



**TOP
OF THE
WORLD**
TRACK 5

Belem & the MeKanics

Igloo Records (57 mins)



A band of mechanical marvels: café music from automatons



Belem are a duo, consisting of diatonic accordionist Didier Laloy and cellist Kathy

Adam. Laloy met Walter Hus, who provides The MeKanics – not a backing band, but an extraordinary assemblage of cables, pipes, metallic and wooden blades controlled by a computer. This creates, autonomously and acoustically, the sounds of an unusual 15-piece orchestra. This madcap apparatus is the 21st-century descendant of the mechanical organs that, like pianolas, automatically played music from sheets of punched card. Such instruments, made by the Decap company, were very popular in the cafés of Belgium in the middle of the last century. ‘Decap and Walter Hus worked for years,’

explains Laloy, ‘to bring the breath of the flautist, the flexibility of the drummer and the virtuosity of the most virtuoso of Chinese musicians to mechanized instruments.’ The music of Belem & The MeKanics is, as you might expect, splendidly eccentric, conjuring the fairground, the cabaret, *chanson* and early cinema. ‘L’Homme au Chapeau’ develops into a Chaplinesque chase, while ‘Lego’s Tragedy’ uses the uniquely elegiac quality of the button accordion, the sonorous depths of the cello and the musical whirlpool of Hus’ machine. ‘Tu Cours Encore’, which lasts more than eight minutes, is symphonic; the interplay of human and mechanical musicians intriguing and unnerving. This music is theatrical, enthralling, sometimes alarming, and very European.

JULIAN MAY

TRACK TO TRY *L’Homme au Chapeau*

Cara Dillon Wanderer

Charcoal Records (43 mins)

★★★★★

Quiet songs of separation, emigration and lost love



Cara Dillon's seventh album draws from the music of Ulster (and broader song traditions) to fashion a lyrical, intimately sung set of songs that embrace themes of emigration and the search for love.

The very well-known Anne Briggs song, 'Blackwater Side', is one such song of desire, spilling over into despair. It's quiet, soft and lyrical and that's the tone of the album throughout, typified by the lyrical beauties of 'The Banks of the Foyle', with the guitars of Sam Lakeman and John Smith to the fore. Further in, Lakeman's piano lays down the structure of 'Sailor Boy', sung with Kris Drever and supported by Niall Murphy's fiddle. On 'The Faughan Side', it's just Dillon's bare voice and Lakeman's piano, opening up the space through which this lovely, heartbreaking ballad of migration can spread and grow. These are songs that suit Dillon's voice well, and when Niall Murphy's fiddle joins with Lakeman's piano on 'The Banks of the Bann', the story of love thwarted by the divisions of social standing is as pained and careworn as it could be.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *The Banks of the Bann*

Bella Hardy Hey Sammy

Now Records (42 mins)

★★★★★

Derby girl goes globetrotting



Hardy's debut album, *Night Visiting*, appeared ten years ago, and this is her seventh solo release. She has expanded her sound palette and lyrical focus yet again on a set of 11 songs written in Nashville, where she spent part of her time as a ranch hand, and on trips to Yunnan in south-west China. It's about as far as you can get from her roots in Edale, Derbyshire, where she started out as a self-taught fiddler and singer at the age of 13.

As is her wont, there are diverse musical styles here, unified by the key ingredients of absorbing lyrics, warm and emotive vocals and varied instrumentation. There's a spiky,

syncopated beat to 'Learning to Let Go', while 'Queen of Carter's Bar', written with Peter Groenwald and Scottish pianist Tom Gibbs, is a vivid and atmospheric narrative. The title-track reflects on contemporary racial divides from a close, intimate perspective, while 'You Don't Owe the World Pretty' is a feminist champion of a song. The longest track, the closing 'Stars', is the album's most haunting and beautiful moment; the ethereal textures of 'In My Dreams' being the other highlight.

