

Goran Bregović & Bijelo Dugme conjured up plenty of Yugo-nostalgia in London



Golke Pehivanoglu

**Marrabenta Festival**

*Costa do Sol Beach, Maputo, Mozambique, February 3*  
Marrabenta, a dance music style born in the Maputo province, is a cultural symbol for the whole country. The annual touring Marrabenta Festival has revived this dying tradition by bringing it to the world stage.

The touring festival travelled to the 2,000-plus seater amphitheatre in the town of Matalana. A train then took participants from Maputo to Marracuene, “deep into the soul of Mozambique,” as festival director Paulo ‘Litho’ Sithoe described the experience. The festival closed with a three-day event on the Costa do Sol beach of Maputo that took place over the weekend of ‘Heroes’ Day,’ on February 3. With the stage overlooking the impressively clean beaches, newly-built fish market and arts and craft market, audiences enjoyed the water, sun, seafood and music all on the same precinct.

The extensive line-up for this year’s festival included 12 acts from all generations of marrabenta. The king of marrabenta, 88-year-old Dilon Djindji set the stage alight with wild and energetic dance moves that exposed the complexity and joy of the music. Middle generation musicians Stewart Sukuma and Ghorwane presented popular and island style marrabenta while younger musicians like Mr

Bow mixed the music with beats. The event closed with a free concert, which attracted 35,000 locals to the beachfront stage and was broadcast live on national television.

STRUAN DOUGLAS

**Goran Bregović & Bijelo Dugme**

*Hammersmith Apollo, London, UK, February 23*

Goran Bregović may have been a regular visitor to the UK with his Weddings and Funerals Orchestra over the past two decades, but Bijelo Dugme – the Sarajevo rock band he formed in 1974 – have never before played here. Bijelo Dugme (White Button) were the most popular rock band in Yugoslavia, splitting in 1989 then reuniting in 2005 and playing to hundreds of thousands of fans in the now former Yugoslav republics. Occasional lucrative reunions have since followed and at Hammersmith, Bregović was joined onstage by Alen Islamović and Mladen Vojčić ‘Tifa’ – the two singers who fronted the band throughout the 80s. The rest of the band were drawn from Bregović’s Weddings and Funerals Orchestra (five brass, drummer, two female backing vocalists). The evening’s repertoire was Bijelo Dugme’s hits and the capacity audience – almost entirely drawn from London’s Yugoslav diaspora – danced, sang along and cheered with

huge enthusiasm. Bijelo Dugme, being from multi-ethnic Sarajevo (as well as currying favour with the then ruling Communist regime), always sang about Yugoslav unity and on this occasion such songs brought forth much Yugo-nostalgia. Dubbed ‘shepherd rock’ when they started out, Bijelo Dugme’s blend of rock and Balkan brass still works brilliantly and the fine voices of Islamović and Tifa carried these songs of a lost nation effectively. “Remember Yugoslavia and how we were happy,” Bregović said during the encore, and in today’s world few would dispute Bijelo Dugme’s celebration of a golden era.

GARTH CARTWRIGHT

**WOMADelaide**

*Adelaide, Australia, March 10-13*

Celebrating 25 years’ worth of music, multiculturalism and joy, a beacon of hope in a world wracked by ignorance and fear, WOMADelaide is now more than just a want. It’s a need. The silver anniversary dawned fine in the capital’s leafy Botanic Park, with a Welcome to Country delivered by an elder of the local Kaurna people, and a set by likeable songman Brushy One String, whose single-string guitar and billowing Jamaican flag were hither and yon over the four days.

Highlights were constant: the turbulent instrumentals of Greek *lauto* player George Xylouris and Aussie

drummer Jim White. The upbeat salsa-funk of Colombian collective La Mambanegra had crowds grinning as they danced. Malian icon Oumou Sangaré delivered a fiery return to form, playing songs from her new album, *Mogoya*, with pitch-perfect flair. Bokanté, a blues/rock/jazz/West African outfit founded by Snarky Puppy’s Michael League, delivered their second ever performance, promising more to come.

Two WOMAD discoveries stood out. Jerusalem’s full-voiced Piyut Ensemble sang sacred Hebrew songs from the Saharan Maghreb, the parallels with their Saharawi-Gnawa counterparts both remarkable and heartening. Totally different, and no less fabulous, was William Crighton, a bearded folk-rock singer from rural New South Wales, whose darkly beautiful songs were buoyed by a crack band and the haunting harmonies of his wife Julianne. With a debut album, *Hope Recovery*, garnering starry reviews at home, international stardom beckons.

The Philip Glass Ensemble played the soundtrack to the iconic 1982 film *Koyaanisqatsi* (a Hopi phrase translating as ‘Life Out of Balance’), the music and images rendered even more powerful under a full moon strafed by passing clouds and the feeling that, inside Botanic Park, WOMAD was putting the world to rights.

