

Europe

brisk drumming and Ewan Robertson's choppy guitar turn it into something akin to flamenco. 'No Ro Bhobag an Dram' usually rattles along, but Robertson slows it right down to reveal the beauty of the melody, which is complemented by the subtle interaction of her harp with the piano playing of James Ross.

Julian May

Titi Robin Kali Sultana

Naïve WN 145166

Mid Price (2 CDs; 87 mins)

★★★★

Arabian Gypsy concept album



Since his *Gitans* album in 1993, French guitarist and composer Thierry 'Titi' Robin has forged a very individual path as a fine instrumentalist on *oud* (Arabic lute) and guitar-like instruments, and as a collaborator, notably with Gypsy musicians. The title of this album, *Kali Sultana* (Black Queen) once again suggests a Gypsy connection, as well as conjuring up images of the fearsome Hindu goddess Kali. It's a sustained work of 87 minutes divided into seven movements with a prelude, postlude and three interludes, hinting at symphonic aspirations.

The sonorous opening prelude, 'Sable' (Sand), on *oud*, suggests the Near Eastern world from which much of the inspiration comes and shows the quality of Robin's playing, setting the predominantly reflective pace. He's joined by regular collaborators Renaud Pion on clarinet and sax, Zé Luis Nascimento on percussion, Francis Varis on accordion, Kalou Stalin on bass and, on the second disc, the raw and powerful vocals of his daughter, Maria



French musical explorer Titi Robin

Robin. The quasi-mystical titles suggest some personal narratives behind the music – the fourth movement implies a Sufi theme, with dances dedicated to Khusrau (the originator of *qawwali* in Delhi), Machrab (a Sufi poet from Uzbekistan), and Emre (perhaps Yunus Emre, one of Turkey's great Sufi poets) – but there are few clues. The first disc is slow going, although the uptempo 'Afghani de Casa' with its *saz*-like Lebanese *buzuq* and Afghan rhythms is a welcome injection of energy. The stand-out track of the album is the catchy and ebullient 'Rumba Sultana' on disc two, a splendid conclusion before the final postlude takes us back into the desert.

Simon Broughton

Griselda Sanderson Harpaphonics

Waulk Music WAULK3

Full Price (54 mins)

★★★★

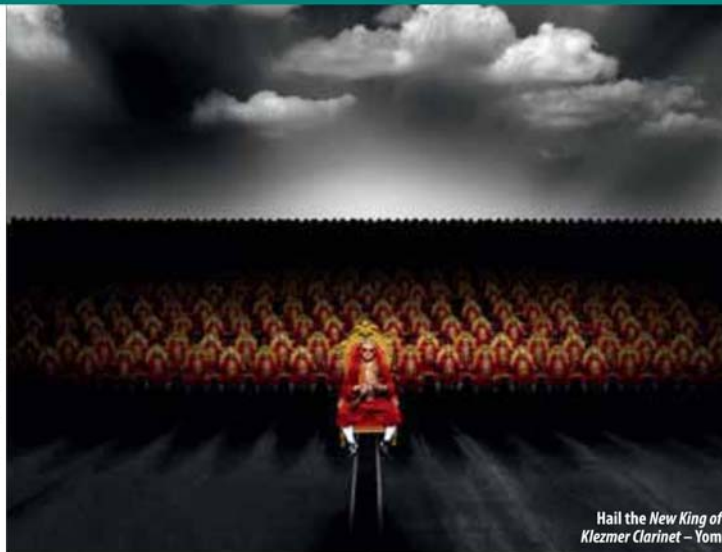
Dreams, drones and Swedish fiddles



The album opens with a beautiful solo on the Swedish *nyckelharpa*, which is a hybrid of hurdy-gurdy and fiddle with a history that goes back at least to the 14th century. It looks like something dreamt up by a medieval-period HR Giger, had he been interested in musical instrument design. By the mid-20th century, the instrument had fallen on hard times, but the post-war folk revival saw an upturn in its use, by Swedish bands such as Dram. Now it has gone international, with Griselda Sanderson's *Harpaphonics* sounding like a musical love letter to the instrument by one in thrall to its powerful charms.

A Scottish musician and sound installation artist, Sanderson acquired her *nyckelharpa* in 2005, and set about composing and recording these pieces two years later, with accordionist Steve Turner, James Dumbelton on *bodhrán* and guitar, and the African percussion of Sam Yeboah. The mix of Celtic and African rhythms on the likes of 'Spring Storm' feels like a less effective employment of the instrument's rich sound possibilities than the more solo-accented pieces such as 'In Thunder', which matches the *nyckelharpa* with Hammond organ, or the Swedish traditional gift-giving song 'Skanklat for Thursa'.

