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Reviews

A sampling of reviews from the current issue

MERCEDES PEÓN *Sós*

Do Fol Música 10002048

There's nobody in Galician music like Mercedes Peón. She graced the cover of fR214 back in 2001 at the time of the release of her first album *Isué*, which is still a magnificent landmark, and there's a new feature upcoming, so I'll spare you the explanation of just why here.

She's not a prolific releaser of albums; they come out when she has something new to say, and a new one is an event. Galician label Do Fol, to which she's moved after the debut on Resistencia and two more on Discmedi, celebrates *Sós* (which in Galego means 'Alone') with a limited-edition black metal box bearing the letters SOS in Morse code.

In sound it's perhaps her most urban yet; the huge strength and sensitivity of her singing is surrounded by hefty and upfront use of the sampling tools of dance-music or hip-hop, but they're bent to the will of her deeply Galician music and shot through with the sounds and rhythms of stone on metal spade, squealing gaitas, and the skittering rattle of pandeireta. She has an archetypal Galician traditional voice, an absolute expression of the

strength, shapes and sounds of the village traditions of the pandeireteras and gaiteiros she's so familiar with; a voice of the rocky places that has resounded throughout time.

Sós reflects her move in live performance from fronting a band to an extraordinarily powerful solo show, showcased to acclaim at Womex, in which she plays clarinet, gaita, pandeireta, snare drum and spade while triggering intricate samples, a demanding, complex task but none of it distracting her from the raw wildness and intense focus of her singing. Her taking on of the whole sound-creation process extends to the album too; her usual co-producer Nacho Muñoz wasn't available this time, though he plays keyboards and samplers, so she did it all herself, and played most of the instruments.

All the songs, while rich in traditional shapes and turns, are her own compositions, and while they're entirely enjoyable to the wider world just as music, for a Galego-speaker her lyrics are a major factor. With an economy of words, the music resonating their strength, she sings of connectedness with Portuguese, Moroccan and Berber music and people, reflects on rich and poor, street demonstration, home and the warmth of family, and the Babel of internationalism, language and travel.

Like Mercedes herself, *Sós* is dramatic, bold, and individual, breaking with the usual folk-revival ways while embracing and cherishing the characterful, lined faces of deep tradition.

• www.folmusica.com | Distributed in the UK by Discovery: www.discovery-records.com | Buy from Amazon.co.uk

Andrew Cronshaw



Mercedes Peón

CHRISTI ANDROPOLIS *Rust & Holler*

Furrow Records FURCD003



Christi Andropolis

Emily Portman's American bandmate in Rubus makes her own distinctive entrance into solo territory with a forthright, supremely confident album. Originally from New York state, Andropolis draws her influences far and wide and isn't afraid to display them, peppering variations on the tradition with her own bold songwriting, a voice of unusual strength and some determinedly original arrangements. Her extraordinary funky version of *Marrowbones*, bustling organ and all, shouldn't work, but somehow does. Similarly, her performance of the opening track *Cambric Shirt* has her belting out the lyrics like a nascent Janis Joplin over thumping banjo and *The Dead Horse* is delivered like a steamy blues over Dave Hart's wailing harmonica. And when she's not slinking 'n' hollering, she's giving us some pretty dynamic fiddle to add solid musicality to the fierce intent; a couple of spacey instrumentals underline the point.

At times it threatens to get a tad overwrought, but there's formidable salvation in her own songwriting. *Good Morning, Mr Hughes* is a mysterious slow burn of a song constantly threatening to explode into a nasty narrative, Emily Portman style, but ultimately leaves you in the lap of the mundane, which is ultimately just as scary. You could even imagine *Another Way Down*, the growly country blues that closes the album being covered by Robert Plant. But even these retreat into insignificance alongside *Winter Soldier*, a beautifully weighted, emotionally draining tribute to Iraq war casualties backed only by

insistent acoustic guitar and churchy organ.

So it's quite an album that's soulful, bluesy and a lot else besides, but hops somewhere else whenever the categorisation police come knocking. Those are often the best sort.

• www.furrowrecords.co.uk | www.christi-andropolis.com | Buy from Amazon.co.uk

Colin Irwin

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Outsinging The Nightingale: Lost Treasures Of Bulgarian Music 1905-1950*

JSP Records JSP77134 ABCD

There can be few who are quite unfamiliar with the sound of Bulgarian music, whether the plangent harmonies of the *Mystère Des Voix Bulgares*, or the rocket-fuelled instrumentals of the wedding band movement, but even the most assiduous devotee will find plenty of surprises, even shocks, in this new collection. The 100 tracks on these four CDs, beautifully remastered from 78 rpm recordings dating from between 1911 and the early 1950s, represent the fruit of more than 40 years' collecting by American accordeonist Lauren Brody, who has brought to light an unexpected wealth of musical riches.

After the Second World War and the Communist takeover, official cultural life, including folk and popular music, was subject to strict constraints, couched in a language of national identity, purity and authenticity. What the extraordinarily broad range of music on these recordings demonstrates is that before music in Bulgaria came under that ideological lens, an almost promiscuous mixture of musical styles coexisted, sometimes even in a single performance.

