in the mainstream of the current trend that fuses world music with American folk sensibilities and the most listenable dimensions of pop. It's an ensemble of traditional instruments from many cultures, guitar, piano, Hilarie Penda's restrained electric bass, and Ashley Maher's silky voice and clear lyrics. There are challenging tempo changes, sometimes complex rhythmic patterns and instrumental phrasing.

Maher's vocals, often pleasantly overdubbed to provide backing harmonies, are not simply supported by the instrumentation. Her singing is as integrated and involved as any instrument, too neatly attempted in most of what we hear. Each song is a delightful orchestration. There are flutes, guitars, electric bass, accordion, some use of finger cymbals, Chinese cymbals, triangle and tambourine and claves. And there is an emporium of African instruments — djembe, marimba, congas, gbalia, twanga, talking drum, shakers and shells, berimbau, bode, beketz, agogo and other bells, bamboo abenda, cabassa and African harp. If you're unfamiliar with many of these words, as are most folk fans, this album will have you visiting *Bang a Drum* to check out the instruments.

The western drums are a bit too much on top in *Blind*, a tune that's truly modern pop. Jazz and R&B influences are felt, but most listeners will be drawn by the interplay of traditional and western instruments with the melodies and vocals.

One track, *Ogoniland*, while maintaining the pleasant melodic theme of the album, has a powerful social conscience. It talks hauntingly of the oil pipelines through this war and famine ravaged part of Nigeria's Niger River Delta, and the song is a tribute to the late activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. (NPR and others have reported on the billions in wealth extracted, along with the oil, into the hands of western financiers, and the unending tragedy of the Ogoni people. A web search produces about that.)

Other songs, like *Babalu*, speak of African culture confronting western influences. There are spiritual dimensions here that may or may not reach the sensibilities of all who track the CD, but they are potent, if one listens to Maher's lyrics.

Ashley Maher wrote or co-wrote all the tracks, and comes by these influences honestly. Her husband is African. She lived for years in both Africa and England, and has absorbed musical influences of both, as well as those of time spent on both American coasts. Those familiar with the old Apple Records catalogue will readily hear the British influence.

We are all accustomed to movies that are made and not released for years, and we sometimes encounter songs that languished in a studio before becoming hits. This album has a similar odd history. Had it been released when it was made, it would have led the current wave of world-influenced music, rather than riding that wave. The tracks were recorded in England in 1997, and while the CD bears that date, it wasn't actually released in the US until 2003. Maher says, "Moving back to the US from England, taking time-out to have children, some years just got away."

Fortunately, her music from those years is back, in her fine live performances throughout Southern California, and on this temporarily "lost" CD. There are ten tracks, and the album runs over 45 minutes. It is nicely



Ashley Maher
 The Blessed Rain

VENDREDI 20 NOVEMBRE 2009 - ÉDITION N°1189

ASHLEY MAYER, CHANTEUSE

Elle est née au Canada, mais a passé une bonne partie de sa vie à Los Angeles où ses parents britanniques sont allés s'installer. Depuis plus de vingt ans, Ashley pratique une musique mélangée avec celle africaine. Elle a travaillé sur le label Virgin Records avec Youssou N'dour et Gabriel vers la fin des années 80. Avec ce label, Ashley a signé deux albums dont *Hi* (1990) et *Pomegranate* (1992). Son troisième album *The Blessed Rain* (1997) signé à Emi confirme son talent de chanteuse de même que le quatrième *Flying Over Bridges* (2006) après le décès de sa mère.

Cette Canadienne «*artiste phare de la musique africaine*»

L'ancrage déterminé dans le milieu artistique d'Ashley Mayer à la musique sénégalaise dans son ensemble s'est réalisé par le biais de son amitié avec Youssou N'dour illustrée en 2007 par une chanson co-écrite et intitulée "Boul bayékou" dans l'album *Itakku sui rokku* du roi du mbalax. Elle a fait ses premiers en Afrique avec Salif Keita, Baaba Maal, Zup Mama, Vusi Mahlasela et Debet Grubben. Présamment, la danseuse de sabar et héritière de la tradition mbalax est à Dakar pour la promotion de son cinquième disque *Aminsa*.

Ashley Mayer, la Canadienne aux ambitions tournées vers l'Afrique de l'Ouest, dit jouer le rôle d'intermédiaire entre la musique africaine et celle occidentale. Mais son choix est tombé sur le Sénégal pour faire la promotion de son dernier album *Aminsa*. «Je préfère le mbalax à toutes les musiques africaines parce qu'il est compliqué, difficile à danser contrairement aux autres artistes

qui s'adonnent aux rythmes faciles comme celui de l'Afrique du Sud», déclare-t-elle sans complexe. Et de préciser que «Youssou N'dour est le plus grand artiste d'Afrique pour être le seul à avoir réussi à faire la connexion entre le mbalax et la musique occidentale. Et c'est ce que je veux faire, c'est mon chemin.»

Ashley Mayer révèle que des deux grands artistes qui l'ont inspirée, c'est Youssou N'dour qui l'a inspirée le plus. «Il a une bonne oreille musicale, une belle voix et il a fait des morceaux tellement bons», dit-elle.

Son amitié avec son inspirateur ne date pas d'aujourd'hui. Et elle se concrétise par l'enregistrement d'une chanson co-écrite. «Il en a enregistré une qu'on a écrite dans son album *Alamaa day* qui s'intitule «Boul bayékou» et après il m'a vue danser quand il était venu faire un concert à Los Angeles et tous les musiciens du Super étoile étaient étonnés parce que j'ai bien dansé.» Ceci a valu à la danseuse de sabar une invitation du roi du

mbalax à Dakar en 2008 pour répéter avec les danseurs sénégalais et se produire à Sorano, puis à Bercy.

Ashley a élargi son espace de connaissance avec les musiciens, en particulier le grand guitariste Jimmy Mbaye, à qui elle a fait part de son souhait d'enregistrer *Aminsa* avec eux à Dakar. «Le jour où Ousmane Mbaye a joué dans le studio, j'ai pleuré parce que cela a fait vingt ans que j'attendais ce moment», explique-t-elle ainsi son rêve devenu réalité. Pour y arriver, Ashley avait envoyé des e-mails à tous ses fans à travers le monde demandant un soutien financier.

