

Press Book

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MOJO *The Music Magazine*

Too much, the magic buzz

The reverberating sound of Congotronics as reinvented by 26 stars from the worlds of alt rock and electronica from Optimo to Animal Collective. By David Hutcheon. Illustration by Siobhan Gunning.

Various



Tradi-Mods Vs Rockers CRAMMED DISCS

"MUSIC," FELA KUTI famously stated, "is the weapon of the future." When the shit hits the fan, "democracy" won't save you, capitalism won't bail you out, socialism won't be a safety net and your gods will shrug their shoulders. He never lived to see the credit crunch, but his son Seun did. "I don't think the crash is going to affect Africa," he said. "Where is Africa going to crash to? We are already on the floor, in pieces. The whole world is going to fall on us."

This is what the future will sound like. Pieces of Africa, forged in dystopias then fallen on, picked up and re-imagined by the rest of the world. Kuti may have believed the last music standing would be Afrobeat, but the most inspiring noise on the continent today is made by Mingiedi Mawangu, a diminutive man in his seventies, who speaks no English or French, makes instruments out of junk and plays a centuries-old court trance music amplified solely because he couldn't otherwise be heard over the sound of the city of Kinshasa, the Congolese heart of darkness.

These pieces of Africa were scattered by the winds of change, and they've been maturing while the world cottoned on: Vampire Weekend, Damon Albarn's Africa Express, Fela! on Broadway, Bassekou Kouyate, Ethiopiques... it doesn't matter where you look, the indisputable fact is that there is a whole clutch of people, ideas and events that are every bit as "rock" as they are "world". The phoney division between world music and the rest starts to dissolve when its biggest names are as mainstream as Tinariwen and Amadou & Mariam and when their dreams are to hang out with Carlos Santana or David Gilmour. Oddly, the best thing to happen to African music was Bob Geldof saying it wasn't a big enough draw to be on the Live 8 bill in 2005: people with little interest were so outraged that they became receptive to whatever was going on in Bamako, Addis or Johannesburg.

So there's a sizeable school for whom the "Eureka"—or "Judas"—moment was Crammed Discs' low-key release of Konono No 1's LP, *Congotronics* in the summer of 2005. Though not their first recordings (Mingiedi has been leading this band in various forms for over 40 years and they could hardly avoid the ethnomusicologist's mike over that length of time), this set was the first to arrive when the zeitgeist and technology were in their favour. A few seconds of the cacophonous, distorted likembe thumb pianos opening Lufuala Ndonga and the unwary listener was suddenly in familiar yet uncharted territory. *White Light/White Heat* was an obvious reference point, a nightmare amphetamine rush nailed to the floor by countless interlocking polyrhythms. Wherever your head was at, there was something in this noise that announced itself as the groove you'd been searching for.

Following that: a compilation of likeminded sonic terrorists, Kasai Allstars' debut, a Grammy-nominated live record from Konono and their (superior) second album, *Assume Crash Position*. Once people said they preferred the earlier stuff, you knew Mingiedi's band had passed the tipping point. This year, the four studio LPs (plus Staff Benda Bilili's first) were released in a vinyl box with single Coupe-Jarret by Kasai Allstars featuring Akron/Family. It's an extraordinary pointer to the future, with the thumb pianos letting a guitar show them the way.

And that brings us to *Tradi-Mods Vs Rockers*, a title that plays on



- THE CAST**
- Deerhoof
 - Animal Collective
 - Andrew Bird
 - Tussle
 - Lonely Drifter Karen
 - Jherek Bischoff
 - Woom
 - Juana Molina
 - Mark Ernestus
 - Skeletons
 - Jolie Holland & Joel Hamilton
 - Aksak Mabou
 - Shackleton
 - Hoquets
 - Micachu & The Shapes
 - Megafaun
 - Au
 - Allá
 - Bear Bones
 - Lay Low
 - Burnt Friedman
 - Oneida
 - Optimo
 - Bass Clef
 - Eye
 - Sylvain Chauveau

Britain's romanticisation of youth-culture clashes between the aspirational and the lumpen; the world's devotion to sound-system battles; and the fact that, in Kinshasa, these bands are called "tradi-mods" because they play traditional music in a modern way. In a nutshell, 26 alternative takes on Konono and their friends. Can you think of an album more guaranteed to bristle the hackles of anybody who loves the originals? Can you think of a concept more likely to be labelled "neo-colonialist"? Other than England's qualification for the finals of another football tournament, can you think of anything more likely to end in tears?

So prepare yourself for the "WTF" of 2010. Twenty-six of them. Now That's What We Call Congotronics is the most surprise-packed album of the year. What could have been embarrassing has come to fruition in a way that speaks volumes for the affection there is toward the buzz, rumble and distorted-twang groove. Rather than weld on house beats and call them "remixes", those involved have brilliantly re-imagined the songs as the foundations of whatever it is they themselves do as musicians. And such is the unpolished resilience of the originals, in almost every case (of the 26 tracks there is one that doesn't work for me) it is as if Mingiedi predicted musical developments about which he couldn't possibly have known.

With everybody on home ground, the results feel like

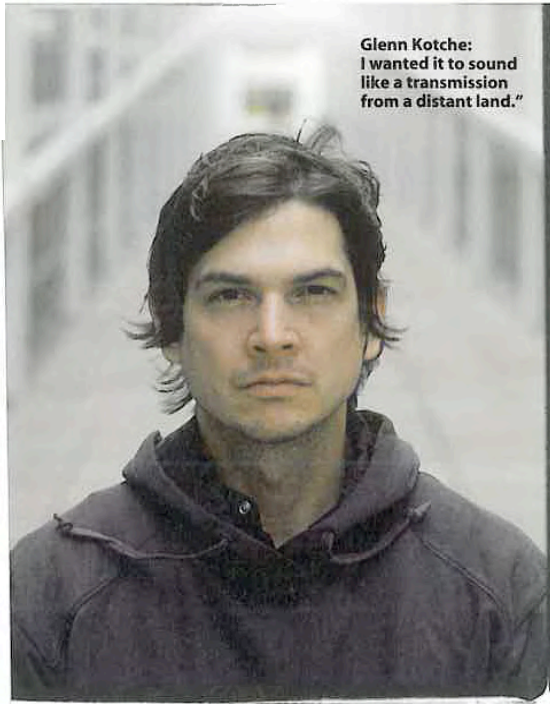
natural progressions from what it is the rockers do best: Deerhoof and Animal Collective open proceedings with psychedelic fairy tales; Megafaun replace the likembes with banjos; Au offer electronic thrash disco; Glenn Kotche uses metal percussion to trace Mingiedi's move from the countryside to Kinshasa; Optimo take the Congolese rumba guitars so beloved of Vampire Weekend and return them to the mothership. You'll hear Can, you'll hear PiL and the Pistols, you'll hear dub and enough static and white noise to leave any other record you've bought this year sounding overproduced.