JANE CORNWELL

**Jim Moray**

*Square Chapel, Halifax, March 12*

Never one to rest on his laurels, Jim Moray has recently been touring his 2016 album *Upcetera* with strings, woodwind and an electric rhythm section. But he’s also a terrific solo performer, with the happy knack of breathing new life into traditional songs. In an intimate setting such as the 18th-century Square Chapel, his storytelling left a lasting impression. The agile singing voice drew one into the narrative, as he plucked high notes out of thin air, and his introductions left one marvelling at the sheer diversity of projects he has been involved in: a role in the Elizabethan Session project at Hatfield House, singing in Anais Mitchell’s folk opera *Hadestown*, re-assessing the folk-song arrangements of Benjamin Britten at Aldeburgh, and forming a folk-rock band for the 21st century with Sam Carter. Not to mention countless writing and production credits.

Moray opened with his thought-provoking ‘It Couldn’t Happen Here’ before continuing with a mix of ballad arrangements – including a creepy version of ‘Long Linkin’ – and his own songs ‘The Straight Line and the Curve’, with its gentle rising and falling

figures, and the touching ‘Sounds of Earth’. He also included three items from the False Lights’ album *Salvor*. ‘Crossing the Bar’ was the best of these; a setting of the Tennyson poem, which opens like a hymn and has an impassioned melody.

One song, ‘Flying the Cloud’, was performed unaccompanied, otherwise he switched between guitar and keyboard. Catch him live if you can and you will be treated to an evening of great music-making.

DAVID FORSDIKE

**Babel Med**

*Dock des Suds, Marseille, France, March 16-18*

The 13th edition of Babel Med, Marseille’s annual music expo, was a veritable blur of musical styles, boasting 31 concerts of artists from 26 countries and five continents. It was, however, the vocal talents of those originally from the South of France that resonated the strongest.

From Montpellier, a new and promising Occitan polyphonic quartet Uèi (‘Today’ in Occitan) was founded by two singers who have spent ten years touring with Lo Còr de la Plana. Brandishing shield-like percussion instruments created by Denis

Betty Bonifassi commanded the stage at Babel Med



Jean de Peña

Sampieri, which were rigged up to transmit various electronic beats, it was a visually striking show although after a while, the effects and strobe lighting distracted somewhat from their vocals.

In contrast, A Filetta from Corsica needed no accessories to demonstrate the purity and sheer power of the naked voice. The six singers who are celebrating a 40-year-long career created an incredible intimacy and spirituality in the normally rowdy and cavernous Salle des Sucres.

But the vocal revelation was Nice-born, now Montréal-based Betty Bonifassi whose latest project simply entitled *Lomax* is an album of slave songs collected by Alan Lomax in the southern US in the 1920s. Bonifassi’s deep, gravelly voice and onstage prowling were reminiscent of a young Joe Cocker and she commanded the stage, even if at times the rock guitar solos tried to steal her limelight. Her versions of work songs such as ‘Black Betty’, ‘Rosie’ and ‘Old Hannah’ were given a full-on funk workout and the passion and commitment she clearly felt for these songs was compelling.

JO FROST

**Black Flower**

*Archspace, London, March 21*

They’d come from Belgium for this one night at a small venue in the archway of an East London railway tunnel, but the music and instruments they played had travelled even further. Ethio-jazz and Afro-funk masters Black Flower delivered a dizzyingly brilliant set that, after only minutes, made any doubters in the hundred-strong crowd realise they

were witnessing something special. Backlit in an atmospheric red glow that cast eerie shadows across the narrow room, the five-piece played tracks from their instrumental second album, *Artifacts*. It was an edgily surreal journey through the fictional ancient Ethiopian gardens of a place that composer, saxophonist and flautist Nathan Daems calls the ‘Abyssinian Afterlife.’

Frontman and cornetist Jon Birdsong, who previously toured with Beck, invited the audience to join the band in getting lost in the music. They then astounded them with two electrifying tracks, ‘Helios Victor’ and ‘Alexandria’, which had everyone abandoning themselves to the frenzied, psychedelic performance. The direction changed constantly and the style was eclectic: heavy African beats gave way to reggae and trippy dub rock fused with native Indian sounds. But at all times the playing was tight and the tempo ensured that the crowd were kept busy on their toes.

To close, Simon Segers played a staggering drum solo with his eyes shut in entranced rapture. The mood was infectious and the crowd demanded an encore. The band returned with traditional Ethiopian instruments that Birdsong and Daems played in rotation. Ethio-jazz aficionados may not have been surprised by the appearance of a *washint*, a small East African wooden flute played by the Amhara people, but there aren’t many places in London where you can watch common seashells being played professionally on a Tuesday night!

RUSSELL HIGHAM



Dianne Brooks

La Mambanegra at WOMADelaide