Concernant la signification d'*Aminsa*, Ashley Mayer explique que «c'est une femme qui a porté un lourd fardeau et qui veut alléger pour être libre.» Il y a aussi une chanson «*Sovall boar*» (petites pirogues) où elle parle de l'émigration clandestine : «Les jeunes prennent des pirogues pour se rendre en Europe et le plus souvent n'arrivent pas à destination. Pour se donner du courage, ils chantent un chant de Marine Cheikh Ibra Fall afin de donner le meilleur d'eux mêmes», souligne l'héritière du mbalax.

Pour finir, la Canadienne pense qu'après la promotion de son disque, elle va revenir à Dakar pour faire un concert. À l'en croire, son combat est de faire en sorte que le Sénégal connaisse sa richesse et que l'Occident ait la chance de savoir ce qui se passe ici.

Jean Michel COLY

THE MUSIC OF ASHLEY MAHER

BY JIM LEE

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Maher's talent brought her to the attention of Virgin Records UK, who released two critically acclaimed recordings, *Ki* in 1990 and *Postgraduate* in 1991. While commercial fame and fortune was not yet to be, her third recording, the independently released *The Blessed Rain* showed Maher moving on, undeterred.

Recorded in both Paris and London using some of the finest African musicians available, *The Blessed Rain* illustrated how well she fused her lyrics and melodies with African rhythms. The song *And I Believe* related the story of her first visit to her husband's family in Africa, and other songs like *Crown for Adorning* and *Babala*, illustrated the strength of her songwriting. Seven years on, this recording remains a powerful and moving statement, refreshingly undated and as valid today as the day it was recorded.

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Jim Lee is a contributing editor, reviewer & photographer for Dirty Linen Magazine, and has also written for Roots, the Welsh magazine YDrych and the Folk Alliance Newsletter.



HARMONY RIDGE MUSIC P.O. Box 995 El Granada, California , 94018, USA
Phone/Fax 650.726-6660 e-mail jsutton@rahul.net

Ashley Maher "The Blessed Rain"

For those not familiar with Ashley, she is Canadian born now living in England and has had two previous CDs on Virgin Records. "The Blessed Rain" is an independent release and continues her musical journey into African rhythms and percussion with jazz, folk and rock influences. As I was listening to this for the first time completely lost in the beauty of the music, the wonderful arrangements, the rhythms, and Ashley's striking voice, I was rocked by the spiritual and humanistic insight of the lyrics. Spin Free seemed to be directed at me, how true the message, and how we need reminders like this so we can remember the power and beauty we all possess:

"the golden ring you're grabbing at
is already in reach
the answer in a bottle's
already washed up on the beach
if you're ready to fly
life will teach you
don't forget

to spin wild
spin free
pull in the nets
of your secret sea"

"The Blessed Rain" is a uplifting spiritual good feeling gift, given and received at the same time, the perfect human exchange. Every cut gives me the feeling of great depth requiring many careful listens. It's like you can listen in a casual way and have the music sweep around and through you, but something inside says, I need to drink in this splendor slowly and deeply. I find it hard to try to technically explain music as I don't understand much of that anyhow. I can only talk about feelings from the music and this feels real good.

The title cut, "The Blessed Rain" is a special treat for me and a great addition to my collection of "rain songs". Sometimes I feel quite alone in my affinity for rain and wonder why so many people seem to spend much energy to avoid being touched by rain. Ashley said she was a great "rain affectionado" and Maireid Sullivan an Irish Celtic singer told me she put corrugated tin on her bedroom room roof to amplify the rain. Oh yes, "The Blessed Rain", I like that.



ASHLEY MAHER

LOOKING FURTHER THAN THE CHARTS

At a time when so many new artists are making music that's calculated to reach the Top 40, it is refreshing to meet Ashley Maher, a Canadian musician with a rather unusually cosmopolitan background.

Born in Canada, raised in LA, and with English parents, she grew up listening to rock and roll bands like the Isley Brothers and Earth, Wind and Fire. Now the colourful street life of West London has introduced her to more exotic sounds.

"For a while I played with a variety of African and European musicians. I got to know more about that sort of music by regularly visiting the sound archives near the Royal Albert Hall."

The result of all these influences is a solo album of remarkable diversity entitled *H*. Her voice is redolent of modern British folk singers like Van Morrison and John Martyn. Yet the rhythms show a keen ear for the contemporary sounds of Caribbean drums and rap. It might not be the most commercial LP of the year, but then few would have predicted Enya would reach No 1.

At the same time Ashley's career is in safe hands. Apart from being signed to Virgin Records, her manager is associated with the team that looks after Peter Gabriel and Genesis.

"I suppose my album is different from most chart material," she admits, "but at least if it becomes very successful I will have my integrity intact. Look at Van Gogh. What he did was totally individual yet now his paintings are changing hands for \$55 million!"

Hello

glossy weekly

U.K. magazine.

circulation: 347,000

www.hellomagazine.com

un miniano, debito alle tentazioni del virtuosismo.

Però non tutte le note sono positive: a parte il fatto che Jeff Healey cantante non è certo all'altezza del chitarrista, non tutti i brani di *Neil To Pay* si rivelano convincenti, a cominciare dalla "Ful Circle" d'apertura, con un riff un po' troppo heavy, adatto forse per la FM americana, ma che qui sembra fuori posto. Non è trattata al meglio anche "Let It All Go" dell'ottimo John Hiatt (che firmò due canzoni tra le migliori di *See The Light*), ed è inutile che si siano scomodati Jeff Lynne e George Harrison per una cover poco significativa di "While My Guitar Gently Weeps".