There's a sequence on the first disc that is one of best examples of a compiler's art you'll experience. It starts with a distortion of Sobanza Mimanisa's Kiwembo, transferred to processed violins by Andrew Bird, who morphs it into Konono's Kule Kule; Tussle pick up the baton with the martial motorik beat of Soft Crush, recorded before they learned about this project, then adapted. Glenn Kotche returns to Kule Kule to tell Mingiedi's story, from peace and quiet to urban jungle, before Lonely Drifter Karen sings a fable inspired by Kasai's album title, *In The 7th Moon The Chief Turned Into A Swimming Fish And Ate The Head Of His Enemy By Magic*. And then it's back to Kule Kule once more, as Jherek Bischoff transcribes it for a string orchestra.

A post-apocalyptic stew drawn from junkyard instruments, amps and speakers, industrial-strength alcohol and weapons-grade grass, *Congotronics* is the last word in popular music to date. There is little that can be done to take it any further: I've been simultaneously playing the original on one machine and the variation on another, and despite the different tempos, tunes and rhythms, these *Zaireeka* (see what The Flaming Lips did there?) interludes have yet to produce anything as disorientating as the opening of Lufuala Ndonga, when the noise that everybody — from Hank to Johnny — had been searching for was laid bare. This, perhaps it should be remembered, is what the youth of Kinshasa deem "old people's music", yet it unquestionably points the way to the future. Music as the weapon. The buzz goes on.

THUMBS UP!

Glenn Kotche, Jherek Bischoff and Nathan Burazer on the heart of Congotronics...



Glenn Kotche:
I wanted it to sound
like a transmission
from a distant land."

"I couldn't figure it out!"

Glenn Kotche, Jherek Bischoff and Nathan Burazer speak to David Hutcheon.

How did you first hear the Congotronics sound?

Nathan Burazer (Tussle): "People were playing their album at a house party in San Francisco and I was just kind of: 'What the hell? What is going on here?' I couldn't quite place anything or figure it out. You couldn't even tell where it was from. Obviously it was of the planet Earth but it was inspired by somewhere else."

Jherek Bischoff: "I heard their music at a fundraiser in Seattle. The DJ was playing the first album and I remember seeing all the heads in the room bobbing in unison and this pulse happening. Nobody was conscious of it but everybody was in this hypnotic thing. I almost couldn't even hear the music; I was feeling it more than hearing it and I was hooked."

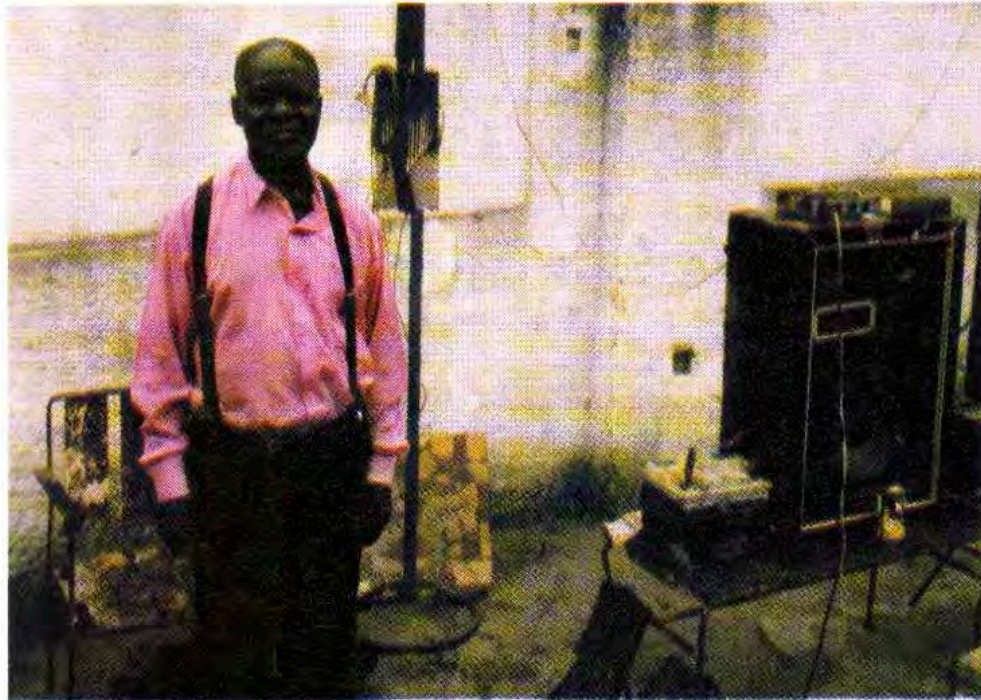
Glenn Kotche: "I think it was right after the first LP came out. In 2005, my duo, On Fillmore, played the Perc Pan percussion festival in Brazil and Konono No1 were there, so we played two concerts with them and we did a community jam together in Carlinhos Brown's neighbourhood."

How difficult was it to do what you wanted to with their music?

NB: "We had been jamming in the studio with a really old drum machine and when we listened back we realised it sounded like Congotronics or Orchestre Poly-Rythmo De Cotonou. When we got the e-mail about the project it was so weird: the universe was saying there was an opportunity for us. So we went into a friend's studio and added thumb piano, breathing sounds and whistles. We're recording an album with the Optimo guys right now and I'm sure there's going to be some Congotronics influence in there."

JB: "I knew I wanted to orchestrate one of their slower songs even though in a lot of ways I prefer their really fast and trancey music. I wanted to keep the feeling of a dance track but not have any elements of dance tracks. So I transcribed the whole song note for note and instrument for instrument. Except for the horns almost everything is note for note but played on different instruments."

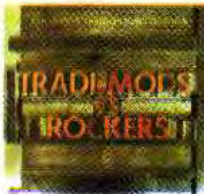
GK: "You don't want to try to do what they do because you're not going to do it as cool. Crammed said: 'Do whatever you want, a remix or an *hommage*.' For me, the whole thing was the idea of a transmission. I wanted to tell the story of a band that came from a quiet place of solitude, before I added the city's noisy elements, then totally fuzzed out before it turns into a sample of Konono. I wanted it to sound like a transmission from a distant land."



