

TROLSKA POLSKA

Moss Go' Danish Folk Music GO0814

You have to warm to a band that says it's "possibly the first tribute band to the world of Nordic trolls" (and they don't mean the Internet variety). Certainly this is music for passing time under bridges, dense, dark, and a touch damp. The seven-piece boasts fiddle, nyckelharpa, hurdy-gurdy, cello, and double-bass among the instruments, which brings a very thick string sound. Add in percussion, guitar, bagpipes and an occasional flute and you've got something different. The brain-child of Danish folk veteran Martin Seeberg (Instinkt, Valraven, Sorten Muld) their initial EP was nominated for a Danish Folk Award last year.

This album develops their sounds, and although the idea seems more novelty than anything, there's some real fire to the music, as well as more shade and light than you might anticipate (indeed, *Nyføding* is delicately beautiful). Plenty of the sound is ideal for stomping around and scaring people, if that's your idea of a good time, but there's some remarkably skilful arranging involved to weave the different strands together. It's most definitely a Nordic album, with its heart very much in the folk tradition (plenty of two-part tunes, for instance), and what singing there is comes from the troll school. There's enough variety to Seeberg's compositions to indicate that this could be a strong ongoing project (*Friegang* dances the way no self-respecting troll ever would and *Jæt-tepolska* is a thing of shadow and mist). There's definitely something interesting going on here.

www.trolskapolska.dk

Chris Nickson

CECILIA

Blauw Gras Appel APR1353

SNAARMAARWARR

B.L.O.C.K. Appel APR1354

FOLLIA!

Follia! Wild Boar WBM21122

Three from the really lively Belgian scene and as usual they are varied and full of interest.

Cecilia follow up their very appealing 2011 album *In Bad* with this offering which if anything is even better. The classic combination of diatonic accordeon, cornemuse pipes and hurdy-gurdy combine to produce a tight sound that is closer to the sounds of Auvergne dance music than their previous releases. Most of the tunes are composed by their piper / flautist Jan Leeflang though two including the title track come from the box player Greet Wuyts with the odd traditional track making up the number.

The album's main strengths come from a combination of factors. They introduce us to some really interesting, well-structured melodies without ever forgetting that they are playing functional dance music – polkas, bourrées, mazurkas, rondos and waltzes. Add that to fine arrangements with a good sense of dynamic and excellent musicianship and the end result is very pleasing indeed.

On the same label, another trio, another third album, another combination that uses traditional dance rhythms to frame the structure of their compositions. Many of their gigs are playing for dancing. Most of their compositions are by one band member, in this case mandola and lap steel player, Maarten Decombel – then the similarities end.

Snaarmaarwaar's instruments are mandolin, mandola and guitar so that you get that brittle, disciplined double-string sound



Trolska Polska

that is associated with the various multicultural units that Andy Irvine has played with. Another handy comparison for the way that their sound has developed is that they seem to have that 'traditional music broken up and then reconstructed' sound that we associate with Spiro in this country. In other words, they are a band that have put considerable thought into their very exciting sound. There is the occasional use of Maarten's voice in the arrangements but it's never used as a dominant focus of a piece, having to take its place along with the instrumentation.

There ought to be a mention for the arresting photography of the cover; a sawn block of wood has music strings stretched over it. What came first the album title or the photos; or the chicken or the egg. We may never know!

www.denappel.be

Follia! are a seven-piece from the Ghent-Blackenberge area. They go back some way, to 1999 in fact, and this is their fifth album. Although it is clear from their sound that they come from a folk and roots background, they have a wide range of cards in their hand and we hear their take on ska, on rap / hip-hop, folk-rock and that 'in-yr-face' approach that The Pogues brought to Irish music.

They also have some slower reflective pieces and these are probably when they are at their best, especially on *Marieke* and *J'En-hahi La Mer* when the lovely voice of Indra Boone is to the fore. The final track also stands out with some fruity-toned saxophone and Hammond organ sharing the lead on a tuneful little ditty.

The strongest impression of their playing together is a great sense of fun and enjoyment that comes over from every track. It is understandable that artists want to have their albums perfect, the prolonged efforts to get them just right squeezes the life out of them.

www.follia.be

Vic Smith

GISELA JOÃO

Gisela João Montepio 0299-2

Born in northwest Portugal, fadista Gisela João, with her eponymous release, has garnered the national critics' choice for the best music disc of 2014. Hailed by Camané, promoted by singer-producer Helder Moutinho, João enjoys lyrical, understated backing for her brooding contralto by Helder collaborator Ricardo Parreira (Portuguese guitar),

Taigo Oliveira (viola de fado), and Francisco Gaspar (acoustic bass). A singer possessed, João must be seen live to fully appreciate her spectral command as a singer, inhabiting her artistry with an expressive fervour and physicality that takes her distinctive interpretation of fado into untracked territory for a new generation. Smartly packaged with lyrics and brief notes in Portuguese.

www.giselajoa.com

Michael Stone

ALMA AFROBEAT ENSEMBLE

Life No Get Dublicate Slow Walk SLW003

Great sleeve art – a family on a motorbike, immediately engaging – turns out to be the work of Lemi Ghariokwhu, the artist who did many of Fela's album covers. Now there's a nice link. And the music is, of course, not without the odd debt to Mr Kutu. Recorded in Barcelona and mixed in Boston, it's a rather cleaner kind of afrobeat, not as sweaty and clanky and funky as the master, but it packs a punch nevertheless. Band members include American, Senegalese, Argentinian, French and a visiting Norwegian.

www.almaafrobeat.com

Rick Sanders

MICHAEL ALPERT & JULIAN KYTASTY

Night Songs From A Neighbouring Village Oriente Musik RIEN CD 86

Intensely yet modestly aware of their milieu, indebted to Adrienne Cooper and all their forebears, this is the essential emigrant sound of stillness, longing and the inevitable and elegiac danger in traditional Yiddish song: "Now all are laughing at her... because for her beloved boy, shackles are being forged... And the girl was left standing by the gate, washing her face with tears."

These songs are from a central Europe barely known and rarely penetrated (aside from high-profile cyclical invasions). The fascinating mediæval Kyiv troubadour rarity, *Buhai*, is delivered with such fidelity to the archaic and arcane source that it's strangely comforting with all its rustic scrapings and barren magic. Other songs have been transplanted into a new global context of itinerant fluidity that mirrors the lives of the original balladeers and musicians for hire. So we