Le buone nuove, invece, arrivano con "I Can't Get My Hands On You" (molto r&b, ben definita non solo per chitarra), "How Much", che è (alla lettera) nelle sue corde, e "Highway Of Dreams", quasi psichedelica, la più originale. Ma il vertice si raggiunge quando entra in campo Mark Knopfler con la sua "I Think I Love You Too Much", ottimo esempio di blues-rock moderno, post-Robert Cray e, naturalmente, post Dire Straits. Quasi sei minuti sono la direzione da seguire per il futuro, e credo che Jeff Healey la "veda bene".

Alex Nighi

4/10/88

Carole King e convincerla pienamente.

È un disco da sentire ripetutamente. Non riesce a stancare perché ci si può soffermare in vari modi sulla voce, sulla ritmica, sulle melodie, sugli impasti vocali. Una vera sorpresa.

Paolo De Bernardis

4/10



MARTIN STEPHENSON & THE DAINTEES
«Salutation Road»

Kelowna - LP/CD/MC

Track: Let Us To Burn / Enclosure / In The Heat Of The Night / Big North Lights / Long Hair Road / Spoke In The Wheel / Heart Of The City / Too Much In Love / We Are Given / Migrants / Morning Time / Salutation Road. **Prodotto:** Pete Anderson. **Best Night:** Let Us To Burn / Heart Of The City / Salutation Road.

Nota con errore che Martin invecchia a vista d'occhio. Nel retro del disco sembra Fernandel. A parlarci si rivela un riflessivo che cerca continuamente soluzioni per non destare interesse, troppo umile, troppo pacato. Per dire ad uno della casa discografica che vorrebbe fare pipì, aspetta quasi di farela sotto. Eppure al 50% di sconto, comprerei tutto quel che scrive. Ma a prezzo intero sono obbligato per questioni di grana a scegliere tra 5 canzoni di *Best To Believe*, un paio di *Humour*, *Gloamers & Nise* e la sola "Let Us To Burn" di oggi.

Mi spiace, Martin segna il passo. Per scattare la cultura americana si è vestito da vagabondo e ha girato intorno ai suoi sogni finché non è arrivata la telefonata di Pete Anderson (Michelle Shocked, Dwight Yoakam, altri) che di quei sogni voleva fare un cocktail buono per il mercato USA. Risultato: "Let Us To Burn" pare di Michael Franks, le altre di Woody Guthrie. La vivace complicazione che "Spoke In The Wheel" è stata scritta in un albergo nel quale, in una stanza attigua a quella di Martin, Lyle Lovett stava facendo baccano (allargandosi, per i gusti del padrone dell'hotel) con la sua già abbastanza "Large Band" rimane soltanto una vivace complicazione. Troppo mito, dunque, e poca cultura vera, che peraltro Martin sfrutta da ospite delle emozioni americane. Il suo bagaglio, che alla fine gli farebbe senz'altro più comodo, è rimasto all'aeroporto di Newcast. Quindi in Europa, pronto per quando Fra Martin tornerà dolcemente allo stato di sobrio compagno della sua miscela Washington, rinvincendo alle amiche di entrare nel cuore dei pigri abitanti di quel paese governato dagli uomini di un'altra Washington.

Enrico Sisti

4/10



ERIC B & RAKIM
«Let The Rhythm Hit 'em»

MCA - LP/CD/MC

Track: Let The Rhythm Hit 'em / No Drugs / In The Streets / Stop Back / Eric B Made My Day / Run For Cover / Un Touchable / Manpower / Keep 'em Laps To The Ladies / Get 'em Straight. **Prodotto:** Eric B & Rakim. **Best Night:** In The Streets / Keep 'em Laps To The Ladies.

A due anni di distanza dall'ultima loro impresa discografica, tornano in azione Eric B & Rakim, una delle coppie più solide e affiatate del rap newyorkese. «Let the Rhythm Hit 'em» è come lo sport, c'è chi vince e chi non vince una volta Eric B, perché così sempre dare il massimo per mantenere intatta la reputazione: non ci sono ore di riposo. E conciliando da questa velleità competitiva del freemove che possiamo considerare i pregi e i difetti di *Let The Rhythm Hit 'em*. Non rappresenta certo un passo avanti paragonabile a quello compiuto un *For D In Full* e *Follow The Leader*, in termini di qualità degli arrangiamenti e consapevolezza del proprio ruolo, essendo viceversa piuttosto simile al secondo, ossia il suo immediato predecessore. Nonostante siano trascorsi due anni, questo nuovo è infatti un disco che si limita a consolidare i risultati ottenuti precedentemente. E in ciò sta la sua forza e insieme, paradossalmente, la sua debolezza. Ascoltandolo dal principio alla fine, ci si innesta nel consueto e apparentemente banale sonoro edificato da un manipolatore di suoni estroso e raffinato quale Eric B, dentro il quale rimbombano le rime barbare di Rakim. L'effetto è ipnotico, talora inquietante. Ma non nuovo. Il suo perfezionismo cioè il proprio stile, lo rende pressoché impeccabile, ma chiuso in se stesso. E in un ambito come questo, che muta scempi con rapidità inascoltabile, la sua ferrea equità a retrocedere, come già ci era capitato di osservare in altre circostanze. Ecco dunque perché la forza e la debolezza di *Let The Rhythm Hit 'em* coincidono con la sua staticità (non prefigurano alla monotonità...). Mai Eric B & Rakim erano stati così solidi nel loro "sport": pronto che la disciplina dell'hip hop richiedeva missioni "specialissime" e maggiore "versatilità".

Alberto Campo

4/10/88

BRUCE HORNSEY & THE RANGE
«A Night On The Town»

BMG - LP/CD/MC

Track: A Night On The Town / Carry The Water / Fire On The Cross / Barrel Ground / Across The River / Standed On Easy Street / Stander On The Mountain / Lost Soul / Another Day / Special Night / These Arms Of Mine. **Prodotto:** Don Gehman, Bruce Hornsby. **Best Night:** Carry The Water / Lost Soul / These Arms Of Mine.

Interpretazione copertina: lo spavento di un



ASHLEY MAHER
«Hi»

Virgin - LP/CD/MC

Track: Dreaming / So Many Times / Honeycomb Gray / Drive Drive Drive / Talk Talk / Giving / Stop By Stop / Jumping Mouse / Hush Child / The Sage Is Under Under My Feet. **Prodotto:** Philip Duffin. **Best Night:** Giving / Honeycomb Gray / Hush Child.

