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SOCALLED

Ghettoblaster Label Bleu/ Bleu Electric LBLC 4011

GEOFF BERNER

The Wedding Dance Of The Widow Bride
Jericho Beach Music JBM 0701

A pair of Canadians drawing on their Eastern European Jewish heritage, beyond that, they're as different as chalk and chopped liver. Josh Dolgin a.k.a. SoCalled is a DJ/producer/multi-instrumentalist who for his first solo album proper (following notable work with David Krakauer and Sophie Solomon) has assembled a large and motley cast of collaborators: everyone from venerable Jewish thespian Theodore Bikel to local rappers and gospel singers, it's a 'kitchen sink' sort of an album that veers between klezmer-fuelled hip-hop, solo piano, sexy Balkan dance beats and the odd bit of spoken word (most notably, some impromptu studio chat from 90-something pianist Irving Fields). This could have easily ended up sounding a mess. But in the event is held together by Dolgin's obvious love for all of these contrasting elements and an overriding sense of fun.

www.label-bleu.com, distributed in the UK via New Note/ Pinnacle.

Accordeonist and singer Geoff Berner came out of punk, went through alt. country and has developed his own twisted and drunken take on klezmer. Like last year's *Whiskey Rabbi*, his new album is a trio recording with violinist Diona Davies and Wayne Adams on percussion, working to create rich trad-sounding melodies and thrashy improvisation over which Berner sings his dark words of wit, irony and the odd bit of unexpected tenderness. Weddings are a recurring theme, as on *Weep Bride Weep*, a cynical lament for a newlywed, warning her of the horrors of married life to come and *Song To Reconcile's* tale of in-laws at loggerheads ("The band requests that all killing be suspended for the duration of the event"). This is a short album, clocking in at under 38 minutes. No bad thing in the age of overstretched CD running times, although given that four-and-a-half minutes is taken up with an instrumental reprise of *Weep, Bride, Weep*, brevity is maybe pushed a little bit too far. Still, there are a fistful of fine, funny, thoughtful songs and that's better going than most. www.jerichobeach.com

Jamie Renton

MALTHOUSE PASSAGE

Over A Barrel Malt Records Malt01

A very cheerful-sounding ceilidh band who stand out from the plethora of same issuing CDs these days. Their sound cuts through thanks to the whistles and ex-fRoots staffer Lisa Warburton's hammer dulcimer while bass guitar and occasional bass clarinet do inventive stuff at the bottom end. Their tunes are drawn from all over the place: staples like *New Rigged Ship* and *Around The World For Sport*; numbers from Filarfolket, Gilles Chabenat and Blowzabella; and a couple by past and present band members. They vary the picture with songs on which guitarist Alan Courtney takes lead and two of which, *Seasons* and *Never Look Back*, he wrote. The rousing *Now Welcome Summer* on the other hand is from the up-and-coming Geoffrey Chaucer. You can check some of this yourself via four clips they've posted on MySpace.

The CD is available for £11.50 from Malt Records, 31 Victoria Park Road, Malvern, Worcs WR14 2JX or contact info@malthouse-passage.co.uk

Nick Beale

MAGGIE HOLLAND

Bones Weekend Beatnik WEBE 9044

Bones consists of twenty-four Maggie Holland performances that, strung together, become a necklace linking 1983 and 2007. That said, the sole 2007 performance is a newly recorded version of one of her own original songs. And that is *A Place Called England* – the song that originally came to notice in a flurry through her own Irregular album *Getting There* and June Tabor's *A Quiet Eye* and it winning 'Best Original Song' at the 1999 BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards. Here it's with Ian Anderson supporting on slide guitar and Zuzana Novak playing mbira.

