World Music Festival Chicago

Its 18 free concerts, spread out over 17 venues, provide us with dozens of opportunities to get to know our neighbors better—both across the street and around the globe.
The World Music Festival is Chicago’s best music festival. You can enjoy it without dealing with tens of thousands of people at once, or being immobilized by a sweaty shoulder-to-shoulder crowd. The WMF lasts 17 days, so you won’t miss it all if you get sick on the wrong weekend. When it presents music in a public park, it doesn’t wall off the grounds—everyone is welcome. And many of the festival’s 17 venues are clubs or concert halls, with all the amenities that implies. Every one of its shows is free.

No other event gives so many of Chicago’s diverse populations the joy of a concert that says “home.” The World Music Festival is full of reminders that our species developed music tens of thousands of years before written language.

Founded in 1999, the festival has been shrinking since founder Michael Orlove and his staff were laid off in 2011. It declined from 52 shows to 41 in 2012, then dropped to 36 in 2014. This year it consists of just 18, down from 21 last year. But as the WMF has gotten smaller, it’s also weaned itself of a disappointing dependence on local acts that Chicagoans can see year-round. In 2012, locals made up the majority of its bookings—an all-time high—but this year they’re about one in seven.

That means the others have all traveled to be here—some from as far away as South Korea, Argentina, Armenia, or Niger. The most exciting artists include several who play fusions new and old: Congolese group Kokoko!, for instance, combine home-built guitars and scrapyard percussion with slick programmed beats, while venerable Peruvian band Los Wembler’s de Iquitos simmer a brew of cumbia, surf rock, and 60s psychedelia (they appear as part of a Millennium Park Latinx showcase called ¡Súbelo!, which can mean “enjoy!” or “turn it up!”). Other acts carry forward antique traditions more or less undiluted: they include many performers at Ragamala, the marathon of Indian classical music that opens the festival, and the Yandong Grand Singers, who specialize in the eerily gorgeous polyphonic “grand song” of the Dong minority in southwestern China.

Most notable in the latter category is Gamelan Cudamani, a thrilling, hypnotizing metallophone orchestra from the Indonesian island of Bali. The chance to see a Balinese gamelan in Chicago is a rare privilege—and offering a warm welcome to an ensemble from the world’s most populous Muslim-majority country is also a fine way for our sanctuary city to give the finger to the white supremacists running the country.

Of course, the World Music Festival can’t stop the federal government’s campaign of cruelty against immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and Black and Brown people in general. But because the WMF encourages curiosity, empathy, and connection, it stands in symbolic opposition to a regime that positions nonwhite cultures as targets for fear, resentment, and hatred. When we invoke a “universal language,” we sometimes mean music—and the rest of the time, we mean love.

—Philip Montoro
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—LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

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**Riccardo Muti Conducts the Complete Symphonies**

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312-294-3000
RAGAMALA: A CELEBRATION OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC  
Presented in collaboration with People of Rhythm. This event continues into the morning of Saturday, September 14. Fri 9/13, 6 PM–8 AM, Preston Bradley Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, all ages

If you’ve never seen Indian classical music performed live, you should—and Ragamala’s 14 hours of performances are an ideal introduction. If you’re already a fan, Ragamala will be a star-studded night to remember—and it’ll give you the rare chance to hear ragas performed at the traditional hours for which they were written. You’ll see a sea of hands moving in unison in the audience as they keep tala, making rhythmical gestures to count meter along with the musicians. Feel free to join in. Onstage, expect constant variation, exquisite detail, and dazzling speed. Most of the ragas to be performed are poems in conversation with gods, which will create a sacred vibe. Many of the players come from renowned musical families with long lineages, and they represent both of India’s major traditions: the northern Hindustani, whose smooth, slow, stretched-out style seems to reforest the spaces between notes, and the southern Carnatic, characterized by quick dancing melodies with lightning melisma. This long night’s vibrant performances should provide magical moments of meditation and an ecstatic journey into dawn beneath the Cultural Center’s stained-glass dome. —LESLIE ALLISON

FRIDAY 13

6–7:15 PM Josh Feinberg with Kunal Gunjal and Amit Kavthekar  
Hindustani legend Amit Kavthekar plays tabla, a pair of tuned drums that sing singing vowels like a human voice, harmonize with each other, and mesh in stunning crescendos that blend into one long tone. The tabla player’s fingers generate dense and evolving waterfalls of groove out of impossibly subtle movements. Kavthekar will accompany American sitarist Josh Feinberg, as will young Maharashtrian virtuoso Kunal Gunjal, who plays the santoor, a 100-string hammered dulcimer with a warm, bubbling, melodic sound.

7:15–9 PM Akshara Music Ensemble  
New York City’s long-standing Akshara Music Ensemble, led by Carnatic musician Bala Skandhan (who plays the double-headed pitched barrel drum called the mridangam), shakes up the tradition. Skandhan composes dynamic, creative new works based on the foundations of Indian classical music for a blend of Carnatic, Hindustani, and Western classical and folk instruments. Akshara’s lineup for this set also includes violinist Arun Ramamurthy and Dave Eggar, hammered dulcimer player Max ZT, bansuri player Jay Gandhi, and tabla player Nitin Mitta, several of whom will perform in other Ragamala sets.

9:30–10:45 PM Jay Gandhi and Nitin Mitta  
With the sky outside now completely dark, the stage will clear for this duo of Akshara Music Ensemble members: New York-based Jay Gandhi (who plays the Hindustani bamboo flute or bansuri) and tabla icon Nitin Mitta, born in Hyderabad and now living in Rhode Island (he’s also collaborated with visionary jazz pianist Vijay Iyer).