Ennesimo debutto. Ennesima nuova lady. Ashley Maher (si pronuncia Mary) ha portato a compimento un lavoro d'eccezione di altissima qualità. Figlia di genitori inglesi, Ashley è nata a Montréal in Canada ma è cresciuta a Los Angeles. Questa sorta di internazionalismo l'ha aiutata forse a intendere la musica dalla parte delle radici, e non solo come interesse artistico. Si è cimentata con lo studio delle percussioni e del suono presso gli Archivi del Suono di Londra, ha messo in pratica con un gruppo di musicisti europei ed africani le sue teorie. Il risultato è questo *Hi*, un lavoro che è stato realizzato in due anni con l'ottima produzione di Philip Giffin. Disc interessante un lavoro come questo è molto limitato.

I musicisti impiegati per la registrazione provengono tutti dalle esperienze più varie e da diversi paesi: Sud America, Canada, Stati Uniti. La base percussiva è la tradizione principale delle composizioni: una voce e propria ragazzata, a tratti irresistibile e perfetta, su cui si dipanano le voci e le melodie della bravissima Ashley. La sua voce poi cita molto elegantemente Jani Mitchell, Toni Childs e

'Amina' for Maher's Afrocentric Music

By MICHAEL AUSHENKER
Staff Writer

Most Western musicians—usually Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel, David Byrne and Sting—have found success by combining their musical talents with African styles and collaborating with the continent's most accomplished musicians.

Such was the Western musician trying to make it in Africa before going international. But such has been the road taken by singer-songwriter Ashley Maher, who has forged a two-decade career on the back of musical collaborations with some of the most accomplished musicians from Africa.

"That's kind of different," said Maher, whose fifth CD, the M'batia-sung "Amina," comes out this week. "It's a harder road."

And her musical journey has its roots in an unlikely place: Pacific Palisades, California.

Born in Montreal to an Irish father and English mother, Maher and her family moved to Los Angeles when she was five, and then to the Palisades a year later.

"The music departments at Paul Revere and Palisades were

excellent," said Maher, who graduated in 1991. "I sang in choirs, learned music theory, and developed a great ear for harmonies."

While attending multi-cultural Palisades, "I fell in love with everything to do with black music," Maher said. "All the white kids were listening to Boston and Journey. But when they played Earth, Wind and Fire, the Jolee Brothers and Parliament-Funkadelic, I was the only white girl on the dance floor. That was my first doorway into the music."

After a year at UCLA, Maher transferred to UC Berkeley, where she graduated summa cum laude and, along the way, "stumbled into African drumming," after hearing C.K. Ladzolepo, a master drummer from Ghana who was teaching at Berkeley. That moment literally changed her life.

"I just heard the drumming in the hallway," Maher said, "and it was this biophysical epiphany. The music affected me almost on a molecular level. I knew this was going to be the direction of my life."

Maher, who was studying medieval history, was on the short list for a Rhodes scholarship to study in Oxford, but was passed over. She decided to relocate to England anyway.

"I moved to London, got a job and lived there for the next 11 years," from the mid-1990s through the mid-1990s, Maher said. "That was the heyday for African music. It was just heaven."

At the time, Maher trained Backlash, an Afro-funk outfit that got her noticed. She was able to record the demos that landed her a contract with Virgin Records in England. "I had Peter Gabriel's manager and Phil Collins' wife label." Her first CD, "H," came out in 1990 and received positive reviews from the British music press. But by the time her second CD for Virgin, 1992's "Demotion," was released, Virgin was going through some internal upheaval and neglected the album.

"The record came and went in 10 days," Maher said.

During that time, Maher had met her husband, Abdoulaye Saliba, who is from Ivory Coast and today works in post-production at a DVD production facility. They had their first child, son Soufiane, now 18 and a student at UC Santa Barbara.

Maher's life took another dramatic turn in 1998, the year she released "The Blessed Rain" independently, when her mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

"I came back to L.A.," Maher said. "We put all our finances on the street and rented our flat to a friend. I knew my mom really needed me full-time. I was with her for six months until she passed away." By then, "the mother in England was sluggish and my husband loved L.A. and didn't want to go back."

And so, today, Maher and her family, which now includes Koyan, 9, live in Santa Monica, where Maher played the Pier in 2006 as an opening act for Malibu singer Sade Kette. She also performed alongside Ry Cooder, Taj Mahal and Dave Alvin at UCLA's Royce Hall at a 2008 concert celebrating the 50th anniversary of the legendary West Hollywood club, the Ash Grove.

In 2006, no less than Youssou N'Dour, arguably the most internationally renowned African recording artist, recorded a song Maher co-wrote with Jason Hane called "Kool Biyekele," which wound up on several Senegalese albums.

"He put his own lyrical stamp on it," Maher said. "The song was



Pacific Palisades-raised singer-songwriter Ashley Maher with Thio M'baye (Senegal's rubber drummer extraordinaire) and Joss N'Dour (Youssou N'Dour's guitarist) in front of Studio Daga in Dakar, Senegal, where Maher's latest CD, "Amina," was recorded.

Photo: Bruce Long

a huge hit in Senegal."

In the spring of 2008, Maher started working on "Amina" with Cameroonian bass player Andy Manga, who had previously collaborated with her on the 2006 CD, "Flying Over Bridges."

Then she got a call from N'Dour.

For the last 10 years, Maher has been studying Senegalese dances such as sabar, and last year N'Dour flew her out to his concerts in Dakar (in Senegal) and Paris to dance on stage.

It was a nice dinner for Maher, who considers N'Dour her favorite musician.

She got back on track, raising \$15,000 to record her new album in Dakar with African musicians by utilizing donations via her worldwide mailing list. "We recorded 'Amina' in September and finished it in June," Maher said. "Then I went on tour all over Europe, returned to Dakar to work on videos, and came back here."

The title of "Amina" is a word that can mean "woman" and "angel."