VARIOUS ARTISTS

TRADI-MODS VS ROCKERS: ALTERNATIVE TAKES ON CONGOTRONICS CRAMMED DISCS

Indie and dance's finest come together to pay inventive tribute to the Congo's vital electro scene



It is not uncommon to hear a band proclaim they are from 'the street'. But few can claim such with the honesty of the Congolese group Konono No 1. This musical troupe sprang from the Kinshasa gutter, armed with all manner of scrap metal drums and home-built speakers with debut album, 2004's 'Congotronics'. Konono quickly won fans from Björk to *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening, who booked them to play his ATP. But 'Tradi-Mods Vs Rockers' suggests that the influence of Congotronics – now a catch-all category for forward-thinking music from the war-torn Democratic Republic Of The Congo – stretches rather further.

In this 26-track compilation, a cross-section of smart indie bands (Animal Collective, Deerhoof, Oneida) and leftfield dance producers (Shackleton, Optimo, Bass Clef) set about a series of covers, reworks, and tracks

'inspired by' Konono and their peers' mix of trad African dance and junk invention. That it doesn't come across as patronising is down to the sheer amount of ideas on display. Deerhoof cover the Kasai Allstars' 'Travel Broadens The Mind', vocalist Satomi Matsuzaki candy-sweet amidst jerky funk rhythms. Animal Collective dismember the same band's 'Quick As White' and take it on a romp.

It's not perfect. Micachu And The Shapes' take on Konono No 1's 'NO K' is a wonky chop-up that loses its way. But it does seem to confirm that the most successful tracks here are the ones that grip a rhythm and don't let go (see the murky chasms of bass drone on Shackleton's 'Mukuba Special' or the twirling, dervish patterns of EYE from Boredoms' 'Konono Wa Wa Wa'). Tasteful? No. Excellent? Indisputably. **Louis Pattison**

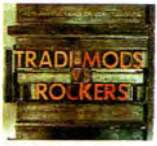
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DOWNLOAD: Shackleton - 'Mukuba Special', Deerhoof - 'Travel Broadens The Mind', EYE - 'Konono Wa Wa Wa'

NME
27th November 2010
Louis Pattison

THE SUNDAY TIMES

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Tradi-Mods vs Rockers: ★★★★★
Alternative Takes on Congotronics
 Crammed Discs CRAM169



Over the past six years, Crammed Discs has released a series of Congotronics albums, focusing on music from the Democratic Republic of Congo that reinterprets traditional music with amplified instruments ("tradi-rock"). Now the label has asked some of the many indie-rock and electronica artists who have fallen in love with this incredible series to create their own "reinventions and covers, reworks and homages", based on original Congotronics tracks. Almost all the 26 tracks here uncover intriguing musical common ground, and many of them are wonderful – notably the Deerhoof and Juana Molina reworkings of Kasai Allstars tracks, and Andrew Bird's piece, which incorporates works by Konono No 1 and Sobanza Mimanisa. **ME**

THE SUNDAY TIMES
 22nd November 2010
 Mark Edwards

UNCUT

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Tradi-Mods vs Rockers 
 CRAMMED
 ★★★★★

An indie tribute to Africa
 The primitive, glorious racket of Konono No 1 and the other quasi-electronic bands who have recently emerged from Congo lends itself perfectly to remixer inventive enough to hear its potential. Standout contributions among the two dozen tributes here include Deerhoof, who add English lyrics to a Kasai All-Stars rhythm track on atmospheric "Travel Broadens The Mind" and Animal Collective, who sample thumb pianos to create a thrilling Brian Wilson-does-Africa collage. Only a few unimaginative dubstep mixes fail to thrill.
Nigel Williamson

UNCUT
 February 2011
 Nigel Williamson

WIRE
 Adventures in Modern Music

Tradi-Mods vs Rockers: Alternative Takes On Congotronics
 Various

Crammed 2×CD/DL
 In 2004, when Belgium's Crammed Discs released the first *Congotronics* album (Konono No 1's debut of the same name), they opened a door onto an unexplored world of electrified and amplified, living African music, which the Western world enthusiastically received. A subsequent compilation, plus an album by Kasai Allstars and another from Konono, makes up the *Congotronics* series, which has provided the inspiration for this double disc set of remixes, reinterpretations and tributes. Drawn from a suitably eclectic range, contributors include Boredoms' EYE, Shackleton, Animal Collective, Mark Ernestus, Micachu & The Shapes, Juana Molina, Glenn Kotche and more, 26 in all. Predictably, there's a lot of fuzz – obviously one of the most inspiring aspects of the *Congotronics* sound – and the primal rhythmic element of the original Congolese music is made good use of in almost every track. As one of the strongest attractions of the music, its blanket usage has the tendency to makes everything sound energetically exciting, but it also makes much of it blend together. There are a few exceptions: Jherik Bischoff's orchestral take on Konono makes limber music a bit moribund and Sylvain Chauveau provides an appropriately disconnected ending. But generally this is a consistent and listenable collection.

From the package design and leavenotes, it's apparent that this was compiled with a lot of love and thought. The contributors are also armed with the most effective of musical tools, as noted above, and strive to make the most of it. The arpeggiated synth counterpoint frolics, like Wendy Carlos gone mad, of AU, Glenn Kotche's chiming melody and gong percussion and the ugly beauty of Oneida's caterpillar shucking its husk of distortion to reveal the prettiness below, all accomplish that goal.