11:15 PM–12:30 AM Prasanna, Bala Skandan, and Samyuktha Sreeram  
When midnight arrives, it’ll be greeted by the shredding of the trailblazing Prasanna, who adapts Carnatic music to the electric guitar. He’s joined by New York-based mridangam player Bala Skandhan of the Akshara Music Ensemble (see above) and by teenage American musician Samyuktha Sreeram, who’s stunning on the ancient clay-pot percussion instrument called the ghumat.

1:20–3 AM Nandkishor Muley and Ambi Subramaniam with Mahesh Krishnamurthy and Raj Deshmukh  
Nandkishor “Nandu” Muley, from an established musical family in Gujarat, sustains the night’s energy on santoor, collaborating with Carnatic violinist Ambi Subramaniam, mridangam player Mahesh Krishnamurthy, and tabla player Raj Deshmukh.

3:45–9 AM Roopa Mahadevan, Rajna Swaminathan, and Arun Ramamurthy  
This set is definitely worth staying up late to see. California native Roopa Mahadevan is a master Carnatic vocalist, with a voice praised throughout India and the U.S. for its strength, depth, and agility, as well as a trained bharata natyam dancer, with a generous, magnetic stage presence. Her singing will be propelled by one of the few women mridangam players in Carnatic music, Rajna Swaminathan (also a composer), and her ever-evolving vocal line will intertwine with the violin of Carnatic and jazz performer Arun Ramamurthy, a member of the Akshara Music Ensemble (see above).

SATURDAY 14

6:15–8 AM Saraswathi Ranganathan with GS Rajan, Ravi Iyer, and Ganapathi Ranganathan  
Ragamala’s grand finale sends listeners off into the day with grooves from around the world. Local hero and veena player Saraswathi Ranganathan kicks off the set, followed by the Veena Chamber Music and Culture with Pirulo y la Tribu, Los Wembler’s de Iquitos, and ¡Súbelo!—A Celebration of Pan Latin Music and Culture with Pirulo y la Tribu, Los Wembler’s de Iquitos, and Centavrvs, with People of Rhythm.

10 AM–9 PM In May, state-run company Petropetro ceased delivery of crude to a refinery in Iquitos, Peru, after locals seized control of tanks at an oil-storage facility in the area. Residents reported at the time that the region had seen “more than a dozen oil spills from Petropetro’s pipeline in recent years.” Tangled in the rain forest and set along the Amazon River in far northeastern Peru, the village of Iquitos is also home to Los Wembler’s de Iquitos, an ensemble founded by Solomon Sanchez and his sons in 1968. Despite their distance from a major city, the band flourished during the 1970s, issuing a long string of LPs that infused cumbia (originally a folkloric Colombian dance style, characterized by a sort of on-the-one shuffle propelled by polyrhythms) with lyrics and personal flourishes drawn from life along the river. Los Wembler’s worked to localize cumbia—they called their music “Cumbia Amazonica” or chicha—and on tunes such as “La Danza del Petrolero” they focused on the region’s fractious relationship with the oil industry, which provides the potential for economic growth as well as for ecological disaster. Following Sanchez’s death four decades ago, the band all but ceased recording. The musical brothers kept gigging locally, but it wasn’t until old material by Los Wembler’s appeared on the 2007 compilation The Roots of Chicha: Psychedelic Cumbias From Peru that they resuscitated their international career. The disc opens with a Los Wembler’s tune performed by another group, and a few tracks later “Petrolero” kicks in—a sinuous dance cut equally indebted to the Ventures’ tuneful surf, Peruvian and Colombian popular music, and pretty much all of early psychedelia. Beginning in 2016, a
few new recordings followed, and on the brand-new long-player Visión del Ayahuasca, the 50-year-old band still reel off uncannily danceable numbers that touch on a surfeit of sadness and the capriciousness of love—all the while declaring “Los Wembler’s para el mundo.” —Dave Cantor

Centavrvs consider what they play to be rock—they’re based in Mexico City, and as front man Demián Gálvez explained to Remezcla last year, Mexican audiences tend to classify any band that doesn’t make pop or regional music as rock. “Sometimes we play at world music festivals, especially in the U.S.,” he said. “But here we play at rock festivals.” The four-piece band are part of a World Music Festival lineup dedicated to Latinx music, but they could’ve just as easily visited Chicago to play Pitchfork or Riot Fest. They also push conventional definitions of rock, as a great band should: their second album, last year’s Somos Uno, combined an electronified take on Mexican rock with a message of unity. The title translates to “we are one,” but sonically Centavrvs are at least several: any given solo might be on guitar, synth, or trombone, and the songs draw from Latin genres such as salsa and cumbia, themselves born from musical mixing (the name “salsa,” after all, alludes to combining different ingredients to make a “sausage”). Like those genres, Centavrvs’s music calls for dancing, which is one way to honor the history the band draws from. They’re not trying to account for all of Mexican music, of course—it’s too diverse to tackle with just one project—but what they do know makes for a great ride. Centavrvs member Alan Santos summed it up for Remezcla in that same story: “We can’t say we sound like Mexico, we don’t,” he said. “It sounds like my Mexico, like Demián’s Mexico, like Paco’s and Rayo’s.” —Justin Curto