"The one thing that's been consistent throughout my recording career," Maher said, "is that all of

the albums have had a spiritual link with African and a hint of jazz. One thing different about 'Amina' is that it's rhythmically more focused on M'batia music."

She explained that the M'batia style utilizes "thin sticks on tightly wound tall drums," in contrast to the "bonds on drums" style of much West African music. "It's a hoity, energetic spikiness," she said.

On "Amina," Maher's tone rises high over the material, her voice and cadences reminiscent of Joan Baez. But social activism and injustice does not inform this album's lyrical content, spirituality and an expert of *jeu de vivre* does. Lyrically, Maher invests hope and faith across such tracks as "Deserts," "Joss," "By My Side" and "Amazing Grace" (not a cover of the famous hymn but a song referencing the power of that hymn's melody). The song structure on "Amina" seems less symmetrical in composition than most Western fare, which makes it less predictable. Overall, Maher's new album is anything, with spots of saxophone blasts giving the album a jazz-like flair.

Through sales of "Amina" available through her Web site and via private donations, Maher stands to raise another \$15,000 to finance a promotional trip to Senegal on November 1, when she wants to begin work filming another video with the country's top dancers. In January, she will throw a CD-release party and spend most summer touring in Europe.

"My manager, Thomas Rome [who has managed N'Dour for 25 years] believes that my doorway onto the world stage will be through Senegal," Maher said. "Internationally, the world music tastemakers and gatekeepers tend to be understandably wary of Western artists who collaborate with Africans, as they may be exploitive or derivative."

"Senegal will not be a place to make money, so piracy there is so rampant. However, my heart is absolutely over the music of this idea, not only because my entire being lights up like a candle when I am there, but because I know that deep down, my higher purpose is to be a cultural ambassador between Senegal's music and ours. There is so much more there I want to champion."



Ashley Maher

"STUMBLING BLOCK"
VIDEO

A great new single from talented singer-songwriter Ashley Maher. "Stumbling Block" is taken from her forthcoming album "Transcendence" the long awaited follow up to 1997's critically acclaimed "11". Maher's music draws upon influences from all over the world.

not surprising, considering her history. She was born in Montreal of English parents and raised in Los Angeles, where she studied history, dance and music. She impressed Radio One listeners when she performed three numbers live on Simon Bates' show recently and her bid for world domination continued apace with an excellent live set on TV AM last week. Looks like nothing can 'Block' her now...

ashley maher

A Prodigious New Talent

"An intriguing front runner in the current crop of heart and soul
singers"
ARENA

"Her lyrics matter, her music is lush and easy on the ear, she writes
from the heart and she sings that way too. One to savour."
DAILY MIRROR

"...overflowing in fact with flesh, pipe and lung from the fruit of the
unconscious... a pretty gorgeous affair..."
TIME OUT

"An essential for all bohemians."
COMPANY

STUMBLING BLOCK

A Great New Single

Record Mirror

ASHLEY MAHER

'Hi'

VIRGIN

True, 'Hi' is hardly an inspiring, attention-grabbing title, but delve a little deeper into its contents, and you might well be pleasantly surprised.

California raised Ashley has released the type of album that will prompt many to proclaim her as this year's winner in the annual singer-songwriter stakes. And they could just be right.

Described (by herself) as "a big ethnic jumble", 'Hi' is a huge pressure cooker simmering with a mixture of rhythms, styles, and atmosphere. A light sprinkling of jazz and folk, evenly peppered with some African beats and intricate harmonies, its aroma is distinctly tropical.

Her rich vocals wrap snugly around the likes of 'Shine Shine Shine', the bright and breezy 'Sage Is Under My Feet', and the glorious 'Step By Step'. A quick costume change later, and the tone is lowered to a gentle whisper for the tender 'Hush Child' and bleak 'Honeycomb Grey'.

These bewitching tunes make for an exuberant, effortless debut, and while not the type of music to set the charts alight, is bound to cause a ripple like Chapman and Vega before her.

One of the year's more pleasing discoveries. ■■■½ **Nick Duerden**

Record Mirror
Glossy monthly U.K.
music magazine
including mainstream
and alternative artists.
now out of print

Time Out

London

MUSIC

Preview

Open secrets

NICK COLEMAN ON ASHLEY MAHER AND TORI AMOS

Blowing orange hair is the thing to have in the second week of January. Tori Amos and Ashley Maher between them have yards of it, and new albums out, and they share that least fertile of all personal defects: a sensitive North American poetic sensibility.

Sounds grim, I know. So soon after Christmas too. But you're going to have to suppress your sniffler instincts. They are both, in markedly different styles, fine records — over-written in places and indulgent of the singers' individual pathologies, for sure, but records of the heart nevertheless. Both *'Pomegranates'* and *'Little Earthquakes'* treat emotion as a commonplace, an open secret operating without cover in a code-free zone. In other words, both Amos and Maher sing descriptive songs about how they feel and do it in the first person. And they want you to share the experience.

You're not put in good heart by the sleeve iconography of either album. On the front of *'Little Earthquakes'* Amos braces herself against the walls of a wooden crate, trashlessly boxed with soul but a tiny blue piano for a friend, while the back cover has equivocal meshiness on it. This is Post-Industrial Ruff of the highest order. At least Maher has the gumption to cover herself in peanut butter, make ambiguous oral play with a pomegranate and do her hair in a sort of Medusa-guns-and-wrestling arrangement, as befits her pan-global anthropo-mythological attitude to life. But you do rather wonder whether it hasn't been too long a road from Corleone King's tapestried bower. Confessional songwriters are supposed to grapple with the inner world, not advertise it.

Still, for all the vulgarity of their

respective surfaces, the inner worlds of *'Earthquakes'* and *'Pomegranates'* are rich indeed, overflowing in fact with flesh, pips and fungi from the fruit of the unconscious.