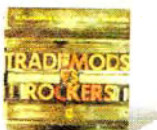
If there is one thing lacking, it's the gaping hole left in the absence of any artists from the African diaspora. Not a single black artist (aside from those providing the source material, of course) makes it on to the tracklisting. Given the production methods and beat sensitivity of so many black American or British artists, it seems a wasted opportunity.
Lisa Blanning

THE WIRE
 January 2011
 Lisa Blanning

THE INDEPENDENT

WORLD

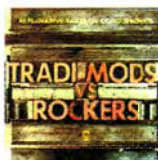
Various artists
 Tradi-Mods vs Rockers
 CRAMMED



A whole bunch of musicians from Chicago to Berlin have built tracks in response to the Congolese music from the Congotronics CD series using the source material to varying degrees. For example, Jherik Bischoff transcribes every buzz and rattle of a Konono No1 tune into a piece for orchestra strings. It could have gone horribly wrong if those urgent polyrhythms had been made to conform to stultifying programmed beats, but thankfully most of it's touchingly respectful and thrillingly successful.
Howard Male

INDEPENDENT ON S
 28th November 2011
 Howard Male

The Telegraph



Various Artists
 Tradi-mods vs Rockers:
 Alternative Takes on
 Congotronics
 CRAMMED, £12.99 ★★★★★

Who could have imagined that the once impoverished Congolese sound systems Konono No1 and Kasai Allstars would inspire a double album of remixes and tributes from high-end, left-field Western artists such as Animal Collective and Lonely Drifter Karen. Delightful and intriguing though the results often are, none rival the weird intensity of the originals. **MH**
Download this Tussle 'Soft Crush'

THE TELEGRAPH
 27th November 2010
 Mark Hudson

<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/music/article-23901410-cds-of-the-week-duffy-the-black-eyed-peas-and-robyn.do>

WORLD

Tradi-Mods Vs Rockers

Alternative Takes on Congotronics

(Crammed Discs)

My heart sinks when the remix album turns up and a characterful and distinctive artist gets repackaged to blend in with everything else. But that's not the case here. *Alternative Takes on Congotronics* has 26 indie rock bands and musicians reworking material from extraordinary Congolese bands including Konono No 1 and the Kasai Allstars. For instance, Deerhoof play a cover version of a Kasai Allstars track they learned by slowing it right down and transposing the parts from thumb pianos on to guitars. It's brilliant. [Animal Collective](#) throw samples into their guitar and drum work. Everyone brings a different approach to make an eclectic, dance floor-friendly double album that should be a cult success.

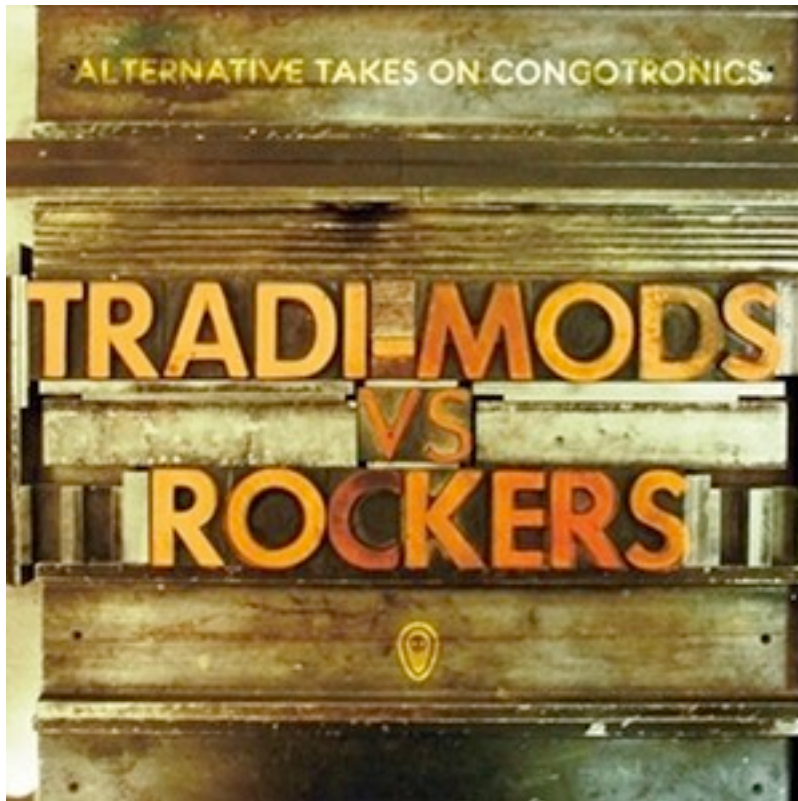
[Simon Broughton](#)

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FACT



VA / Congotronics: Tradi-Mods Vs Rockers



Available on: Crammed Discs 2xCD

When Brussels-based Crammed Discs dropped that first Konono N°1 Congotronics album in 2004, it had the same kind of “shock of the new” impact in contemporary World music circles as say, ‘Anarchy in the UK’, had among jaded rock fans in the mid-1970s. And like ‘Anarchy’ and other pioneering punk records, it was notable for a strong DIY ethic, a captivatingly dirty sound and a refusal to pay lip service to the earnest “authenticity” that all “worthy” musical endeavours were expected to embody. Such is the power of this “Tradi-Moderne” music from Kinshasa that Crammed has been able to follow that first album with a compilation of tracks by Konono and like-minded Kinois (Buzz’ n’Rumble in the Urb’ n’Jungle), a full-length album by the Kasai Allstars, and, most recently, Konono’s second album of original material, Assume Crash Position.

And now this, the fifth release in the Congotronics series, one that illustrates the effect that this music has had on audiences more accustomed to listening to the Aphex Twin than Ali Farke Toure, Sonic Youth than Youssou N’Dour. For Tradi-Mods vs Rockers, Crammed has

invited a disparate bunch of musicians, mostly operating at the avant garde edges of rock and dance music, to remix, cover and create new works inspired by tracks from the first four Congotronics releases. Some of the names (Animal Collective, Shackleton) may be more familiar – and certainly fashionable – than others, but all have their merits.

Highlights from the first of the two CDs – there are 26 tracks in all – include Deerhoof's cover of the Kasai Allstars' 'Travel broadens the mind', a remake (complete with new lyrics) that is oddly reminiscent of Crammed's post-punk enfants terribles, The Honeymoon Killers. Another innovative cover version comes from sometime Casiotone for the Painfully Alone collaborator Jherek Bischoff, who has transcribed Konono N°1's 'Kule Kule' for chamber orchestra. The intense loops of the original sound even better played on string and wind instruments.

Tussle take another Konono track, 'Soft Crush', in a delightful Kraut rock-y direction, while Andrew Bird's processed violins on the medley of 'Ohnono' and 'Kiwembo' are a mellifluous joy. At the other extreme, Mark 'Basic Channel' Ernestus turns 'Masikulu' into deep, dark, dub techno: like Unknown Cases lost in a blood diamond mine.