TIM CUMMING

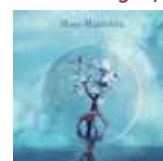
TRACK TO TRY *Stars*

Redi Hasa & Maria Mazzotta Novilunio

Ponderosa (37 mins)

★★★★★

Italian singer meets Albanian cellist: insightful modern folk



Well known as vocalist of the Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino, Maria Mazzotta here joins

forces once again with Albanian cellist Redi Hasa for a new album. It is music that sounds convincingly modern while remaining deeply rooted in tradition; geographically it moves in a wide arc, including not only the Italian and Albanian sides of the Adriatic sea but several points east and south thanks to master Iranian percussionist Bijan Chemirani and Mehdi Nassouli, a Moroccan singer. Mazzotta sounds at ease in all the languages she sings in, including Italian, Apulian dialect, French and Albanian. She has an intense expressive power, explosive in 'Cu Ti Lu Dissi' by Otello Profazio and Rosa Balistreri.

Virtuoso cellist Hasa, whose high-profile collaborations include Ludovico Einaudi and Robert Plant, provides effective accompaniment to the voice throughout, as well as a short meditative solo in 'Woodroom'. The most successful tunes are the Albanian traditional '25 Trecce', arranged for voice, cello and percussion, and the closing 'Libro d'Amore'. The latter is a monumental variation on classic *pizzica* rhythms, with traditional verses put to new melodies by Mazzotta; she accompanies herself on tambourine against a stark background of electronically modified, layered cello, uneasily but successfully bridging tradition and contemporaneity.

FRANCESCO MARTINELLI

TRACK TO TRY *Libro d'Amore*

Martin Hayes Quartet The Blue Room

251 Records (51 mins)

★★★★★

Irish fiddler goes chamber folk



A fiddler with a characteristically delicate touch, Martin Hayes has won worldwide respect for his unique take on Irish traditional music. He is perhaps the Irish trad equivalent of Jan Garbarek, often taking tunes at a stately pace and experimenting with arrangements, while never losing sight of the fundamentals that underpin jigs, reels and hornpipes. His quartet features his long-term accompanist Dennis Cahill on guitar, alongside Liz Knowles (*hardanger d'amore*) and Doug Wieselman (bass clarinet). The latter is a New York-based composer, arranger and musician, and the gentle huffing of his clarinet is one delightful aspect of this album.

The album has a ruminative, ponderous tone throughout, at times reminiscent of the Michael Nyman Band, at times sounding like the charming soundtrack to an arty children's animation. It might arguably be more enjoyable to listeners unfamiliar with the Irish tunes that are the source material: some of them don't quite seem to warrant the pensive *rubato* treatment Hayes gives them, while the teasing glimpse he gives us of his more 'standard' Irish playing at the start of 'The Humours of Scariff' left me wishing he'd continue. That said, it's never less than an interesting listen, and Hayes does pick up the tempo, to toe-tapping effect, on 'Tommy Peoples' Reel' and the baroque-sounding 'Paddy Fahy's Reel'.

MATT MILTON

TRACK TO TRY *Tommy Peoples' Reel*

I Fratelli Tarzanelli Vivat Vivere

Appel Records (47 mins)

★★★★★

Swaggering bohemian tunes



Pablo Golder (diatonic accordion) and Baltazar Montanaro (baritone violin)

have been playing together for a decade, touring and recording three albums. Golder is interested in the traditions of both his Italian birthplace and his Belgian home, while Montanaro's heritage is a blend of

Hungarian and French (Occitan). The resultant melody *mélange* pulls from these roots, along with a peppering of original material. Montanaro also sings on a few of the tunes.

The results are spirited and flamboyant, displaying joyfulness and melancholy in turn, the pair thinking like a full chamber ensemble. Golder spends half his time fingering wandering bass lines, while flitting around with his other hand in the high-note realms. 'Griffon' has sparse violin flecks with trilling accordion, before 'La Guerre Des Boules' kicks in, with its coruscating sawing and spidery bass patterns. Whenever the spirits droop, there's usually a curative celebration ahead. A Gypsy-ish vocal livens up 'Fabiola', with its suitably dervish violin solo, then 'Emile' makes for a much gentler trapeise. Golder shapes clipped, pumping phrases, while Montanaro's violin dances around nimbly. 'Alice', too, has a Gypsy strut to it, with finely poised moves before Montanaro sweeps in with a romantic café bar vocal.