Amos's album is the tougher of the two. By the sound of it she's had a tougher life, one that's involved withstanding 'the atrocities of school', resisting the pull of 'nine-inch nails and little fascist panties' and being racked on the timbers of male sexual malevolence. It all spills out in a terrible gush, most compelling when there's irony about ('Silent All These Years', 'Leather' and 'Tear In Your Hand' — 'I don't believe you're leaving' (tease me and Charles Manson like the same ice cream)) but still effective when her weakness for spotted poetry is reined in and disciplined by succinct musical ideas ('Winter', 'China', 'Wappy Phantom'). She can't always hang the gashers, however, and sometimes the images flood the basement with sleep about crucifixion and so on. It's to her advantage then that she whacks the crap out of her piano and goes in for spartan arrangements — odd bits of guitar, strings, bass, very few drums — the kind of modest apparatus that becomes the root exhibitionist. Normal people will find Amos fascinating. Slubberers over Kate Bush, and the terminally sniffy, will be offended.

No one could reasonably be offended by Maher, however. Unless the abuse of peanut butter for trans-cultural purposes is an offence. *'Pomegranates'* is her second album and, like the first, it draws all its musical juice from the vines of the developing world and Jon Mitchell. And if you ignore the ghostly global rock-waffle of the opening track, 'The Flew', a pretty gorgeous affair it is too. Her tones are almost indecently luxurious, the playing exquisite and the arrangements as full of subtlety as you could wish, given the puerile nature of the lyrics they are set to frame. You see, Maher's thing, unlike Amos's, is not irrepressible witchy pessimism but its opposite: hers is a golden world, in which words are garlands, voices are a glow and drums... well, you know what they say about the drums.

Bell's bells, it seems mean to be picky about records that include music as lovely as 'Laughter In The Rain' and 'Spring', riveting as 'Leather', but at this end of the production chain it's not so much an irrational world as a world in which irrationality is taken according to taste. Hey 'em both and suck out the good bits.

'Pomegranates' is out on Virgin, *'Little Earthquakes'* on East West.



Time Out
U.K. weekly event
listings magazine
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www.timeout.co.uk

Tra Europa e Africa

ASHLEY MAHER

Intervista con una musicista sorprendente ed affascinante giunta con "Hi" al suo debutto discografico. Dopo anni di ricerche sui suoni e la cultura musicale africana, e dopo aver provato e riprovato possibili assonanze e convergenze, la Maher presenta il suo lavoro, cercando di chiarirne le motivazioni.

di Marcello Virella

"Sono nata a Montreal in Canada, ma sono cresciuta a Los Angeles. Le prime influenze musicali le ho avute dalla black music: Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, Earth Wind & Fire, J.Bey Brothers, ed altri classici. Parallelamente cantavo non solo questo genere ma anche repertorio classico, jazz, folk, per cui ho assimilato da studiosi filoni..."

Chi si presenta con questa parole è Ashley Maher, che ha stupito positivamente un pò tutti con il suo album d'esordio, definito dalla stampa specializzata di mezzo mondo "un piccolo capolavoro", pur presentandosi con un semplice "ciao" ("Hi") sulla copertina. In una intervista metà in inglese e metà in italiano (Ashley ha vissuto due anni a Bologna e parla perfettamente la nostra lingua, n.d.r.), abbiamo cercato di sapere di più su questo perfetto cocktail di ritmiche e ricercatezze armoniche spartiti dai Caraibi all'Europa, che sorprende per completezza e maturità, essendo di diritto probabilmente fra i migliori album in assoluto del 1990, sicuramente come migliore prova d'esordio.

"Tutto è iniziato quando all'università di San Francisco ho incontrato un percussionista del Ghana, che è stato capace di fondere in chiave occidentale delle ritmiche prettamente africane. Spesso questo lavoro di "traduzione" viene meno per cui pur essendo affascinati dalle sonorità non riusciamo a cogliere le componenti politiche, sociali, mistiche, restando solo parte di quello che ci viene offerto. Noi abbiamo deciso di rivisitarci in questa lavoro di "traduzione letterale", facendole diventare la colonna portante del disco, ed utilizzandola in situazioni musicali tanto diverse quanto simili".

Facile a dirsi ma per arrivare a questi risultati ci



retti stile sixties che di una chitarra solista che si riallaccia a certi schemi classici del rock. Tutto ciò rende molto piacevole un album delicato e suggestivo, dove il delicato non deve trarre in inganno e far pensare a una musica noiosa o melensa. "Chemicalcrazy" è un disco rock a tutti gli effetti che i T.P.E. riescono ad infarcire di influenze black senza tradire la loro impronta originaria. Un esempio, per tutti, "Scunsurfin" scatenatissima rock-song, forse la migliore di tutto il disco. In evidenza anche "Sensitize" e "Another day". (Giambuca Guacci).

ASHLEY MAHER

Hi
Virgin

E' indubbio che negli ultimi tempi vi sia stata una vera e propria invasione di cantanti/compositrici, che hanno inevitabilmente portato ad una saturazione del mercato, oltretutto con una produzione sì buona, ma quasi mai trascendentale.

Ma il LP appena pubblicato da Ashley Maher (ci dicono che si pronuncia Marr) ci ha fatto letteralmente cadere dalla sedia e gridare al miracolo. Sicuramente la più interessante novità nel panorama musicale femminile attuale, la Maher ci ipnotizza con un perfetto cocktail multietnico e poliedrico. Cresciuta con il rock, poi passata al soul, questa piccola canadese, cresciuta a Los Angeles e poi trasferitasi a Londra, ma messo a punto insieme con il produttore Philip Giffin, un condensato di ritmiche che spaziano dai Caraibi alla California, dal Sud America all'Europa, passando per l'Africa, in cui si valorizzano le sue indubbie capacità vocali, consone a tirar fuori delle ricercatezze armoniche anche nelle situazioni più improbabili.