A striking example is clarinettist Ramadan Lolov's *Orientaliski Kyuchek*, which combines a limping, irregular Bulgarian rhythm with a melody with a contour that we would today place as characteristic of Jewish klezmer, performed with a phrasing and sound reminiscent of the klarino of northern Greece. Add to this mix a central, semi-improvised solo performed in a strongly Turkish manner, and it seems clear that any ideals of purity and authenticity held little interest for these performers and their audiences. Like the other Balkan states, Bulgaria, a multi-ethnic country in any event, only achieved its present borders after a series of conflicts in the early years of the 20th century, with a national identity consequently being assigned to people who previously considered their membership of a common culture to be of greater importance than a label of nationality. The collection includes choirs with an almost Adriatic sound, vocal duets with sprightly violin and accordeon which have an entirely Serbian cast, and ensembles of plucked tamburas which could easily pass for Greek.

Nevertheless, the core of the collection is sturdily Bulgarian: echoes of Boris Karlov's masterful accordeon, Vulkana Stoyanova's bright, joyous vocals and the break-neck village virtuosity of Ivan Arseov's *Karlovska Ruchenitsa* can still be heard today in the country's massively popular pop-folk.

Amazingly, the earliest of these recordings dates from 1911, a year before the First Balkan War, reconstructing part of a wedding ceremony in a kind of miniature documentary. We hear the shouts of the wedding guests, ritual chanting, a bagpipe melody, the sounds of procession and a blessing, leading to a final outburst of dance. It is a moving glimpse into a distant world.

The liner notes reflect Brody's dedication: there are thumbnail sketches of prominent performers, notes on the record companies, and a brief overview of the changing attitudes to the music by academics and its audience. This will remain the definitive guide to these once-lost treasures for many years to come.

• <http://songofthecrookeddance.com> | www.jsprecs.com | Buy from Amazon.co.uk

Kim Burton

ALBERT KUVEZIN & YAT-KHA *Poets And Lighthouses*

Yat-Kha YAT005

The idea of Tuvan folk-rocker Albert Kuvezin and his band Yat-Kha has sometimes appealed more than the reality. Not always (they can put on a darkly blistering live show), but I haven't found myself taking to the growly voiced Mr K and co. as much as I think I ought to. The omens for this new album weren't looking too promising either: recorded on a remote Scottish island and including some musical settings of obscure Japanese poetry... doesn't exactly sound like the soundtrack to a fun Saturday night does it? And yet *Poets & Lighthouses* turns out to be a winner. Stark, shamanistic but strangely beautiful, it features a whole new Yat-Kha line-up, including 'Hardest Working Man in Roots-biz' Lu Edmonds, Billy Bragg's bassist Simon Edwards, clarinettist Sarah Homer and multi-instrumentalist Giles Perring (who also produced the recording at his studio on the Isle of Jura).



Photo: Hayden Voight
Albert Kuvezin

The sound is acoustic and varied, peaking with *The Way My*

Poetry Should Go, where the rumbling lead vocals, ghostly chorus and unusual instrumentation bring to mind a kind of Tuvan/Celtic Tom Waits. There are interludes that feature just Kuvezin growling, whispering and intoning, a duet with Scottish smallpiper Neil Cameron and a lovely closing track that offsets Kuvezin's ravaged voice with the sweet tones of Melanie Pappenheim. But it's the instrumental backing, sometimes soaring, sometimes muted, always imaginative, that really makes the album such an unexpected joy.

• www.yat-kha.com | [Buy from Amazon.co.uk](#)

Jamie Renton

AND THE REST... *The albums - good, adequate and plain bad - which didn't get the full-length treatment, contributed individually by a selection of our various reviewers cowering under the cloak of collective anonymity. For example...*

Huun Huur Tu: *Ancestors Call* (World Village 468107)

Atmospheric deep Tuvan roots from the best in the biz. Nothing they haven't done before, but all done very well. The only surprise is that it was recorded in sunny California, rather than the windswept steppes. www.worldvillagemusic.com - distributed by Harmonia Mundi.

Ralph Jordan: *Eloise* (no label ATT001)

17 prime tracks from one of the UK's finest exponents of the MacCann duet concertina. Wide repertoire (Bach to Tallroth, Auric to Schroer, *Springtime In Battersea* to *The Navy Lark*) and some pleasing stringed enhancements; the only drawback is its frustratingly low playback level. £13 from ralph.jordan@ntlworld.com

Gary Miller: *Reflections On War* (Whippet WPTCD22)

Oh crikey, the bloke who couldn't sing from the Whisky Priests has made a solo record. Lots of actually quite decent songs about soldiers and war - think *The Men They Couldn't Hang* - with good folk-rockish arrangements, but although his heart's in the right place, unfortunately his voice is still in several different keys. www.garymillersongs.com

Ceumar & Trio: *Live In Amsterdam* (own label 0 793573 596482)

Better than average Brazilian jazzish MPB pop samba, well sung and played, though no moulds are even slightly cracked. If you like this sort of thing, worth investigating. www.ceumar.net

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