MARTIN LONGLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Alice*

Peter Knight's Gigsparner The Wife of Urban Law

Peter Knight's Gigsparner (51 mins)

★★★★★

Technique meets texture



This splendid set from fiddler Peter Knight, with guitarist Roger Flack and percussionist Sacha

Trochet, oozes confidence from the start, but it's worth focusing on two highlights. 'Green Gravel' and 'Lament for the Wife of Urban Law' are notable for contrasting and complementing one another perfectly. The former derives from a traditional children's circle game around which Knight fits a tight fiddle refrain, while Trochet adds beats and Flack embellishes with guitar textures. This version came from singer Fay Hield, but the cyclical playing, along with repetitive lyrics create an original and hypnotic song.

'Urban Law', Knight's improvised-sounding solo instrumental, counters that tune by refusing to take a simple form; instead it shifts and changes its mood from gentle and quiet to jarring and spiky, reminiscent of something from a Nick Cave and Warren Ellis soundtrack. Its stark minimalism boldly upends the innocence of the previous song, throwing a beautiful



Janek Mazur

Kapela Maliszów Wiejski Dżez

Unzipped Fly Records (57 mins)

★★★★★

Berserk mazurkas and wonky polkas: odd Carpathian magic



The Malisz family hail from Męcina Mała, a small village in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains near the Slovakian border. They're the *2Fast 2Furious* crew of wild Polish traditional songs and tunes, and this is a welcome follow-up to 2015's *Mazurki Niepojęte* (Inconceivable Mazurkas, a Top of the World in #112).

The patriarch, Jan, builds violins, hurdy-gurdys, *nyckelharpas*, pipes and more in his workshop, plays cello, hurdy-gurdy and accordion, and his children Zuzanna and Kacper play the *baraban* (drum) and fiddle respectively – both instruments having been in the Malisz family for generations. Kacper's furiously emotional mastery of the fiddle is wondrous throughout,

and both Jan's accordion and Zuzanna's voice excel, the latter's bare naked voice on the opening track, 'Zawiślóczek', penetrating right through the song's strange, concentrated heart.

Wiejski Dżez (Village Jazz) is a music rooted in vanishing traditions, reconnecting the here-and-now with the going, going, gone. It's the fire of their improvisations that makes this music of tradition as relevant and contemporary as a broadband connection. *Wiejski Dżez* is their response against the sprawl of mass culture over smaller, local cultures. By reaching into the past with the vitality of the present, the Malisz family deliver another powerful and rich set.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Zawiślóczek*

curveball. These tracks exemplify the imaginative, questing spirit that runs right through this striking album.

GLENN KIMPTON

TRACK TO TRY *Lament for the Wife of Urban Law*

Kries Selo Na Okuke / Village Tracks

Riverboat Records (35 mins)

★★★★★

Powerful Croatian folk-rock



The band name (pronounced Kree-ess) means 'Bonfire' in old Croatian dialect, but Kries certainly aren't incinerating the old folk songbooks. These tunes are all, believe it or not, traditional, though they have been recalibrated into the hardest folk

rock. The Kries instrumentation has bagpipes, flutes, *lijerica* (a bowed lute/fiddle hybrid) and percussion to the fore, but not without an ever-present bolstering by electric guitar, bass and drumkit. It's been eight years since their last album, so there is much pent-up energy to release in the Dubrovnik studio.

The chief Kries mode is full-thrust, with booming drums, pulsing bass and a lusty male chorus, led by founding lead singer Mojmir Novaković, he of the deeply theatrical bull-roar. 'Sestrica Pavlova' is about the only song that calms into a softer side, stripped down with sensuous wooden flute, and possessing a filmic drama. Otherwise, the time signatures veer from tricky skipping to full-on romping. The jerking guitar riff and bagpipe bursts of 'Skoči Kolo' are markedly unusual, but it's Novaković's

striking vocals that really provide the band with a powerful, mythic-sounding resonance.