The second disc begins with another fantastic horror trip, courtesy of Shackleton, who stretches out crucial elements from Kasai Allstars' 'Makubu Special' (chants, conga loops, likembe riffs) over 10 and-a-half minutes of slow-building dubwise menace. His finest remix since 'Minimoonstar'. By contrast, the track that follows – 'Likembes' by Hoquets – is ridiculously bright and breezy anarcho-indie pop inspired by Konono N°1 and played on self-made instruments. Bon Iver's compadres Megafaun, meanwhile, turn Kizanzi Congo's 'Soif Conjugale' into a teasing, pleasing 'Conjugal Mirage', veering from math rock to jazz to banjo-picking country without ever sounding like they are being clever for its own sake. Beta Band fans will love this.

My two favourite pieces on the album are both original jams inspired by Congotronics tracks – Au's 'Two Labors' (inspired by Masanka Sankayi) and Bear Bones, Lay Low's Konono-influenced 'Kuletronics'. Au is a Portland, Oregon band led by multi-instrumentalist Luke Wyland, with anywhere between two and 10 members. On 'Two Labors' Wyland (keyboard and vocals) and percussionist Dana Valatka build a monstrous dervish groove. Imagine the riff speed of early Anthrax without all the heavy metal bullshit. Nutty and quite, quite superb.

'Kuletronics' is the work of Ernesto Gonzalez, a Venezuelan emigre living in Waterloo, near Brussels. This compelling psychedelic jam is based on the same track that Jherek Bischoff covered – two excellent and very different interpretations. And those looking for something with more of a dancefloor orientation should look no further than Bass Clef's Kasai Allstars rework, 'The incident at Mbuji-Mayi', an infectious low-end banger that combines the interlocking guitars and powerful vocals of the original track ('Drowning goat') with a bassline that's pure London 2010. More experimental dancefloors may choose to rock to the sound of 'Konono Wa Wa Wa', a deeply idiosyncratic take on Acid House by Boredoms' Yamantaka Eye. Brilliantly barmy.

Any project of this nature is bound to be something of a curate's (or curator's) egg, but, for the most part Tradi-Mods vs Rockers works, and works well. At its best, these alternative takes on Congotronics are superb.

Justin Toland

Fusion



The Kasai Allstars are just one of the Congolese bands behind the inspiration for this album

VARIOUS ARTISTS

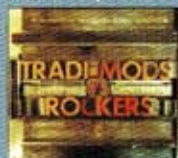
**Tradi-Mods vs Rockers –
Alternative Takes on Congotronics**

Crammed Discs

Mid Price (2 CDs, 152 mins)

★★★★

Thumb-pianos re-plugged



The Congotronics remix album was inevitable, of course. The primitively electrified ambience of Konono No 1 and the Kasai Allstars unwittingly echoes some of the wilder sonic shores currently being visited in contemporary indie rock/electronic music. As someone who has generally detested electronic remixes of African music (the DJ-led aberrations performed on Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Cesaria Evora have to be two of the worst records ever reviewed in *Songlines*), I approached these two discs with trepidation. Yet the vast majority of these 26 reworkings are terrific and reveal a genuine empathy with the original material, whether it's straightforward remixes, cover versions, homages or radical, sample-heavy reinventions. Deerhoof add guitar, bass, drums and their own lyrics to a Kasai tune to create the superbly atmospheric 'Travel Broadens The Mind'. Animal Collective – possibly the coolest indie rock band in the world right now – sample the thumb pianos from Kasai's 'Quick As White' and add their own deft touches to create the kind of sound Brian Wilson might have made if he'd been born in the Congo. Andrew Bird delivers a medley of Congotronics tunes using processed violins and Megafaun gloriously pit thumb pianos and bluegrass banjos against each other. Argentina's Juana Molina builds a hallucinogenic lullaby she calls 'Hoy Supe Que Viajas', on top of a Kasai rhythm track. Even Oneida's re-shaping of Konono into a synth-heavy slab of Krautrock seems entirely in keeping with the Congotronics spirit. A handful of tracks don't work, such as Shackleton's dubstep remix of Kasai's 'Mukuba', which spends ten minutes layering pointless four-to-the-floor electro-dance beats over the original. But they're rare blemishes on an album I expected to hate, but can't stop playing.

Nigel Williamson

**TOP
OF THE
WORLD
ALBUM**



Deerhoof who work their magic on a Kasai Allstars track



Chicago-based songwriter Andrew Bird who performed with Konono No 1 this summer

crammed 2 discs

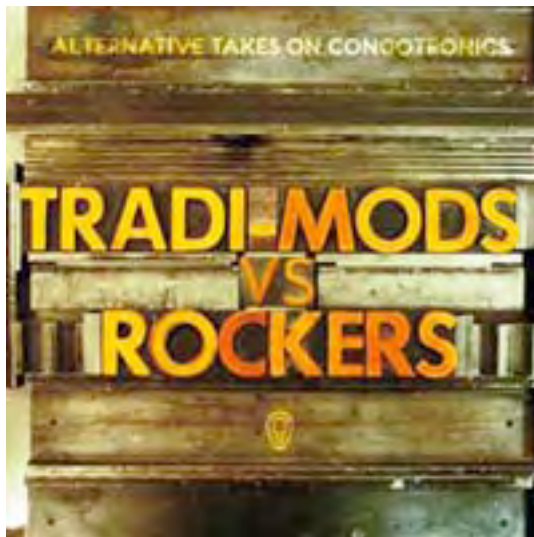
SONGLINES
MAGAZINE

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Album Review

Tradi-Mods vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes on Congotronics



Various Artists

Tradi-Mods vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes on Congotronics

[Crammed Discs; 2010]

8.1

In 1987, a French record label called Ocora released a cassette called *Zaire: Musiques Urbaines à Kinshasa*. It was a set of four half-hour performances by four different bands, recorded in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), in 1978. It was the first time Kinshasa street music ever made it out of Africa, but the timing wasn't quite right; pre-Internet, word of mouth could only spread this music so far. And it was up against a mainstream world music industry that didn't prize rawness or real African soundworlds. It went out of print, but if you can find it, it is very worth hearing.

But that music couldn't stay hidden forever. In 2004, producer Vincent Kenis curated an album by one of those street bands that had been recorded in 1978, *Konono N°1*, for Crammed Discs (they also recorded a live LP for Terp that year). *Konono* in 2004 sounded almost exactly like *Konono* in 1978-- a bracing mix of headlong rhythm and interesting texture, created by found-object percussion and crudely electrified likembe thumb pianos. This time, the timing (and let's be honest, the marketing) were much more fortuitous. *Konono N°1* crash-landed in the Western indie rock and avant garde worlds and were embraced wholeheartedly, and Crammed embarked on a series of "Congotronics" releases aimed at building a broader picture of Kinshasa's vibrant street music scene, which is comprised of bands from ethnic groups around Congo who amplify their traditional music to be heard over the urban din.