The dreamy ensemble sound of 'Irimé' is outstanding. Via some lessons from Juldeh Camara on the *ritti*, enters the rich interlocking tones of 'Alpha', developed



Hail the New King of Klezmer Clarinet – Yom

from an end-of-party jam session. The best pieces profit from extending into improvised territory, and on the likes of the closing 'Treadlightly March', *Harpaphonics* pulls all the right strings.

Tim Cumming

Yom New King of Klezmer Clarinet

Buda Musique 860169

Full Price (52 mins)

★★★★

If not king, then certainly heir apparent



The clarinet is not a 'Jewish instrument', but one could be forgiven for thinking that it is. Clarinet is at the frontline in most modern klezmer groups, with many brilliant practitioners who seemingly make it laugh, cry, and *kvetch* (to whine or complain in Yiddish). And it is probably no coincidence that several of the greatest jazz clarinetists have been Jewish.

So for France-based musician Yom to crown himself the 'New King of Klezmer Clarinet'...

well, let's just say he's got a heck of a lot to prove.

Especially since this release is a tribute to Naftule Brandwein, the flamboyantly inventive virtuoso of klezmer clarinet whose recordings

between the mid-1920s and 1941 are genre classics, savouring of Greek, Turkish, Roma and Jewish influences. All bar three of the 14 tracks on Yom's disc are Brandwein compositions, while another is by Brandwein's contemporary Dave Tarras. Everything is arranged by Yom, while his ensemble comprises Denis Cuniot (piano), Benoît Giffard (tuba and trombone) and

Alexandre Giffard on *tapan* percussion. Aside from Cuniot's occasional Keith Jarrett-esque excursions, these musicians mainly function as simpatico accompanists, discreetly generating the harmonic undertow beneath the leader's rippling lines.

So, all hail the new king of klezmer clarinet? Certainly Yom is a master, and up there with the best. His technique and control are absolutely dazzling right across the clarinet's range, and thankfully, like Brandwein, that virtuosity is harnessed to produce music that is fresh and aflo with ideas, pushing the generic perimeters without straying into avant-klez. It's a *tour de force*.

Mike Gerber

Tükrös Zenekar Our Transylvanian Heath

FolkEuropa FECD040

Full Price (67 mins)

★★★★

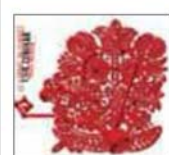
**Csik Zenekar
If The Train Has Started**

Fono FA2432

Full Price (44 mins)

★★★★

Blasting the heath



The Transylvanian heath in the title of the Tükrös disc is the area the Hungarians call Mezőség, north-east of the city of Cluj in the heart of Transylvania, Romania. All the music here comes from that area and is 'hand-picked from the repertoires of the village Gypsy bands', many of whom the Tükrös musicians have played with. The disc opens with >>

It is probably no coincidence that several of the greatest jazz clarinetists have been Jewish

Yom

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church bells – presumably from the village of Palatka – preceding wedding songs and dancing from the village where the Palatka band were (and still are) one of the best in the region. Other music here derives from Szék (another essential village for Transylvanian music), Magyarszovát, Bonchida and other villages.

What makes *táncház* (dancehouse) bands like Tükrös so good is the spring in the dance that they bring to their music, and the authentic bite of bow on strings. Tükrös are a five-piece band with two fiddles, two kontra violas playing chords, *cimbalom* on the Bonchida tracks, and a sawing bass – although it would have been better to have that louder in the mix. There are lovely vocals from Éva Korpás, particularly the ‘Soldiers’ Farewell Song’ from Visa. The album was recorded outdoors and the natural sounds of birds and crickets are beautiful. It’s one of the best discs of traditional Hungarian music I’ve heard in a long time.

Led by singer and fiddle player János Csík (pronounced Cheek), Csík Zenekar arrange songs and tunes from different parts of Hungary and Transylvania for a varied ensemble of strings, cimbalom, guitar and guests on *tambura*, *koboz* (lute) and sax. A lot of it is in the *romungro* style of restaurant bands – something that the Hungarian folk police look down on – which used to have a popular following and now seems to be enjoying a revival. Other tracks such as the ‘Gyimes Héjza’ with imaginative solo sax, and songs from Kiskunhalas with effective solo tambura, bring a refreshing new sound to the music. Marianna Majorosi is a warm vocalist too, particularly on the haunting song ‘It is Going By’. If you want to hear great traditional Transylvanian music, try Tükrös, but if you know the trad stuff and want a new, but respectful take on Hungarian folk, try Csík.