Re-recording rather than licensing the song is an indication that this set of performances draws on her solo Rogue output. In other words, none of the material duplicates recordings released on Rhiannon or Irregular or her Rogue work with Hot Vultures, the English Country Blues Band or Tiger Moth, though she also contributed to Rogue's *Jali House Rock* (1989) project, the source of *Living A Lie* here. To tackle the discographical, solo, she recorded two vinyl releases for Weekend Beatnik's parent label, Rogue, namely, *Still Pause* (1983) and the six-track *A Short Cut* (1986), plus one CD, *Down To The Bone* (1993). (She calls this, "probably my most enjoyable recording experience so far" in her song descriptions that complement Colin Irwin's background notes.) *Bones* delves further, unearthing three tracks (Adrian May's *No Good At Love*, her own *Sandy Hill* and Randy Newman's *Old Man*) from a promotional cassette and the *Short Cut* outtake, *Look Up Look Up* from the National Theatre *Mysteries* trilogy.

When it comes to song selection and editorial prowess, *Bones* reveals a keen wit and her ability to wear various hearts (hers and trophy hearts) on her sleeve. She puts flesh on the bones of Robb Johnson's reflective *Overnight* and Peter Rowan's Earth Opera-era *Mad Lydia's Waltz* (with John Kirkpatrick on the main squeeze), goes full tilt at Tyron Dagg's *Locks & Bolts & Hinges* ("unfortunately I have yet to work out a way of performing it live without hyperventilating") and snarls out Bruce Cockburn's *If I Had A Rocket Launcher*. She even sings of stripping flesh off the bones on her own banjoistic *Black Crow* and *Perfumes Of Arabia*, a song of hers that Martin Carthy took a shine to. But what shines through this anthology is Maggie Holland's voice. She sings and speaks in the same earthy way.

Distributed via Proper.

Ken Hunt

INCHANTO

Città Sottili Radici Music RMR117

FRANCESCO BANCHINI

Baqshish Felmay FY8122

UNAVANTALUNA

Unavantaluna: Cumpagnia Ri Musica Sxiliana Finisterre FTCD36

InChanto are from the historic and culturally rich region of Tuscany. Its location at the centre of the Italian peninsula on the main route to Rome has made it a region where visitors of other countries, languages and cultures have long been welcomed. The 'Vulgare Italian', that came to be spoken there, formed a linguistic bridge that was understandable by the North and South of Italy and evolved into the modern Italian language.

InChanto appear to reflect the spirit and heritage of Tuscany. Their music is deeply rooted in various folk styles (Irish, Breton and



Maggie Holland

Occitanian), but also the elegance of the Italian Renaissance. The songs sound timeless and could easily be mistaken for being drawn from antiquity, but are all composed by members of the ensemble; Cesare Guasconi provides the music and Marco Del Bigo texts of various languages that suit the Tuscan setting. The instrumentation is drawn from classical and folk origins and includes hurdy-gurdy, tin whistle, clarinet, lute and Breton harp. The excellent musicianship combines the crisp precision of classical music and the warmth, universality and rhythms of traditional styles, which provides an ideal accompaniment for the graceful voice of Michela Scarpini. *Città Sottili* translates as 'Thin Cities' and this could be interpreted as the traveller's view of a city on the horizon. It could also describe the way that InChanto make the dividing line almost imperceptible between past and present, folk and classical music, and indigenous and external cultural influences.

www.inchanto.org

Francesco Banchini brings some rich experience to his solo project. He has been involved in numerous collaborations with Italian artists such as Lino Cannavacciuolo, Marcello, Colasurdo and Massimo Ferrante and has also worked with musicians of many nationalities and written scores for films. Banchini's main instrument is the clarinet, but on this album he also plays ney, flute, piano and sings. He is South Italian and was born in Pozzuoli in the province of Naples and he draws on the local traditional dance styles, such as *pizzica* and *tarantella* in his compositions, which are mostly original with the exception of a few traditional sources, but integrates these South Italian folk influences with Balkan and Arabic styles. He is supported by five able musicians: Davide Della Monica (guitar); Crisitano Della Monica (percussion); Francesco Migliaccio (accordeon); and Manuela Salinero (percussion). The Eastern European influences guarantee some interesting rhythmic patterns and this is emphasised by the input of the twin percussionists, although the album is not all in an uptempo vein and there are moments of lilting, reflection. Banchini intended this album to have a Mediterranean flavour that would convey the atmosphere of the streets, markets and cafés and to a great extent he has succeeded.

www.felmay.it; via Egea Music UK.