Their latest Congotronics project takes a different tack. There's no doubt that Congotronics has had an impact in the West, and Crammed's Marc Hollander (who long ago was Kenis' partner in the band Aksak Maboul) asked 26 artists to contribute their own personal takes on Congotronics, and contributed one himself under his old Aksak Maboul banner. These artists took a variety of approaches: some wrote original music, some covered actual Congotronics songs or used parts of them as raw musical material, some sampled the source material, and others wrote music modeled on a specific piece. Each song is credited to the artist "vs" the Congotronics act that inspired the song (usually Konono or Kasai Allstars), and it's a hugely diverse, double-disc grab-bag by a group of contributors from Europe, the U.S., and Japan.

Some tracks are related to their inspiration more in spirit than anything else. A good example is Tussle's spectacular funk workout "Soft Crush", which has a very loose relationship to Konono N°1, dropping ethereal thumb piano patterns into its otherwise relentless stomp. Bear Bones and Lay Low's "Kuletronics" is like Congotronics via the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, directly quoting Konono N°1's "Kule Kule", but transposing the likembe groove to odd, throbbing bass sounds and sprinkling the mix liberally with pinging sound effects and filtered, echoing noises. It's interesting to hear the inherent similarities between things that seem as disparate as, say, Konono and Andrew Bird. Bird's pizzicato violin loops on "Ohnono/Kiwembo" are nothing too out of the ordinary for him, but it's amazing how well the interlocking patterns he creates reflect an affinity with the band's likembe patterns.

There are plenty of other highlights, from Shackleton's 10-minute, spaced-out "Mukuba Special", which features vocal interjections sampled from Kasai Allstars, to Jherik Bischoff's very literal, amazingly heavy orchestral arrangement of "Kule Kule". AU's "Two Labors" is a crazy pile-up of as many likembe rhythm patterns as possible playing at breakneck speed, while Oneida sucks the music into its own noisy psychedelic world. Juana Molina is one of several who adds vocals and lyrics of her own, bouncing her own melody off the patterns of Kasai Allstars, whose call and response chants she samples into her own composition.

Hollander has afforded each artist the chance to talk a little bit about his or her contribution, and reading the range of thoughts behind the tracks here makes for an interesting companion activity to listening. There are certainly ways a project like this could have gone wrong-- everybody avoids the biggest one, which would have been for a Western artist to try and perform the chants in the original music-- but the artists involved were given enough free reign and seem to have enough genuine appreciation for the music that the final result is a very pleasing listen that captures some of the spirit of the music without outright imitating or caricaturing it.

— Joe Tangari, November 10, 2010

top story



Diplo Works With Passion Pit Frontman

The two pair write songs for other artists, visit baby raves

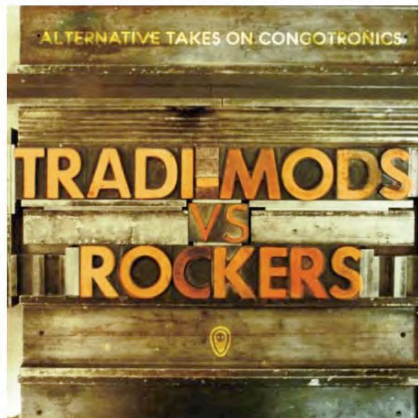
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- Video: Les Savy Fav: "Let's Get Out of Here"
- New Rihanna and Nicki Minaj: "Raining Men"

Listen: Animal Collective, Andrew Bird, Deerhoof, Optimo, Megafaun Take on Congotronics

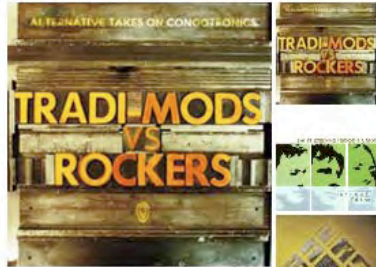
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The double-disc tribute compilation Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes on Congotronics, out November 9 on Crammed, features people like Animal Collective, Andrew Bird, Deerhoof, Micachu & the Shapes, Optimo, Oneida, Megafaun, Wilco's Glenn Kotche, Shackleton-- to take on Congotronics series of Congolese street music. The whole thing is streaming at

record reviews



Various Artists Tradi-Mods vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes on Congotronics

Crammed Discs asks 26 non-African artists-- including Animal Collective, Andrew Bird, Deerhoof, Oneida, and Shackleton-- to take on Congotronics. [Joe Tangari]

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Cee-Lo Green: Bright [Elektra]

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Animal Collective, Andrew Bird Redo Congotronics

Deerhoof, Optimo, others take on Congolese street music

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record reviews



Superchunk Majesty Shredding

Nearly a decade since their last album, Superchunk crank out snarky bruised-romantic pop-punk anthems without any dip in energy level or quality control. [Tom Breihan]

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The Hold Steady

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* story John McShane

It kind of feels like this is what Deerhoof was meant to be doing all along. Not to rag on them or anything, or downplay everything they've done so far. It's just the fact that it took covering a pretty joyous (though similarly minimalist) track ("Wa Muluendu") by a 15-piece Congolese supergroup to get Deerhoof to calm down a little must mean that their buttons are being pushed in some new ways. Technically credited to Deerhoof VS Kasai Allstars, this is the lead track on a new Crammed Discs compilation of "alternative" (their word) acts covering songs from Congotronics albums. As you might've guessed, the most well-represented coverees on the 2-disc comp are Konono N°1 (they're the one people know!). That said, consider us pretty interested in the Oneida VS Konono N°1 track, especially after the impression this one makes.

Download: Deerhoof, "Travels Broaden the Mind (Kasai Allstars Cover)" (via YANP)

Read more: http://www.thefader.com/2010/10/28/deerhoof-travels-broaden-the-mind-kasai-allstars-cover/#ixzz18vbAI0Mb

THE FADER John McShane 10th November 2010



relix

Crammed Discs

Several passes of an album should be enough to not only develop an opinion of its worth as well as a degree of understanding as to why. Of course, that doesn't happen when listening to a release becomes an obsession such as this two-disc set *Tradi-Mods Vs Rockers*, which is dubbed as "Alternative Takes on Congotronics." I'll admit being new to the range of Congotronic sounds. Sending me towards further investigation of its practitioners is another positive by product of this production.

