Dustbusters

Just back from digging in a bottomless crate, it's Jim Irvin, for funk's sake.

IN 1996, a website, www.dustygroove.com, opened up to lure seekers of rare funk, soul, jazz and hip hop from around the world to a Chicago-based store. Founders Rick Weck and John Schurter knew they'd attract crate-diggers in search of breakthroughs and vinyl collectors keen to score limited-run reissues. The site and its brick-and-mortar outpost have become trusted sources of recommendation, encouraging visitors to stray into cool backwaters – Tropicalia, boogie funk, Afro-beat, Serge Gainsbourg and Sun Ra. It was only a matter of time before they started issuing their own editions of desirable rarities, and ya verily, Dusty Groove America, launching with a handsome half-dozen CDs, musically unrelated except in their rarity.

I can't comprehend why so many of the great Jorge Ben's early albums remain unavailable, even in his Brazilian homeland. Almost everything he cut in the '60s and '70s is terrific. DG agree and have made Funga Beba, a staging summit with percussionists. Trio Macaco from 1970, part of their opening salvo. This is a key work in Ben's development of samba-soul, effortlessly compelling and uplifting, and is highly recommended. Now please can we have 1973's Ben back on CD too?

Dorothy Ashby is not a name I recognised, though it turns out I'm familiar with her work. She's that rare thing, a jazz harpist, and if a soul record includes harp it's usually her: Bill Withers, Earth, Wind & Fire and Stevie Wonder's If It's Magic from Songs In The Key Of Life. DG have uncovered a brilliant 1971 album recorded for Chess offshoot Cadet called The Roughage Of Dorothy Ashby on which she performs her own material, singing and playing harp and koto in rich, soulful arrangements by conductor Richard Evans. Unforgettable. Psychedelic Eastern-jazz with a warm groove.

You might recall hearing the title track of Jungle Fever by Chakachas in Paul Thomas Anderson's Boogie Nights. Accidental Latino funk interlaced with organic cues and sighs. Their Psychedelic albums from 1972 can't keep it up, sadly, and the rest is mostly standard loungey chachachá – but fascinating, as they're middle-aged white guys from Belgium!

The rest of the batch comprises La Clave's super-rare self-titled Latin funk LP with Lalo Schifrin connections, Pete Jolly's warm and mellow jazz centred around electric piano on suits, and Melvin Jackson's crazed 1969 outing, Funky Stuff. Hands up anyone who owns all six originals…