The subtitle of this album translates as 'Sicilian Music Ensemble'. That is a concise description of this band of four musicians with a common Sicilian background performing music in the tradition of the island and in the local language. They play old tarantellas, country dances and sea shanties along with

new compositions in a largely traditional manner, with ancient instrumentation such as the *zampogna* (bagpipe), *friscallettu* (traditional flute) and frame drum. The innovative arrangements incorporate some interesting ideas and extra percussion is provided by some varied guests (including the celebrated Neapolitan percussionist Nando Citarella) playing an international array of instruments. The overall result is an enjoyable album with enough modern ideas and non-indigenous influences to keep the music vital, without losing touch with its Sicilian roots.

www.finisterre.it

Michael Hingston

AMBROZIJN

10 – Live With String Orchestra
Homerecords.be 4446028

WOUTER VANDENABEELE

Chansons Sans Paroles Homerecords.be
4446026

This is a very different, quite surprising album from Ambrozijn but it is also very interesting and welcome. It is produced to mark the 10th anniversary of the band and sees them reworking the songs that they have become most associated with over these years, often in startlingly changed arrangements and sung by different guest vocalists – and they decided to record it live in concert. Clearly, this was a bold and ambitious move and it could have gone very wrong. But it didn't! In almost every case the new version heard here is more interesting than the original and performed in ways that are more confident and mature than the originals; songs like *Sometimes It's Gold* and *Le Cyprés* show different facets from the treatment that they get here. The five guest singers see to this, particularly the cool and convincing voice of Sylvie Berger. There is also a string orchestra but the arrangements, mainly by Wouter Vandabeele, are used sparingly and effectively. His own playing and the diatonic accordion of Wim Claeys also show that considerable thought and effort have gone into these new versions. If there is a criticism, then it would be that their own vocalist, Tom Theuns, sounds rather more ethereal than he does on earlier recordings, but that may just be down to his microphone during this concert.

We get a chance to hear Wouter's fiddle in a very different context on his solo album recorded with a small group of friends with the accordionist Anne Niepold making the most significant contribution. He plays a selection of his compositions and these reflect his wide-reaching experience in playing with musicians from other cultures and traditions. Those who have heard his work with the band Olla Vogala will get much more of an idea about this album than anything that he has done with Ambrozijn.

www.homerecords.be; www.cdroots.com

Vic Smith

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Folk Rising Proper FOLK04

In the age of the iPod and MP3, when making up your own mix-collections has practically become a national sport, you wonder if there's a future for compilation albums. Fair play to Proper then for an album that boldly gives a vote of confidence not only to the compilation format, but also the vast array of young talent bursting out of the blocks at the mo. Last year's 'nu-folk' hoo-ha may have been a smokescreen, a convenient, briefly fashionable pigeon-hole for anyone too quirky or too soppy to be accepted by the rock world, but this selection is a much better

representation of the real new generation.

It starts off safely enough with a couple of proven tracks – The Devil's Interval's *Studying Economy* and Tim Van Eyken/Nancy Kerr's *Gypsy Maid* while Jackie Oates's *Lavender's Blue* and Mawkin's *Banks Of Dee* are also reasonably familiar – but the best compilations are those that introduce you to something different. In this respect John Smith's live recording of *Axe Mountain*, part John Martyn and part Tom Waits, is the most interesting. A song about a murderer delivered in a voice of worn gruffness supplies the sort of subversive anti-hero attitude you'd like to associate with anything labelled 'rising folk'.

Elsewhere it's a motley assortment – the vibrant Irish band Teada, the magnificent young Scots fiddle player and BBC Young Folk Award winner Lauren MacColl, the impudent young band Kerfuffle, clarsach player Rachel Hair, genteel singer-songwriter Jenna, Welsh harpist Gwenan Gibbard and Teesside duo Megson giving it a good blast of Corrs-esque pop folk.

