

fROOTS

Local Music From Out There

belgium invades the world!



think of one

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performance, and in common with every track on this album, beautifully paced. I loved the very spooky *O Death* which Dave says was inspired by Dock Boggs's version, and *I Wish I Had Someone To Love Me* which he learnt from Jeff Davis who had it from Connemara's Joe Heaney. Thus the songs go back and forth. There's a couple of fine riverboat songs, and a Canadian children's play party song which may or may not have a more disreputable origin in lumberjack saloons – and since Dave teams it with *The Cuckoo's Nest* we know what he thinks is the case!

The tunes are terrific, too, including a very fetching *Georgia Girl*, the Irish *Dan O'Keefe's No. 2* linked with the Virginian *Ducks In The Pond*, a Civil War tune *Downfall Of Richmond*, and even one from 19th century Sussex, *Michael Turner's Waltz*.

If I had to pick a favourite track it would be *The Two Sisters*, which is quite heartbreakingly beautiful in its simplicity and restraint. I was put in mind of lines I read recently in Jeffrey Eugenides's remarkable novel *The Virgin Suicides: ...* "an occasional fiddle evoked the country the country had once been". Dave Arthur succeeds in doing that with this album.

Shirley Collins

XENOS

Tutti Frutti Xenos Music XM3335

VARDOS

Entertaining Countess Dracula own label VARDOS002

ALEXANDER FEDORIOUK & KALMAN MAGYAR

Crossing Paths: Ethno-Jazz From Eastern & Central Europe Folk Sounds FS0004

There seems to some special chthonic link between Australia and the Balkans. What is it that makes apparently ordinary Australians immerse themselves in the musical cultures of South-Eastern Europe? It's not exactly a new phenomenon – Mara! – go back to the early 80s at least. Answers on a postcard please. There's nothing in these CDs to tell us how that happened, although it transpires that Xenos, now based in Melbourne, have their roots in Zürich. Oh, well. Xenos are not traditionalists – on this album, with a core of Romany songs from Macedonia, there is electric bass & saxophone as well as *gaida* and *zurna*. From the insanelly catchy chorus of the first number, they're on to a winner. It's pretty upbeat, fun stuff – I'm sure they'd be great live. Anne Hildyard seems to be master of many obscure instruments, and the whole band are wonderfully relaxed and together as they romp through a wide variety of songs and tunes. www.xenosmusic.com

Vardos are linked by the accordionist Sophie (or Sofia) Chapman to Xenos. Their mostly instrumental album, though, has a much more traditional and acoustic sound, with the wild fiddle of Alana Hunt and the double bass of Kate Hosking completing the trio. Tim Meyen on cimbalom is an important guest, giving the album much more of a Hungarian feel. The virtuosity is just faultless, making it a joy to listen to. They bounce through Romanian, Moldavian & Hungarian tunes with joy and ease. And all recorded in Melbourne! Distributed by www.indie-cds.com

The Fedoriouk & Magyar CD is vastly better than the awful title would lead you to believe. Fedoriouk is Ukrainian, and a classically-trained cimbalom player, now based in Cleveland. Magyar is Hungarian, and an attorney based in New Jersey. Their cimbalom and violin form the core part of the sound, although they're both multi-instrumentalists –

interestingly, all the other backing instruments are played by them as well, though the sound is so superbly tight that the multitracking is not at all obvious. It's all acoustic & instrumental, but the original folk tunes that form the core of the music have been stretched in melody and form by both arrangement and improvisation – hence the misleading "jazz" of the title. For instance, there's a tune from Bukovina played in rock 'n' roll style. On these instruments, that's quite refreshing. www.folksoundsrecords.com

Geoff Burton

FERNANDA PORTO

Fernanda Porto TramaT004/ 590-2

If there's one Brazilian artist with the potential to 'cross over' from world music to a general pop audience, it's Fernanda Porto. At home she's already a mainstream star as a result of her wonderful *Sambassim* (included here, naturally), which the press release describes vaguely as "one of the highest selling drum 'n' bass singles of all time". Her club-friendly marriage of roots and chic modernity puts her at the cutting edge of São Paulo's vibrant music scene and is likely to win over the hip young audience that packs out gigs by Gotan Project and their peers. Unless of course drum 'n' bass is too old hat for them.