Lucibela is technically a millennial, having been born in 1986, but you’d be hard-pressed to guess that from her sophisticated, been-through-many-lifetimes voice. The Cape Verdean singer has a tone that channels her later countrywoman Cesária Évora, a beloved ambassador of morna music, and she has acknowledged the lineage: on her website she says that she wants to “carry on the work that Cesária began.” Her music is a gentle amalgam of several styles found either in her native islands or in Brazil—especially bossa nova, morna, and another Cape Verdean genre called coladéra, a relatively lively descendant of morna whose bright, fun songs often engage in light social satire. She seems to shine more on material that invokes the latter, including “Mi E Dode Na Bô Cabo Verde,” a shuffling tribute to the islands (with lyrics partly in Cape Verdean creole) from her 2018 debut album, Laço Umbilical. Lucibela has toured internationally since moving to Lisbon in 2012, but she began her career straight out of high school in the mid-2000s, singing at tourist hotels in the islands, where she learned to reinterpret bossa and jazz standards with her own Afro-Caribbean flavor. Her live shows are an extension of the lounge vibe she learned on those jobs, and she’s usually accompanied by an acoustic four-piece that keeps it mellow. —Salem Collo-Julin


girma bêyène & akalé wubé

At age 65, Chicago percussionist and composer Kahil El’Zabar is growing into his role as jazz elder. He joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians at 18, about six years after its founding in 1965; ten years later he became its chairman, a position he held till 1980. He’s served as a sideman for jazz icons such as Pharoah Sanders, Dizzy Gillespie, and Archie Shepp, but since the 1970s El’Zabar’s main musical concerns have been two bands of his own: the Ritual Trio and the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, both of which have passed through many lineups over the decades. He’s stayed active in a variety of creative fields, and has devoted much of his energy to educating, promoting, and booking other artists. He worked as an associate arts professor at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln from 1987 till 1999, then at the University of Illinois at Chicago till 2004; his first book of poetry, Mis Taken Brilliance, came out in 1993 via Third World Press, the largest independent Black publisher in the States. In 1996, El’Zabar launched Traffic, an interdisciplinary performance series at Steppenwolf Theatre that he ran for almost four years; in 1998, he became a partner in and artistic director for Loop-based jazz club Rituals. He also makes clothing, and his bandmates all wear his Afrocentric garb—as did Nina Simone, who hired him as a sideman and then discovered his talents as a designer. Outside jazz, though, El’Zabar remains a marginal figure, which inspired writer-director Dwayne Johnson-Cochran, a childhood friend of his, to ask why via the 2014 documentary Be Known—which includes the hushed “Wish I Knew” from the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble’s latest album, May’s Be Known: Ancient/Future Music (Spiritmuse). Joined by Ian Maksin (cello), Alex Harding (baritone sax), and Corey Wilkes (trumpet, percussion), El’Zabar explores the meditative nuances of spiritual jazz; when his voice leaps from a tender murmur to a possessed growl on “Lost in Myself,” the whole band jumps with him. —Leor Galil


girma bêyène & akalé wubé, kahil el’zabar ethnic heritage ensemble

Sun 9/15, 7 PM, Constellation, 5111 N. Western, 21+ See Saturday, September 14, for Girma Bêyène & Akalé Wubé.

The Englewood/Soweto Exchange is a joint endeavor of Chicago’s Old Town School of Folk Music and the Wits School of Arts at the Universi-
Singer and ethnomusicologist Jeremy Dutcher, based in Toronto, belongs to the Wolastoqiyik people of Canada's First Nations, specifically the Tobique Reserve. His self-released debut, Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa (“The Songs of the People of the Beautiful River”), places the swoops and glides of his powerful operatic tenor in dialogue with the songs and stories of his elders, recorded on wax cylinders in 1907. Those antique recordings had languished, forgotten in a museum, until Dutcher’s mentor, Passamaquoddy song carrier Maggie Paul, recommended he seek them out. In attempting to learn the old songs, Dutcher began to compose pieces that intertwined his voice with those of the elders and supported both with his piano playing—and the resulting album won the 2018 Polaris Music Prize, a 2019 Juno Award, and many other accolades. Dutcher will perform those breathtakingly beautiful pieces here in a solo setting, accompanying his charismatic singing on piano. The counterpoint he’s written illuminates the artistry of the ancient songs, fulfilling Dutcher’s aim (explained in an NPR Music interview) of placing First Nations music on the same level as European “high art.” Dutcher identifies as queer, and his activism extends to that part of his identity as well—he’s become a spokesperson for an indigenous futurism that foregrounds First Nations perspectives, including their regard for “two-spirit” people such as himself (the term refers to a wide variety of traditional, ceremonial “third gender” roles in indigenous American cultures). His songs also help preserve the nearly extinct language of his people—fewer than 100 native speakers of Wolastoq survive.

—Catalina Maria Johnson

**THURSDAY 19**

**JEREMY DUTCHER** Thu 9/19, 7 PM, American Indian Center, 3401 W. Ainslie, all ages

See Wednesday, September 18.