It combs so many styles it can't possibly please everyone, but as an introductory showcase to the world at large, it beats another barrage of *Streets Of London* and *Black Velvet Bands*.

www.proper-records.co.uk

Colin Irwin

K'NAAN

The Dusty Foot On The Road Wrasse
Records WRASS 195

It takes a special talent (or a lot of hype!) to be honoured at the Awards For World Music before even having an official UK album release, but that's exactly what happened to best newcomer K'Naan this year. The evidence for that success is laid out on this live album recorded in various locations in North America, Africa and Europe, as the Somali refugee rapper took his studio album *The Dusty Foot Philosopher* on the road in stripped-down form (mostly just acoustic guitar and minimal percussion backing), utilising his considerable on-stage energy and charm to give a rootsier, more gritty edge to the songs.

This being a live album (with the attendant loss of subtlety), the highlights are songs that rely more on rhythm than melody, such as *Afro-centric* openers *Wash it Down* and *The African Way*, new song *By The End Of The Day* and the lightning-fast, funky *Soobalax*. K'Naan's voice is raw, deeper than the unconvincing Eminem impersonation that blights much of *Philosopher* (where there was far too much Slim Shady from the slim Somali) and the songs crackle and fizz with the vigour of a man compelled to tell the story of his trouble-and-grief-stricken time in Mogadishu. And tell it he does, with humour and defiance – the key line from his most cathartic song *Smile*, "never let them see you down/ smile while you're bleeding", something of a personal credo – his acerbic wit at its most cutting when contrasting his experience of real-world violence with the macho posturing of mainstream hip-hop artists like 50 Cent.

Despite that, a recent song posted on K'Naan's website seems to indicate that the Toronto-based rapper is keen to embrace mainstream hip-hop, and indeed US hip-hop star Mos Def is a guest on *The Dusty Foot On The Road*. This release, then, might well be a coda to K'Naan's period of dusty foot, howl-got-here philosophy, which would be a pity, because surely there's plenty more mileage in this roots-based rap from this most singular of talents.

www.wrasserrecords.com

www.thedustyfoot.com

Con Murphy

RICCARDO TESI

Riccardo Tesi Cinq Planètes CP09381

Riccardo Tesi is not sure what inspired him to ditch his psychology degree at the age of 22 and take up the diatonic accordion, but we are all rather glad that he did. In the intervening thirty years, Tesi has been involved in various ensembles and collaborations, both within Italy and internationally, and has produced some wonderful music and brought the instrument to a wider audience. This album has a reflective air and looks back over Tesi's long and successful career and is a project of new recordings of Tesi playing alone (apart from the traditional tune *Sestrina*, where Tesi overdubs a solo). There are a few new tunes, but most of the tracks are re-recordings of material drawn from different points in his career.

The album amply demonstrates the diverse stylistic variety of his work. *Fulmine* is one of his first compositions and is from a period in the early 1980s when Tesi was interested in experimenting with asymmetric rhythms; *Tevakh* was commissioned for the Parthenay Festival and combines elements of the musical styles of Sardinia and Madagascar; *Processione* was originally composed for a bagpipe ensemble; *Turkese* was written for the stagemusical *Leldorado*; and *Mazurka Del Nonno* was originally recorded for the film *Liscio*. Tesi's fertile imagination inspires him to all kinds of experimentation. *Batticuore* is written for the left hand and tremolo; the funky *Marock* employs the left-hand and feet in a percussive role; and *Brughiere* includes elements of Irish folk and the music of the Brazilian Nordeste and has a nagging rhythmic feel that is reminiscent of Simon Jeffes's *Music For A Found Harmonium*.

It is not often that a performer exposes their technique and repertoire in quite such a naked manner and the technical proficiency on display serves as an excellent masterclass for accordionists. But these are far from just technical exercises and the album is also enjoyable for the variety and sheer musicality of these breathtaking performances. This is a bold summing-up of a career by a musician who is still very much on top of his game.

www.cinqplanetes.com, in the UK via
Discovery: www.discovery-records.com

Michael Hingston

K'Naan