Porto is a prodigiously talented all-rounder who wrote all but one of the 14 tracks on her debut album and plays all the instruments (including programming!) herself. So don't expect to hear interaction between musicians; despite its hi-tech veneer, this album has the cosy self-contained feel of a handmade sweater. And though superficially energetic, drum 'n' bass often has a strong ambient undertow, which Porto's own production seems to recognise by ensuring the beats don't dominate overly. She has an agreeably seductive tone on sax and a light jazzy touch on keyboards and guitar. And her singing styles range through bossa crooner/ samba siren to rock(ish) chick and even opera singer. But therein perhaps lies the rub. Who exactly is she?

During a recent gig at London's 100 Club with her highly accomplished band, she tinkered with all her favourite instruments but lacked any real charisma. Maybe that's all one can expect from such a relative novice. Similarly, the album has plenty of startling moments, although the overall impression is of something going in and out of focus, as yet without a fully formed identity. Highlights include the sleek mid-tempo glide of the opening *De Costas Pro Mundo* (driving music?), the *maracatú*-styled *Baque Virado*

Fernanda Porto



Photo: Marcos Vilas Boa

and the nova bossa nova of *Jeito Novo* (Not The Same), which switches from Portuguese to English without losing its appeal. There may initially seem to be no end to the skills of this Jill-of-all-trades, but somehow there aren't quite enough ear-catching melodies to justify the album's 63 minutes, and the late appearance of *Só Tinha de Ser Com Você* – the only cover – is a jarring reminder that not all her songwriting is up there with the likes of Antonio Carlos Jobim.

Fernanda Porto is an enjoyable listen, though good as opposed to great. Hey, it's early days, and nobody can say what the future holds for an artist with this much promise. It's clear she could take any number of directions and should find a more defined artistic 'voice' in due course.

Jon Lusk

HADASS PAL-YARDEN AND OTHERS

Yahudice (Urban Ladino Music) Kalan 272

This is the most important new recording of the music of the Sephardim since David Saliel's *Jewish-Spanish Songs Of Thessaloniki*. It consists of interpretations of 14 pieces by, amongst others, Israeli singer Hadass Pal-Yarden and, from Turkey, Yurdal Tokcan, Selim Güler, Göksel Baktagir, Stelios Berberis and many others.

Hadass Pal-Yarden is the main force behind this production. She is both an excellent singer and a scholar of Ladino music, and her connoisseurship is evident in every aspect of the recording. Not only are the performances both emotionally powerful and technically superb, there is real intelligence in the selection of material here. The songs are in Ladino (medieval Spanish), Hebrew, Greek and Turkish, and Pal-Yarden has brought out the richness of the multilingual aspect of many of these songs. A good example is *Kante Katife* (the song known in Turkish as *Kadifeden Kesesi* and in Greek as *Kadifes*), for which Pal-Yarden has carefully chosen some of the sweetest and most affecting stanzas from each of these languages, in particular the Ladino version which light-heartedly celebrates the beauty of a woman leaving a coiffeur.

An arrangement which stops the heart is *En la Prision* (the song is sometimes called *Yedi Kule*). The lyric features a dialogue between an imprisoned man and his former lover, and Pal-Yarden's impassioned vocal – especially in the *amenes*-like solo section – is equal to the emotional weight of the text.

The accompanying booklet is magnificent and is alone worth the cost of the CDs. There are full transcriptions of the song texts, with translations, a valuable and original commentary on each song, and a very full bibliography and discography and some wonderful photos. A new high-water mark in the interpretation of Sephardic song.

Chris Williams

DJIGUIYA

Sakidi Daquí 332014

SAF PERCUSSIONS

Alliance PlayaSound PS65265

From Burkina Faso, young Djiguiya supply interlocking percussion, balafons and vocal chant, the real indigenous thing with sparkle and kick. Social ambitions too, using their profits to pay for a hostel, trade training centre and regular food for street children. In 1996 the group won first prize at the Bobo-Dioulasso National Culture Week, and last year they were named 'artistes du peuple'. So, no debilitating crossover here: this is pure, local west Africa.