**LANKUM, YANDONG GRAND SINGERS OF CHINA** Thu 9/19, 7 PM, Beverly Arts Center, 2407 W. 111th, all ages

You don’t have to dig too deeply into the Irish folk canon to find tales of destruction, riots, and love triangles that end violently, and fortunately Lankum embrace the eeriest and most disturbing aspects of this legacy. Lankum are a four-piece traditional Irish group who got their start in 2012 playing punk squats and dive bars around Dublin, and as they’ve moved to bigger halls they’ve retained their grit. On 2017’s BETWEEN the Earth and Sky (Rough Trade), they play a mix of original tunes and traditional material such as “Sergeant William Bailey,” an anti-enlistment song written during the 1916 Easter Rising that depicts the slow, lonely, self-inflicted demise of a despatched army recruiter. Lankum’s sound sometimes recalls that of Fairport Convention, with beautiful vocal harmonies by all four members. Singer, uilleann piper, and tin whistle player Ian Lynch and his guitarist brother Daragh (who gave Lankum their original name, Lynchedin), are joined by singer and hammond player Radie Peat, who sings like Sandy Denny, and violinist and violist Cormac Mac Diarmada. They changed the band’s name in 2016, sending around a press release that made plain their intentions: “We will not continue to work under our current name while the systemic persecution and murder of black people in the USA continues.” The band’s current name comes from the Irish Traveller ballad “False Lankum,” a cautionary tale about a child murderer, and the Lankum original “The Granite Gaze” maintains this tradition of mining horror for wisdom with its moving lyrics: “We are the ones left behind / In swaddling bound with baling twine / They stole the narrow from our very bones / And we in turn, turned on our own.” —Salem Collo-Julin

Rooted group melodies split into eerie harmonies and then recede into unison. Catchy phrases engage in polyphonic darting and hocketing. Shim-mering long chords drone and waver. Freely flowing rhythms resolve into steady, driving patterns. A lone voice erupts in bold, joyous elaborations. These are the sounds of “grand song,” a folk-singing tradition that has shaped and sustained the lives of farmers in southwestern China for centuries. Chairs in each village of the Dong ethnic minority typically perform grand song at the drum tower (the hub of local social life) or informally in the home, and the singers pass down this tradition to their children or disciples. Grand song requires no conductor and no instruments. It’s used to transmit history and culture, because the Dong do not have a written language of their own. The Yandong Grand Singers, composed of women and men from farming families from southwestern China, perform music that resounds with Dong ancestral voices but also strikes sparks with contemporary listeners around the world. The singers are represented by Michigan-based international-music agency Alma Artist Booking, and they’ve performed at festivals throughout China and in Germany and Japan. The Yandong Grand Singers’ performances include exuberant theatricality and humor as well as moments of quiet reflection, and some of their material—“Cicada Song,” “The Swallows Are Back”—calls to life the natural soundscapes of their native Yandong township. Other songs address love, relationships, or the interconnectedness between people and the environment. Grand song is not just beautiful music but also an encyclopedia maintained by oral tradition, and in 2019 UNESCO officially proclaimed it an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

—Leslie Allison

**SATURDAY 21**

**MABANG!** Sat 9/21, 7 PM, Mary Patricia Gannon Concert Hall, Haltschneider Performance Center, DePaul University, 2330 N. Halsted, all ages

See Friday, September 20.

**IKEBE SHAKEDOWN, ANA EWERLING** Sat 9/21, 8 PM, Martyrs’, 3855 N. Lincoln, 21+

Ikebe Shakedown fuse funk, soul, Afrobeat, disco, scores to movie westerns, and more into sleek, horn-driven grooves. The foundation of the seven-piece instrumental band was laid at Bard College in Red Hook, New York, where several members...
met as students, and the full lineup took shape in 2008 after they relocated to Brooklyn. The airy, joyous energy of the band’s music makes it feel like a sunset drive down a winding west-coast highway, far from the oppressive grind of the big city (which might be part of why the group has become a favorite at outdoor festivals such as Bonnaroo and Austin City Limits). Ikebe Shakedown recently released the full-length Kings Left Behind (Calemine), recorded at Brooklyn studio Hive Mind, which is partially owned by two Shakedown members, bassist Vince Chiarioto and saxophonist Michael Buckley. The studio has given the band space to collaborate and experiment over the past couple years, and its casual creative environment has served them well. Every member of the group contributed to the writing process for Kings Left Behind, shaping something fresh and fun in a subgenre fraught with retro re-creations. —JAMIE LUDWIG

Born in Chisinau, Moldova, in 1987, Ana Ewerling (formerly Muntaneau) began studying music at age seven—including solfège, piano, and jazz performances—and moved to Chicago in 2010. For the past four or five years, she’s been involved in a series of local musical projects, including self-described “global dance music” band Beats y Bateria. Everling sings in Portuguese, Spanish, and English as well as her native Moldovan, but for this show she’ll collaborate with Chicago pianist and arranger Patrick Donley on a set of predominantly Moldovan music scored for quintet—the vocals and piano will be accompanied by guitar, violin, kaval (a Romanian flute), and percussion. That’s not to say the performances will be traditional or folkloric, however. Though the material Everling has chosen from her homeland includes what she characterizes as peasant songs, she and her ensemble will treat it as jazz, adding touches from bossa nova, fado, and Balkan dance music. Blessed with a potent, crystalline voice and a striking stage presence, Everling delivers her unusual fusion with the utmost delicacy and elegance. —CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON

AFROTRONIX, KOKOKO! With video mixing by Giroscopio. Sat 9/21, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 2053 W. North, 21+ Before Chadian guitarist, vocalist, and producer Caleb Rimitobaye launched Afrofuturist dance project Afrotronix in 2014, he’d spent the bulk of his career in the band H’Sao, formed in Montreal in 2001 with a couple brothers and a childhood friend from their hometown of N’Djamena, the capital of Chad. H’Sao foregrounds the harmonies of their massed voices, blending in popular Western genres such as R&B, gospel, and blues, but Rimitobaye was eager to find a new idiom—partly because the public pigeonholed H’Sao’s work. “H’Sao was perceived as world music,” he told Teller Report in January. “I wanted to make music less community and more universal.” Afrotronix is his vehicle for exploring electronic music outside the group: he’s brought together the sweltering guitar of Tuareg blues, the melismatic melodies of Senegalese mbalax, the sly polyrhythms of Afrotop, and the ground-shaking beats of EDM. On 2017’s Nomadix (Productions Sia), Rimitobaye makes sparing use of the blaring bass and power-up synth of stadium-ready modern dance music, mostly relying on the half dozen other genres that inform his animated production. He delivers his eurhythmic vocals mostly in one of the dozen languages of the Sara people, and he’s got positivy for days. Drummer Lionel Kiziba reinforces Afrotronix’s muscular dance rhythms for live performances, where Rimitobaye consistently wears a large white helmet that looks like a cross between a chambered nautilus and a Slinky—he says it’s a large white helmet that looks like a cross between a chambered nautilus and a Slinky—he says it’s a jarringly novel sound out of home-made, serrated beats is weirdly accessible and accessible (spoken by fewer than 200,000 people), but you don’t have to understand it to absorb their passion.

—JAMIE LUDWIG

GLOBAL PEACE PICNIC WITH THE GARIFUNA COLLECTIVE, KOKOKO!, AND HERMÁN OLIVERA Y SU ORQUESTA Sun 9/22, 2–6 PM, Humboldt Park Boathouse, 1301 N. Sacramento, all ages

SUNDAY 22

The Garifuna people trace their origins to the early 1600s, when two slave ships sank near the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent and the surviving West Africans assimilated with the local Caribs and Arawaks. Today the Garifuna primarily live in coastal communities in Central America, though a significant population has immigrated to the United States. Their total number is only around 600,000, and as a consequence many people don’t know they exist. The Garifuna Collective aim to change that. A multigenerational ensemble founded in the late 90s by Belizean musician Andy Palacio, they’ve toured widely enough to bring the culture and sounds of the Garifuna people to more than 30 countries. Their 2007 debut album, Wátina, gave its gently percolating Garifuna rhythms, delicate guitars, and soulful, understated songwriting a contemporary feel with gorgeous studio production; it became a breakthrough success, earning Palacio the 2007 WOMEX award (along with Wátina producer Ivan Duran). Palacio died at age 47 in 2008 from stroke and heart attack, but the Garifuna Collective have continued his mission, touring and releasing material that draws from traditional songs and modern sensibilities—including 2013’s breathtaking tribute to Palacio, Ayé. Where that album is contemplative in tone, the brand-new Aban feels more celebratory and lighthearted. Focusing on the unity and resilience of the Garifuna people over time, it combines an even deeper dive into tradition with elements of dub and stripped-down electronics. The collective sing in the Garifuna language (spoken by fewer than 200,000 people), but you don’t have to understand it to absorb their passion.

See Saturday, September 21, for Kokoko!

Born in 1959 in Newark, New Jersey, to parents of the Puerto Rican diaspora, Hermán Olivera quickly made a name for himself in the New York salsa scene of the 1980s. His gift for vocal improvisation enlivened several essential hits by the famous Conjunto Libre, co-led by percussionist Manny Oquendo—including the smokily sensuous mid-tempo “Decidete” and the barn burner “Elena Elena,” where Olivera’s brash, rapid-fire singing functions almost as another brass instrument. He went on to record with most of the big names in the genre, including Johnny Pacheco and Ray Barretto. In recent years he’s been the lead for the legendary Eddie Palmieri’s band, where he negotiates the progressive arrangements as effortlessly as he handles traditional material. Olivera has mostly recorded with other bandleaders, but he finally released an album under his own name in 2014: La Voz del Caribe (Salsaneo) is about what you’d expect from a veteran professional, which is to say it’s a crash course in salsa. The title track in particular is an impressive showcase, with Olivera’s polished vocals riding a sashaying groove. In live performance, Olivera’s voice has lost a bit of its old razor sharpness, but he can still pack a lot of quivering emotion into a phrase and slide his way around a melody with ingenuity and soul. —NOAH BERLATSKY
er Thomas de Hartmann from 1924 to 1927; he dictated roughly 300 compositions based on that folk music to de Hartmann, who transcribed them in Western notation. Eskenian and company wanted to reintroduce the sounds that inspired Gurdjieff via a modern interpretation of his work, which resulted in the 2011 album Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff (ECM). For their next project, the Gurdjieff Ensemble honored another giant of Armenian folk music: priest, scholar, ethnomusicologist, and composer Soghomon Soghomonian, better known as Komitas. He first studied music in the 1880s at the Etchmiadzin Cathedral, the heart of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and became an expert in khaz, the notation system used in Armenian religious music. He also translated thousands of folk songs into Western notation, though his work all but ended with the profound trauma he suffered during the Armenian genocide in 1915. The state-owned college of music in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, is named after him—the Komitas State Conservatory is where Eskenian earned his master’s degree in piano. The Gurdjieff Ensemble’s smoldering, somber 2015 album, Eghass Malan (Sahel Sounds), is full of songs that combine the two styles. Ghali switches to electric guitar, which she plays over tende, hand claps, and background harmonies provided by Akrouni and a third woman (unfortunately unidentified in publicity materials). The result is a joyfully meditative celebration whose mood drifts between the poles of blissed-out psychedelic trance and rambunctious block party—it sticks closer to the first on the title song, and pushes toward the second on the rhythmically intense “Jori.” This Chicago concert by Les Filles de Illighadad is a rare chance to see one of the most quietly cutting-edge performers on the globe. —NOAH BERLATSKY