For anyone else new to the form, Congotronics refers to the series that highlighted electrified traditional music from the African Congo. The approach meshes in a way that the sound uses its conflicting and overlapping melodies and rhythms to develop into a hypnotic blend. Credited as an influence on a bevy of alt-rockers, Crammed Discs, the original label for Congotronics, came up with the idea of encouraging acts including Animal Collective, Deerhoof, Andrew Bird, Glenn Kotche, Oneida, Skeletons and more – 26 participants overall – to take the source material from Kasai Allstars, Konono No1 and Sobanza Mimanisa, and create brand new works. Yes, purists could decry a westernization of the original content but music has always drifted from one shore to another, influencing musicians ad infinitum.

On disc one the fascination is immediate, inhabiting the mind and body. Deerhoof Basing "Travel Broadens the Mind" on Kasai Allstars, Deerhoof presents an enticing opening to the proceedings. Followed by Animal Collective and Andrew Bird, the mixture of electronics, western structures and African traditions ebb and flow. Jherk Bischoff's orchestral "Kule Kule" has the grandeur of an outtake from "The Last Emperor" soundtrack Overtaking the better-known artists, Tussle's "Soft Crush" offers nearly six minutes of joyous match of machine and mankind. It sounds like the jamming of a drum circle combined with

Daily Dose Pick: Tradi-Mods vs Rockers

2:00 pm Tuesday Nov 30, 2010 by Doug Levy

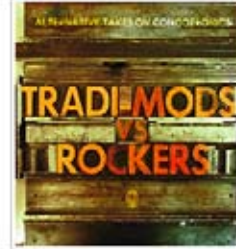


Over two dozen musical artists, including Animal Collective, Deerhoof, and Andrew Bird, provide their takes on the modern music of the Congo via the double-disc *Tradi-Mods vs Rockers*.

The 26 acts were approached for the collection by Crammed Discs, the label responsible for bringing the amplified African street music that would become known as Congotronics to Western audiences. Each group tackles a track by Congolese artists such as Konono No1 and Kasai Allstars, creating a mashup, cover song, or entirely new composition in the process.

The result is a truly modern musical culture collision that represents the best of both worlds, putting a new spin on old sounds, while creating a new sound of its own.

Listen to [samples from the collection](#), get a [free download](#) of "Travel Broadens the Mind" by Deerhoof vs Kasai Allstars, read Pitchfork's [8.1 review](#) of the release, learn more about [Congotronics](#), and buy a [copy](#) of your own.



a seasoned improvisational troupe. Seriously, I've put it on repeat more than times than I should admit, and feel the same about Woom's "Enter the Chief," Mark Enestus' "Masikulu Dub" and Skeletons' "Kiwembo."

Disc two goes heavier into the electronic possibilities derived from the Congotronics world and in the case of "Two Labors" by AU embraces the repetition and chaos. Sometimes it can be bumpy ride, especially after the tantalizing vibes of the previous disc. Still, it does provide its own pleasures. Optimo's "Wumbanzanga," based on Konono No1, begins as an update of the Talking Heads' "Remain In Light" technique with a slithery bassline holding focus as the bright guitar lines define themselves through a loop of activity. It transforms itself into a microchip being before returning to its human pulse. And when done, there's nothing left to do but start "Tradi-Mods" from the beginning and bask in the international cross-pollination river of rhythm.

Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers



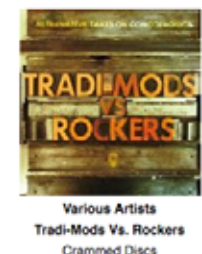
Crammed Discs

By Christopher Bahn November 30, 2010

When the electrifying, trancelike street music spearheaded by veteran Congolese band **Konono No. 1** reached Western ears in the early 2000s, it sounded like something beamed in from Mars. Konono's music was based around traditional instruments like the likembe thumb piano, but the need to use hand-built, jury-rigged amplifiers to be heard on busy Kinshasa streets brought in heavy, loud distortion that gave Konono a rough, propulsive, hypnotic edge. It sounded weirdly and radically modern—the same kind of thing that forward-thinking punk and electronic musicians like **Sonic Youth** had been playing around with for years, but approached from an entirely unexpected angle.

The Konono aesthetic has had some time now to filter through Western indie-rock and electronica, and it's expanded intriguingly on the double-disc compilation *Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers*, which opens up the floor to 26 American, British, and German indie bands who rework material from Konono and other Congolese bands, including Kasai Allstars. The results are largely enthralling, and sometimes nearly as revelatory as Konono itself sounded in 2004. Heard in context on *Tradi-Mods*, for instance, the seamlessly incorporated influence of Konono on **Andrew Bird's** electronically processed, looped violin is obvious. The disc is a triumph, and a great example of what a remix album should be: reverent to what made the original material fascinating, but not so much that it can't fly away in its own unexpected directions.

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Juana Molina vs Kasai Allstars: Hoy Supe Que Viajas

MON NOV 29, 2010

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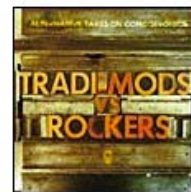
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Modern electrified music of the Congo has been inspiring fans and musicians alike for some time now. The label Crammed Discs has carefully selected an array of indie artists including Animal Collective, Andrew Bird and Jolie Holland to re-imagine and reinvent. For Today's Top Tune, Argentine artist **Juana Molina** takes a song from her first record, *Rara*, and marries it with **Kasai Allstars**, the song is "Hoy Supe Que Viajas," from the Congotronics compilation, *Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers*.



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Showing **New World Adds Chart** For Issue #1178

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TW	TA	Artist	Recording	Label
1	19	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes On Congotronics	Crammed
2	9	AFROCUBISM	Afrocubism	Nonesuch
3	7	PACIFIKA	Chocolate Remixes	Six Degrees
4	4	METHOD OF DEFIANCE	Jahbulon	M.O.D.
5	3	GOOD ONES	Kigali Y'Izahabu	Dead Oceans

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TW	TA	Artist	Recording	Label
1	31	BOTANY	Feeling Today	Western Vinyl
2	26	PHENOMENAL HANDCLAP BAND	Remixes	
3	16	PACIFIKA	Chocolate Remixes	Six Degrees
4	15	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes On Congotronics	Crammed
5	15	ROYKSOPP	Senior	Musebox