Simon Broughton

Uxía Eterno Navegar

World Village WV 498024
Full Price (65 mins)

★★★★

Rhythms and songs for the Atlantic waves



There’s so much to say about this pretty, magical disc by Galician singer Uxía. Its guiding theme is the Atlantic ocean and its voyagers, linking Galicia to Cape Verde, the Azores and Brazil. And, somehow, recording in the Vale de Lobo studio near Sintra in the Azores with Paulo Borges as producer, Uxía has captured all the seductive musical styles of those places in her songs. The album’s like a dream that takes place in an open-air nightclub facing the sea: it’s intimate, nuanced, subtle and minimalist – yet spacious, with nothing precious about it. The musical core is a trio, with Borges playing cool piano and accordion, Marco Santos on drums and percussion and Yuri Daniel on double bass. Other superb musicians guest: Ruben Santos adds in dashes of trombone, Davide Zaccaria contributes cello, while singer-guitarist Manecas Costa brings gorgeously understated guitar.

The feel for each song is subtly different: from the tango inflections of ‘Sen Ti’ to the sinuous ‘Rumores de Falúas’, the flow is spot on. Uxía has a serenading voice that dances and caresses simultaneously, even when singing upbeat rhythms, as on the swinging ‘Berenguela’. She’s joined by the equally fine voice of Zeca Medeiros for the traditional Azorean song ‘A Lira’, and by Sara Tavares and Júlio Pereira for the yearning version of ‘As Nosas Cores’ that closes the album, for which Pereira plays all the accompaniment on mandolin, guitar and synthesizers, with slightly eerie effects that pull it back from sentimentality. This is a beautifully crafted piece of work: don’t overlook it.

Jan Fairley



TOP OF THE WORLD ALBUM



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Vicky Cristina Barcelona OST

Telarc CD 85001
Mid Price (42 mins)

★
More Barcelona in the title than on the album...



With rare exceptions – Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon*, various Fellinis and Scorseses – the phrase ‘*motion picture soundtrack*’ on a CD may as well be a health warning. This one is not an exception. Whatever

moved Woody Allen to set a film in Barcelona, apart from the blindingly obvious architecture, he clearly hadn’t heard any of the city’s rich and distinctive music. “I wanted Spanish music but I didn’t know any,” the director has commented, and the result is a lazy travelogue of ancient flamenco-lite chestnuts by Paco de Lucía and the resident US soundalike Juan Serrano, supplemented by some dumbed-down classical extracts and bits of Gypsy swing. Not Barcelona’s unique Gypsy *rumba*, that is, but Django Reinhardt tributes – one of them by a New York-based guitarist, to add insult to injury. The two items vaguely representative of young *mestizo* Barcelona include a pleasant but forgettable ditty named, fortuitously for

its authors, ‘Barcelona’, by an Italian-Scandinavian-Spanish group called Giulia y los Tellarini. The group apparently left a copy at Allen’s hotel on spec: such was the rigour of his research that Allen instantly made it the film’s main title theme. If you suddenly feel inexplicably determined to buy a film soundtrack, buy anything – buy *Mamma Mia!* – in preference to this.

Philip Sweeney ●



Penélope Cruz in a scene from the film, out February 6

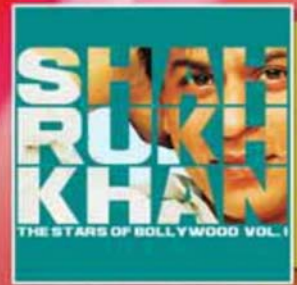
WHY DIGITAL?
WHY NOT?



Asha Bhosle
iAsha - 15 essential songs



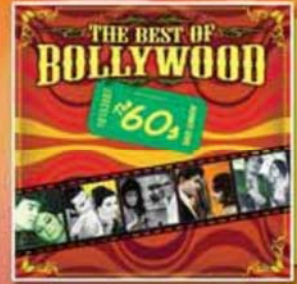
Manna Dey
iManna - 15 essential songs



Shubrukh Khan
The Stars of Bollywood - Vol. 1



Meena Kumari
The Stars of Bollywood - Vol. 4



The Best of Bollywood
The 60s



The Best of Bollywood
The 80s

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