**WEDNESDAY 25**

**HAITIANDANSCO, GURDJIEFF ENSEMBLE**

Wed 9/25, 7 PM, Mauer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, all ages

Haiti is by far the most populous country in the Caribbean with a dominant French cultural influence, but that’s not the only thing that makes it unusual in the region: its deeply rooted African religious influence is more Dahomey than Yoruba, which in large part accounts for the differences between Vodou and closely related faiths such as Santería and Candomblé. Cultural and religious traditions shaped by the African diaspora, whether in New Orleans, Puerto Rico, Brazil, or elsewhere, all give music and dance a central place in the worship of the sacred, and none of the dances is purely secular. The founder of this group, Dieufel Lamiere, a native of Port-au-Prince, has studied dance in many forms, among them jazz, modern, and ballet. His current ensemble, HaitianDansCo, combines those influences with folkloric and traditional dance, and has presented Haitian culture all over the Americas. The company is part of a larger organization called Dance to Save Lives, which teaches Haitian youth, raises money for infrastructure and education, and offers food, shelter, and career opportunities to young dancers in need. —MONICA KENDRICK

**FRIDAY 27**

**GAMELAN ÇUDAMANI** Tickets required for entry; reservations encouraged via harristheaterchicago.org. Walk-up tickets available only on a first-come, first-served basis. Fri 9/27, 6 PM, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph, all ages

American international-music festivals have been criticized for their reliance on what Reader critic Peter Margasak has called “pan-stylistic performers whose sound rarely suggests anything more specific than ‘world music.’” This strategy is encouraged by issues of cost and accessibility—artists advancing specific, rooted traditions in other parts of the world are often more difficult and expensive to book than stateside acts pushing vague, crowd-pleasing fusions. Those issues are especially salient with gamelan music, which originated on the Indonesian island of Bali; it’s played by large ensembles using heavy, idiosyncratically tuned metallophones, gongs, and other percussive instruments and often accompanied by elaborately costumed dancers, so the logistical challenges of touring are formidable. Because many major American cities and college towns have at least one homegrown gamelan ensemble, it can be hard for organizers to justify the immense expense of bringing over a group from Indonesia. Fortunately this year Chicago’s World Music Festival has secured a singular Balinese company, Gamelan Çudamani, by serving as an anchor for its U.S. tour and encouraging other stateside presenters to book it as well. Founded in 1997 and based in the village of Pengosekan, Gamelan Çudamani has distinguished itself from the many Balinese gamelan troupes that exist mainly to entertain tourists: it’s a nonprofit organization that emphasizes the continuity between traditional culture and contemporary artistic practice. Çudamani has commissioned the manufacture of special instruments with a wider-than-usual pitch range, which allows it to play older compositions as well as contemporary pieces from around Bali, and it stores an extra set in Los Angeles to cut down on shipping costs. Many of the 19 current ensemble members grew up being taught by older members in community-based schools, and they’ve learned not only a virtuosic command of their instruments but also a light-handed dynamism that makes their perfor—

**THURSDAY 26**

**LES FILLES DE ILLIGHADAD** Thu 9/26, 7 PM, Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, 21+/Mon 9/23, 6 PM, Oak Park River Forest Community Center, 4200 Green River Rd., Oak Park, free

Kim So Ra plays the janggu, a hourglass-shaped drum that’s been part of Korean music for more than a thousand years. Played with bare hands, with sticks, or with one of each, it’s constructed with opposing heads so that it can simultaneously produce different pitches; in some settings, a drummer will also dance to encourage listeners to get on their feet and do the same. Kim is an officially designated ambassador of Korean folk music, but she’s not a rigid preservationist. During a visit to Chicago in 2014, she collaborated in turn with a group of dancers (as part of Links Hall’s Collision Theory series), classical guitarist Tim Johnson, jazz saxophonist Jeff Chen, and experimental rock trio Kwaidan—and no matter the setting, she found ways to assert the intensity of her alternately stark and frenetic playing. This time, though, Kim will present a set of relatively traditional material called “A Sign of Rain,” which shares its name with her most recent album. She’ll be accompanied by Lee Hye Joon on piri (a bamboo double-reed instrument similar to the oboe), Lim Ji Hye on kayagum (a zither related to the guzheng and koto), and fellow drummer Hyun Seung Hun, but the program also provides plenty of room for Kim’s rousing solo playing. —BILL MESSER

**LES FILLES DE ILLIGHADAD, KIM SO RA**

To Western listeners unfamiliar with the music of Niger and the Sahel, Les Filles de Illighadad may sound like traditional performers. In fact, they’re adventuruous innovators. The band’s cofounder, Fatou Seid Ghali of the village of Illighadad, is one of only two professional female guitarists in Niger. She picked the instrument up from her brother of only two professional female guitarists in Niger. She picked the instrument up from her brother—“tende” here referring to a traditional goat-skin drum and the accompanying group dance, performed by young girls at courtship rituals (or just for fun). Tende parties include yodeling chants and, judging by this recording, a lot of delighted laughter and mutual encouragement. Les Filles de Illighadad’s second album, 2017’s Eghass Malan (Sahel Sounds), is full of songs that combine the two styles. Ghali switches to electric guitar, which she plays over tende, hand claps, and background harmonies provided by Akrouni and a third woman (unfortunately unidentified in publicity materials). The result is a joyfully meditative celebration whose mood drifts between the poles of blissed-out psychedelic trance and rambunctious block party—it sticks closer to the first on the title song, and pushes toward the second on the rhythmically intense “Jori.” This Chicago concert by Les Filles de Illighadad is a rare chance to see one of the most quietly cutting-edge performers on the globe. —LEON GALLIANO