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TW	TA	Artist	Recording	Label
1	67	COMMERCE	The Things I Say Vs. The Things I Mean	Self-Released
2	61	GIANT SAND	Blurry Blue Mountain	Fire
3	59	PARTING GIFTS	Strychnine Dandelions	In The Red
4	58	ROYKSOPP	Senior	Musebox
5	55	VELELLA VELELLA	Atlantis Massif	Self-Released
6	54	NAKED AND FAMOUS	Passive Me, Aggressive You	Universal Republic-Slightly Damaged
7	50	LCD SOUNDSYSTEM	London Sessions	
8	37	OH LAND	Oh Land [EP]	
9	35	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes On Congotronics	Crammed
10	32	LAURA MARLING	Blues Run The Game	Third Man
11	23	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Minnesota Beatle Project Vol. 2	Vega
12	22	BOTANY	Feeling Today	Western Vinyl
13	20	NITZER EBB	Industrial Complex	Artist Addiction
14	14	MARK INSIDE	False Flag	MetalBox
15	12	AND THE WIREMEN	And The Wiremen	Sonambula
16	12	PHENOMENAL HANDCLAP BAND	Remixes	
17	11	SAM HUMANS, HELIGOATS	"Live Free And Let Loose"	Greyday
18	11	BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN	The Promise	
19	11	DECEMBERISTS	"Down By The Water" [Single]	
20	10	STEREOLAB	Not Music	

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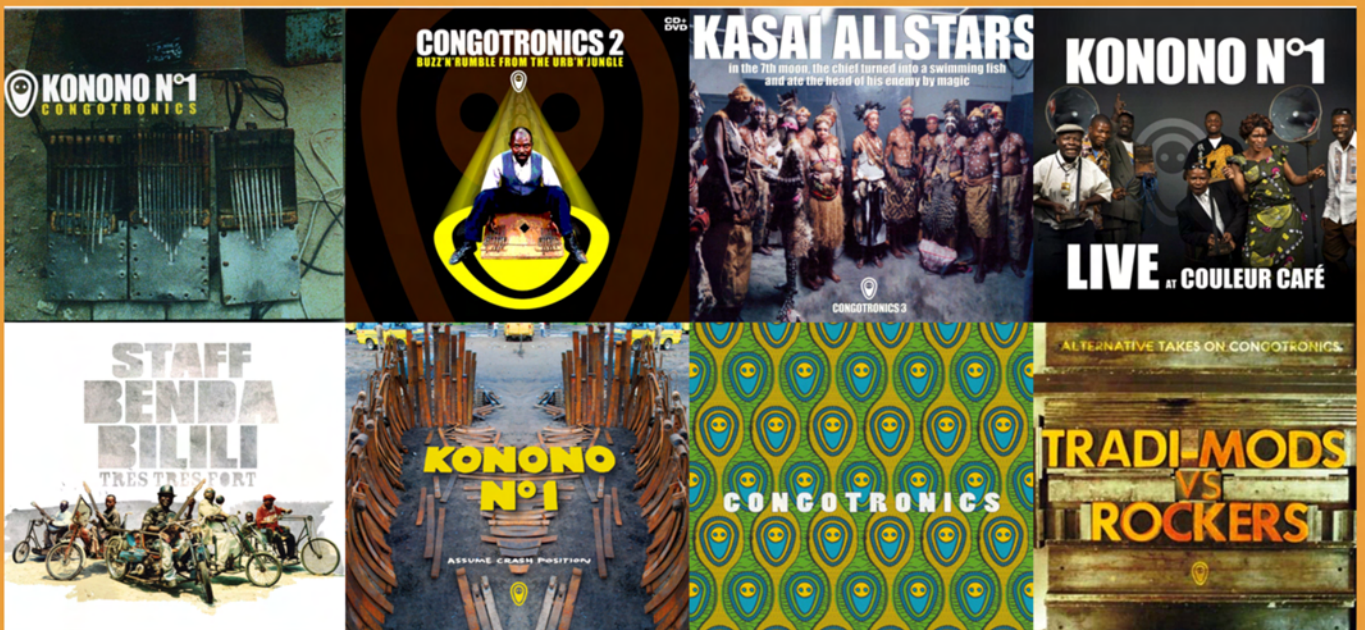
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TW	LW	2W	PK	WKS	Artist	Recording	Label
1	1	1	1	10	AFROCUBISM	Afrocubism	Nonesuch
2	4	4	2	4	AURELIO	Laru Beya	Next Ambiance
3	3	3	3	4	BALLAKE SISSOKO AND VINCENT SEGAL	Chamber Music	Six Degrees
4	5	14	4	4	VUSI MAHLASELA	Say Africa	ATO
5	2	2	2	7	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Tradi-Mods Vs. Rockers: Alternative Takes On Congotronics	Crammed
6	9	6	5	4	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Angola Soundtrack: The Unique Sound Of Luanda (1968-1976)	Analog Africa
7	7	9	7	4	EMPRESARIOS	Sabor Tropical	Fort Knox
8	11	13	2	13	VARIOUS ARTISTS	The Roots Of Chicha 2: Psychedelic Cumbias From Peru	Barbes
9	17	8	3	15	TOUBAB KREWE	TK2	Nat Geo
10	12	12	8	9	METHOD OF DEFIANCE	Jahbulon	M.O.D.
11	8	10	4	4	VARIOUS ARTISTS	The Sound Of Siam: Leftfield Luk Thung, Jazz And Molam In Thailand 1964-1975	Soundway
12	6	5	2	11	CHICO MANN	Analog Drift: Muy... Esniqui	wax poetics
13	14	15	10	6	LUISA MAITA	Maita Remixed	Cumbancha
14	10	7	3	14	BUJU BANTON	Before The Dawn	Gargamel
15	31	25	6	12	DEPEDRO	Nubes De Papal	Nat Geo
16	19	18	11	14	SPANISH HARLEM ORCHESTRA	Viva La Tradicion	Concord Picante
17	18	19	8	12	VARIOUS ARTISTS	Radioclit Presents: The Sound Of Club Secousse Vol. 1	Crammed
18	20	35	1	23	LUISA MAITA	Lero-Lero	Cumbancha
19	13	11	9	9	JOSEPHINE FOSTER AND VICTOR HERERRO	Anda Jaleo	Fire
20	32	23	20	3	NATACHA ATLAS	Riverman Remixes	Six Degrees
21	25	-	21	2	WAYNE WALLACE LATIN JAZZ QUINTET	To Hear From There	Patois
22	-	-	5	19	BUDOS BAND	The Budos Band III	Daptone

The Congotronics Series Discography



CONGOTRONICS



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www.crammed.be