Costruito su delle percussioni del Ghana, chitarre funky e flauti tradizionali, il disco della Maher, oltre a costituire un vero e proprio sogno di mezza estate per tutti gli amanti delle ritmiche, si dimo-



stra più maturo e con maggior spessore - pur essendo un lavoro d'esordio - dei lavori di Sade e Toni Child. Non ci resta quindi che dire "Hi" e benvenuta alla Maher ed a quello che si appresta ad essere uno dei più piacevoli dischi dell'anno. (Marcello Villella)

JEFF LYNNE

Armchair Theatre
Reprise/WEA

Un pop-star di cartapesta o un vero artista? O, forse, la verità sta nel mezzo? In fondo che importa; il suo nuovo album non cerca la didattica, è solo un godibile esempio di rock'n'roll melodico, oscillante fra gli arrangiamenti sofisticati ed un velato spirito ribelle. Nello stile "Armchair Theatre", è bene precisarlo subito, di primo acchito non sembra poi così distante da quanto la sua vecchia band, l'Electric Light Orchestra, suonava con successo negli anni settanta e nella prima parte degli ottanta, e cioè del buon pop-rock "sinfonico". Un'analisi superficiale che non tiene conto delle recenti, importantissime esperienze vissute da Lynne con i componenti del Traveling Wilburys. Si potrebbe iniziare da lontano, dalla collaborazione sullo splendido "Cloud Nine" di George Harrison, passando per l'opera prima del Traveling Wilburys e per il considerevole aiuto che ha dato alla lavorazione di "Mystery Girl", l'ultimo album di Roy Orbison prima della morte, finendo con la produ-

PREVIEW

ART SARAH KENT ON GEORG BASELITZ BOOKS MARIA LEXTON ON TRUE CRIME

MUSIC NICK COLEMAN ON DEXTER GORDON FILM GEOFF ANDREW ON 'SWEETIE'

SPORT ANDREW SHIELDS ON REAL TENNIS THEATRE JANE EDWARDS ON 'GIBRALTAR STRAIT'

DANCE ALLEN ROBERTSON ON WILLIAM TUCKETT

ASHLEY MAHER

NICK
COLEMAN

Ashley Maher's excuse is that she is a kind of cultural mongrel. She was born in Canada to English parents, grew up in California and has since spent half her life continent-hopping. 'If my family ever had money it was always measured in plane tickets rather than houses and cars,' she says through catwalk, chucking a strand of orange hair over her shoulder. 'All my life I've only been interested in looking at other cultures as a way of asking what really is the best way to live; to ask how do you get through your day, what's the role of women in your culture, how do you eat, how do you organise your household, what do you do at

weddings? All of that colour and information has been grafted to my personal will. What is the best possible way of life?

Penshelt Road punches in afternoon spring sunshine, its culture hanging like vapour at her door. That emotionally and spiritually, I feel most at home in London because of its cultural mix. Better than in the States, better than in Europe where the ethnic population is considered to lend an exotic and beautiful dimension to society...' She stops abruptly, her joint made.

Too much halcher can be bad for you. Global village idiom is a plague that afflicts half the planet, and it's highly contagious. After all, why should one dirty one's mitts in the messy aftermath of Western multi-culturalism when protective halchered rubberwear is so readily accessible to the average shopper? We have Single Malt, we have Bourbon and we have the most marketable commodity in the post-industrial, number-crunching, information-fatigued cosmic economy: guilt.

These are the politics of race sugar-boned and settled during transit. Halcher is what Radio One has. Multi-culturalism is what would happen if we all joined hands and learned to sing in perfect harmony. So Ashley Maher needs her excuse. She is entering the marketplace at a vulnerable angle: her music stands rather only at the interface between the ethnic and the indigenous, a jingly mixture of quirky home-girl narratives, Afro rhythms and the tunes of José Mitchell — a ghostly notion on paper but one that wells well in the life, largely because her sweet contralto is unmeasured and José Mitchell wrote great tunes. She is confident and bright.

'Well, some people write politically, because that's their most natural mode of expression, their particular voice, while others write very personally, often narratively, some in an established formula like balladry and pop. You just have to find out what's comfortable to you.

'When I was in Italy a couple of years ago studying opera at the conservatory there, the main thing I came away with was that opera was about constructing a voice on top of your natural voice, just like bodybuilding is

all about taking a body and making it bigger than it actually is. Well, I decided that I wanted to find a way of singing and a kind of music that came absolutely naturally to me, so that working becomes a process of freeing away barriers to what was natural. My whole involvement with singing is an attempt to find what my voice actually is.' She is given to epigrammatic utterances. Later on in the interview, while discussing the relative benefits of New York and LA, she explains Los Angeles's scandalous reputation as a place of community with an insular veneer and a particularly tasty slice on her ginger soap: 'At least in New York you still have to step over someone to get to your favourite.' She's very likable.

She's also preoccupied by the fractal relationship between music and community: how the more you look the more complicated it appears, the deeper the patterning, the more frightening the detail, how half the time you can't see the chicken for all the eggs. In great earnest she discusses Ghanaian drum music in terms of its 'beautiful geometry', and she justifies her choice of musical hemisphere in painterly terms.

'I'm very conscious of coming from a [Western] tradition of writing about personal feelings, emotions, experiences, as opposed to those of the community, but that doesn't mean that if those values aren't inserted cor-

rectly to different textures they can't be necessarily understood. It's a question of varying your musical palette, like Kate Bush or Peter Gabriel do.' She indicates the edge of the large, round table at which we sit. 'I mean, if you imagine these to be the parameters of music, they're expanding all the time, the frontiers are being pushed outwards. Technological music has its own heroes, rap has others, metal others again, and I think that the "World Music" section of that expanding circle is really, really interesting because music is getting more and more international with every passing day.

'I'm not African, I don't want to sing like an African, I don't want to pretend to be an African — I mean, I'd be like a millionaire in the jungle — but I'm so drawn by these rhythms I love them. The more I learn about them, the more fascinated I become, and the less I can help my feelings about it all. I just can't help it.'

Then there's the gawkily respectful jazz-country spiritualism of the Blessed Mary Margaret O'Hara. Staring, staring, I left her concert last year in tears. As I walked down Charing Cross Road I was howling my eyes-out, got on the bus and these two African women looked over to me and asked what was wrong. I said (sob), 'She's the real thing (sob). I'm a phony, I'm gonna throw in the towel, get a job in the laundromat and give up!' Everything about her is completely true — all that seriousness and everything too. And when she finally gets into the song and her eyes open up in that big, blue, crystal way, you know that you're seeing directly into the soul of someone who is genuinely transported by what she's doing.' Of all places, this is the one Ashley Maher would choose to make her destination.