To Western listeners unfamiliar with the music of Niger and the Sahel, Les Filles de Illighadad may sound like traditional performers. In fact, they’re adventurou
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mances especially thrilling. Çudamani has just released its fourth album, Bhumi, through the non-profit Foundation for World Arts. —BILL MAYER

SATURDAY 28

THOMAS MAPFU MO & THE BLACKS UNLIMITED, ALSARAH & THE NUBATONES, FUNKADESI, CHIEF BOIMA Sat 9/28, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, 2047 N Milwaukee, 21+

Born in 1945, Thomas Mapfumo began his musical career singing covers of American rock and soul tunes in nightclubs around Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe (during those years, the country was called Rhodesia or Southern Rhodesia, and it was embargoed in a long transition away from British colonial rule). In the early 1970s, Mapfumo made a choice that would help transform the future of his country: he began playing original material that drew upon his roots, singing in Shona rather than English and setting his words to cycling, single-string figures that transposed melodies traditionally played on mbira (thumb piano) onto electric guitar. He dubbed his style chimurenga music (after the Shona word for a liberation struggle), and his metaphorical lyrics protested the white-dominated power structure. Mapfumo attained such popularity and authority that the colonial government attempted to ban his more confrontational songs and in 1979 jailed him without charge—though after three months of popular demonstrations in his support, the regime was forced to let him go. After Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, Mapfumo fixed his criticism upon Robert Mugabe’s new government and its growing corruption. Unfortunately, Mugabe proved a more formidable and intransigent foe (he ruled the country till his ouster in 2018, when he visited for the first of a series of concerts) and, while still based in the United States, he’s been involved in Eugene, Oregon. Mapfumo wouldn’t return to his homeland till 2018, when he visited for the first of a series of concerts, and he’s still based in the United States. Though he’s open to input from American sources—in 2000 he made a record with improvisers Wadada Leo Smith and Henry Kaiser, and in 2015 he jammed with Chicago blues harmonica player Billy Branch at Rosa’s Lounge—he continues to sing mostly in Shona and call out the powers that be in music patterned after the sounds he heard growing up in the Zimbabwean countryside.

—B ILL M EYER

On their most recent album, 2008’s self-released Yo Baba, they incorporate nimble West African guitars, loose-timed samba congas, and ebullient hip-hop breakbeats—and that’s just on one song, “Crash da Party.” Yo Baba also detours into lean, straightforward blues (“Lonely Road”) and features an appearance by rapper Anacron (“Galsun”). Vocalist-percussionist Kweve Steve Cobb has performed in 70s funk group Boscoe and with Roy Ayers and Anita Baker (and released one of Chicago’s earliest hip-hop recordings, the 1983 12-inch “Mastermind”), while guitarist-vocalist Abdul Hakeem has worked with the likes of Sly & Robbie, Herbie Hancock, and Philip Glass. Funkadesi’s genre blending would probably be disorienting if the band weren’t so tight—they’ve built a coherent, hard-to-pin-down sound that celebrates their cultural commingling. —LE OR G G AL I L

Chief Boima, born Boima Tucker, grew up in Milwaukee in the 80s in a close-knit community of immigrants from Sierra Leone and elsewhere in southwest Africa. He traveled the world as a writer and DJ, focusing on digital music from all over Africa and the African diaspora, and his DJ sets reflect the dizzying variety of mixes, beats, and modes of production that he’s come across in his research. Given the size of his musical vocabulary, it’s almost impossible to guess exactly what sounds you might hear in a Boima set, but you could prepare by listening to the releases on his Intl Blk label, which he started in 2015 to distribute his own work and that of like-minded DJs. Judging by the latest from Intl Blk—the three volumes of Cali Quilombo, an eclectic compilation of Afro-Caribbean remixes of recent California rap—Boima’s quest for musical knowledge hasn’t slackened at all. The remix of Tyga’s “Taste” he did with Los Angeles DJ Foreigner (aka Adam Cooper) gives it a dancing-in-the-streets-of-Bahia flair—it even makes me like Tyga for a second. As a DJ, Boima has absorbed the distinctive rhythms and sounds of the places he’s lived and traveled: after Milwaukee, he spent years in Oakland and Brooklyn, all the while making lengthy trips to Africa and South America and performing and collaborating with other producers influenced by the global south, most notably DJ/Rupture. Boima now lives in LA, and his appearances in Chicago have been rare—the opportunity to hear him mix live shouldn’t be brushed off lightly.

—SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Lowdown Brass Band started in the early 2000s, around the time southern rappers ushered crunk into the mainstream, and on Facebook the Chicago group say they play “brass,” “street funk,” and “crunk”—an adequate shorthand for their earthy, danceable music, which embeds hip-hop, funk, soul, and R&B into the traditional New Orleans funk aesthetic. They gained fame in 2007 with the release of their debut album, For the Dancers, which sold 20,000 copies (a respectable number for a group with a grassroots following). Since then, they’ve incorporated more horn-driven arrangements on each successive release, most recently on their 2018 album, Aitombi.

