

**Cheikh Lô**

Balbalou

Chapter Two Records ★★★★★

**Cheikh Lô (v), Flavia Coehlo (v), Oumou Sangaré (v), Fixi (acc) and Ibrahim Maalouf (t). Rec. date not stated**

A jewel-like recording from the singular Senegalese crooner, whose tremulous voice, both delicate and strong, weaves through 10 original tracks. It's the first album in five years for Lô, a dreadlocked follower of the Sufi Muslim Baye Fall who burst onto the scene in 1996 with his mesmerising international debut, *Ne La Thiass*, then worked intermittently with the likes of Afrobeat drummer Tony Allen and saxophonist Pee Wee Ellis before disappearing again. *Balbalou* presents a more confident, open take on Lô's trademark sound, which mixes hard driving mbalax polyrhythms with Jamaican reggae and the Afro-Cuban grooves beloved of West Africa since the 1930s. Lô's voice, variously

husky, languid and impassioned, tells – in Wolof and Bambara – of corruption and *coups d'état*, of the importance of peace, love and spirituality. Brazilian bossa-muffin singer Flavia Coehlo and Paris-based accordionist Fixi lend light and colour to lead track, 'Degg Gui'; the great Malian diva Oumou Sangaré guests on 'Doyal Naniou'; ever-questing Lebanese trumpet player Ibrahim Maalouf gives the funky title track a spacey edge.

Recommended. **Jane Cornwell**