Ashley Maher's debut album, '3E', is released on May 5 on Virgin Records.

Time Out
LondonTime Out
U.K. weekly
event listings
magazine
circ: 85,000
www.timeout.co.uk

hi lights

ASHLEY MAHER TALKS WITH KHALID OMAR JAVED ABOUT THE MULTI-CULTURAL INFLUENCES WHICH WENT INTO MOULDING HER DEBUT ALBUM, *HI*

As debut albums go, Ashley Maher's *Hi* is full of promise. It's certainly slick and well produced. Intermingling an African beat and Latin percussion, propped against a soft tenor voice, the rhythms link up precisely with the home grown, clear eyed lyrics very nicely. In fact everything about this is very nice.

Iconography apart, the record is peculiar enough to leave its mark. Touched by humour and an eccentric taste the audience it will appeal to probably reflects Ashley Maher's hybrid background. *Hi* works well as an introduction to today's upbeat cosmopolitan sounds and has pop credentials. Most likely it will fit snugly into the thirty something M-O-R market, though it's debatable whether *Hi* will engross the listener who goes directly to the source of Ashley's influences.

It is difficult to criticize Ashley Maher: she is very amicable, lucid, educated, presentable and promotable. The question which will be answered in time is whether she is profitable. From small beginnings so far she has appeared on the Wogan show and, in contrast, the BBC arts programme *The Late Show* and she also sang live on *Johnny Walker's G.R.* These are not programmes aimed at teeny-boppers. A combination of expert management and her own entrepreneurial drive have brought Ashley's music to the attention of the right ears and launched her in the right direction.

Born in 'icy cold' Montreal and raised in the 'monotonous' sunshine of Los Angeles, Ashley has found the moody British weather inspirational. Her easy-going parents, an Irish father and English mother, encouraged her musical development. She studied Opera in Italy, medieval history at University and has described herself as "a cultural mongrel". She took classes with Ghanaian drummer C.K. Ladzoku that were to have a profound influence and give her music an immediate direction.

"It was music I just absolutely loved. I've been listening to rhythmic music from quite a young age, but this suddenly put in front of me a plate of food that I was definitely going to find out who had cooked."

After graduating four years ago she arrived in London and made contacts.

"In some ways you have an added advantage arriving as a foreigner, as people are more impressed when you seek them out having travelled far."

Before long she was jamming around with a group of North London



lads looking for a break and coming to London as it turns out was the right thing to do.

"America is one huge ethnic mixing, like a big salad. There is every single race, but the opportunities to express ethnic music available here are much more extensive. The public here is in general better versed in the cultures of other people as well as more receptive."

This came as a surprise, are we really ahead of the Americans?

"In England there is probably a similar amount of multi-culturalism as there is in the States, but here it is much better organised. I loved the vibe of London, there is so much happening. The cultural attitudes here are translated down all the way on all levels of society. Granted, racially there are still problems here, but in comparison to the States it feels much closer to the degree of equality that we are all looking to realise."

She describes how on returning to Los Angeles to record part of the album she found to her embarrassment that similar bands to those she had worked with in London had always been there.

jambores of the background instruments. *Step by Step* the first single released from the album describes her days working as a waitress in a Greek restaurant.

"It was just doing any job to pay the rent while you're growing in other ways and doing your exploring while you are not really fed down."

"*Step by Step* is a positive, bright and clear introduction to my album with a number of elements which run throughout the album. It's not as obscure or avant garde as *Tick Tock*. I love all the songs, but *Giving* is dear to me. It's got a hypnotic repetitive groove that is representative of the balance between the African and Western styles I am working towards in my heart."

"African music is cyclical and synchronised into one finally tuned common element. It is not obtained with ego boosting solos in the same way as Western music, which starts with a motif and builds and builds until it grows into a climax. I like the philosophy of community linked with African music. It does require a quantum leap of attitude to listen to African music. You have to be willing to relinquish that state of 'entertain me immediately'. Africans are content with keeping the groove going 'til dawn."

"I am in a position where I have an eternal infatuation with that musical perspective. But at the same time I am also conscious of being from a western tradition which enjoys getting to that real high. My task is to find a medium between the two."

"I like writing about people around me and describing what I see. Maybe, as time goes on I'll feel more comfortable writing in a more personal vein. Ultimately these songs are indirectly personal in that the way I write about others obviously reflects me."

Widely compared with Joni Mitchell her songs reveal a range of moods - romance, desire, hope and fear - and tell tales of friends. The best could do with being moved up 10rpm but it is a charming album, by it and decide.

Hi is out now on Virgin.

What's On in London

What's On in London
London listings magazine,
catering to tourist market
circulation: 40,000
www.whatsoninlondon.co.uk

Ashley Maher:

Hi

Virgin

With British parents, Canadian passport and a Californian upbringing, Maher could be a crazy mixed-up kid. Instead she gets her feet in the doors of the world's top rhythm players in search of Big Beats to match her alliterative lyrics. And she succeeds. There is a menacing tribal feel to the darker songs as quirky characters cluster around original storylines.

The two best tracks convey varying degrees of optimism. *Honeycomb Grey* is peppered with divine Burt Bacharach-style backing and plenty of hooks about a potter in his gloomy tower block. *Step By Step* is the classic autobiographical tale of a struggling artiste doing a bunch of crummy jobs with the hope of realising her ambition. Elsewhere the world goes on around a narrator *Dreaming* to the sound of fluttering flutes. *Hush Child*, has a stutterer cry 'I am a bird beating broken wings inside a bottle' accompanied by throbbing bass and folksy mandolin. *Eddie* is a silly tale of a shoeshine valentine, and *Jumping Mouse* a fable. *Tick Tock* has a cool cat lure a lad into crime with 'big boasts about little adventures.' *The Sage Is Under My Feet* ends a solid debut with triumphant jazzy vocals.

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