—C A T I L I N A M R I A J O H N S O N
second-line street-parade style. Their lineup usually consists of two drummers and a sousaphonist in the rhythm section, plus three trombonists, two saxophonists, and two trumpeters up front. About four years ago they recruited local rapper Billa Camp, who's nudged Lowdown closer to hip-hop for 2018's self-released Lowdown Breaks: rounded brass notes arrive in concise, precisely repeated patterns that replicate the feel of looped samples, and on “Don’t Wait! Right Now!” the horns briefly lock in with a boom-bap breakbeat. Billa Camp's group the Dread and veteran rapper Ang13 are among the guests on the mike, though Lowdown's instrumental parts bump so hard that you don't really miss the vocals when they're absent. Midway through “2nd Line Hop,” the trombones mimic the booming brass sample that anchors Pharoahe Monch’s “Simon Says,” a clever nod that demonstrates the band's deeply rooted affection for the genres they're combining. Even better, they sound like they're having a blast doing it. —Leor Galil

Fidel Nadal; Lowdown Brass Band @FERNANDO MESSINO, RENTAUSKAS

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The complete schedule of World Music Festival Chicago

FRIDAY

RAGAMALA: A CELEBRATION OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC
This event continues into the morning of Saturday, September 14. 6 PM-8 AM, Preston Bradley Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, all ages

6-7:15 PM JOSH FEINBERG, KUNAL GUNJAL, AND AMIT KAYTHEKAR

7:45-9 PM AKSHARA MUSIC ENSEMBLE

9:30-10:45 PM JAY GANDHI AND NITIN MITTA

11:15 PM-12:30 AM PRASANNA, BALA SKANDAN, AND SAMYUKTHA SREERAM

1-2:30 AM NANDKISHOR MULEY AND AMBI SUBRAMANIAM WITH MAHESH KRISHNAMURTHY AND RAJ DESHMIKUH

3:45-5 AM ROOPA MAHADEVAN, RAJNA SWAMINATHAN, AND ARUN RAMAMURTHY

4:45-6 AM SAMARTH NAGARKAR WITH AMIT KAYTHEKAR AND RAMACHANDRA JOSHI

6:45-8 AM SARASWATI RANGANATHAN WITH GS RAJAN, RAVI IYER, AND GANAPATHI RANGANATHAN

SATURDAY14

ISÚBELO!—A CELEBRATION OF PAN LATIN MUSIC AND CULTURE WITH PIRULO Y LA TRIBU, LOS WEMBLER’S DE IQUITOS, AND CENTAVRYS
5-7 PM, Jay Pritzker Pavilion, Millennium Park, 201 E. Randolph, all ages

LUCIBELA, GIRMA BÊYÊNÊ & AKALÊ WUBÉ
7 PM (doors at 6 PM), the Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. West, 21+

SATURDAY15

GIRMA BÊYÊNÊ & AKALÊ WUBÉ, KAHLI ELIZABAR ETHNIC HERITAGE ENSEMBLE
7 PM, Constellation, 3111 N. Western, 21+

SUNDAY16

GAMELAN ÇUDAMANI
Tickets required for entry; reservations encouraged via harristheaterchicago.org. Walk-up tickets available only on a first-come, first-served basis. 6 PM, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph, all ages

SATURDAY17

LES FILLES DE ILLIGHADAD, KIM SO RA
7 PM, Sleeping Village, 3734 W. North, 21+

SUNDAY18

THE ENGLEWOOD/SOWETO EXCHANGE, JEREMY DUTCHER
7 PM, Old Town School of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, all ages

THURSDAY19

JEREMY DUTCHER
7 PM, American Indian Center, 3401 W. Ainslie, all ages

LANKUM, YANDONG GRAND SINGERS OF CHINA
7 PM, Beverly Arts Center, 2407 W. 111th, all ages

FRIDAY20

MABANG!, YANDONG GRAND SINGERS OF CHINA
5 PM, Ping Tom Memorial Park, 300 W. 19th, all ages

LANKUM
7 PM, Irish American Heritage Center, 4626 N. Knox, all ages

SATURDAY21

MABANG! 7 PM, Mary Patricia Gannon Concert Hall, Holtschneider Performance Center, DePaul University, 2330 N. Halsted, all ages

Y SU ORQUESTA 2-6 PM, Humboldt Park Boathouse, 1301 N. Sacramento, all ages

WEDNESDAY25

HAIITIANDANSCO, GURDJIEFF ENSEMBLE
7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, all ages

AFROTRONIX, KOKOKO! With video mixing by Giroscopio. 9 PM, Chop Shop, 2033 W. North, 21+

THURSDAY26

THOMAS MAPFumo & THE BLACKS UNLIMITED, ALSARAH & THE NUBATONES, FUNKADESI, CHIEF BOIMA
9 PM, Concord Music Hall, 2047 N. Milwaukee, 21+

SUNDAY29

WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL MEETS THE WORLD DUMPLING FEST WITH FIDEL NADAL FEATURING MR. PAUER, ALSARAH & THE NUBATONES, AND LOWDOWN BRASS BAND
Noon-7 PM, Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand, all ages

SUNDAY29

Gamelan Çudamani
Tickets required for entry; reservations encouraged via harristheaterchicago.org. Walk-up tickets available only on a first-come, first-served basis. 6 PM, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph, all ages

Sarah Mohamed Abunama Elgadi of Alsarah & the Nubatones © NOUSHA SALIMI