MARTIN LONGLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Skoči Kolo*

Mames Babegenush Mames Babegenush With Strings

Galileo Records (46 mins)

★★★★★

A klezmer outfit and a jazzy string quartet truly swing



This fifth helping of Babegenush is as joyous, sorrowful and deftly produced as the group's previous albums, and this time it comes with a side serving of strings. This truly is high-end klezmer, which accurately locates the beating heart of the

tradition while simultaneously transcending it with inflections from other genres. The instrumentation of the Danish ensemble combines the usual suspects of clarinet, upright bass and accordion with the less predictable flugelhorn, sax and drums. The result is a sound that conjures up the old scene of *klezmerim*; learning whatever instruments were available to them in the *shetels* yet melding their individual voices into a life-affirming whole.

That said, while the band have one foot firmly in the past, the other is thrust fervently into the future. The string quartet accompanying them here provide the perfect voicings for close jazz harmonies and bolster the horn improvisations on tracks such as 'Mountain Dance' to bring the wild music of Eastern Europe and the sounds of the New York cellar bar ever closer together. Party tune 'Tornado Alabastru' and the thoughtful 'View from a Drifting Room' are just two notable points on an invigorating journey packed with enjoyable diversions to a carousing close.

TOM NEWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Mountain Dance*

Melrose Quartet Dominion

Melrose Quartet (49 mins)

★★★★★

Everybody needs folk neighbours



This quartet is the combination of two duos – Nancy Kerr and James Fagan with Richard and Jess Arrowsmith –

who came together when they became neighbours on Melrose Road, Sheffield; all are seasoned artists on the English folk scene. Joy in music-making bursts out of the speakers on *Dominion*, their second album together. A mix of songs both traditional and new, along with instrumental pieces on fiddles, melodeon and guitars, this set is firmly rooted in English tradition but roams across centuries in style and subject matter. What makes the Melrose Quartet extraordinary, though, is their ensemble singing. Several tracks are a *capella* (or very nearly) and the virtuosity and musicianship in these four voices combined is something to behold. Paul Davenport's 'Davy Cross', a tale of a fisherman lost at sea, brings a lump to the throat when told by these clear and bell-like voices.

Nancy Kerr has to be one of the finest songwriters in English folk, as demonstrated on just two memorable ▶

pieces of melody and lyricism: 'Hand Me Down' and 'Rise No More'. There's plenty more to enjoy here; the instrumental dances are full of vim and vigour and the accompanying booklet, with all the lyrics and short explanations about each piece, is the cherry on top of an excellent record.

TIM WOODALL

TRACK TO TRY *Davy Cross*

Kirsty Merryn
She & I

Kirstymerryn.com (29 mins)

★★★★★

Saluting strong iconic women



Following in the footsteps of the likes of Seth Lakeman and Phillip Henry & Hannah Martin,

Kirsty Merryn is another young folk musician to benefit from the mentoring of Steve Knightley (Show of Hands). This debut album highlights her clear voice and delicate piano playing on a distilled collection of eight original songs that run to a slight half hour. There is confidence in the brevity, however, and also in the way Merryn threads the album through with the concept of strong women – from icons such as Emma Hamilton and the Biblical Delilah (note that the track 'Delilah and Samson' puts Delilah first) to lesser known heroines such as Grace Darling, the saviour of shipwrecked sailors, and Victorian spiritualist Georgina Houghton.

With production and musical accompaniment from prolific producer Gerry Diver, the tracks have a sparse, experimental and contemporary edge, full of off-beats and echo chambers, while Merryn's vocals are complemented by guest appearances from Knightley and the young Kent singer Luke Jackson.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Forfarshire*

O'Hooley & Tidow
WinterFolk

No Masters (45 mins)

★★★★★

Tidings of (dis)comfort and joy



Christmas albums are like buses – you wait for ages then a whole fleet comes along. Yet few Yuletide sets will match O'Hooley and Tidow's *WinterFolk*. Its mix of original, contemporary and traditional winter songs probes the darker side of the

Yule season – via themes of poverty, religion, displacement, migration and loneliness, domestic violence (in their original song 'One More Xmas') and even global warming (in the glacial love song that is 'The Last Polar Bear'). Steve Ashley's seasonal classic 'Fire & Wine' opens, and there are songs too from Richard Thompson and the immortal 'Fairytale of New York'. The duo draw from their previous works, including 'Whitethorn' and the beautiful 'Wexford Lullaby' from Jackie Oates' *Lullabies* album.

'Coventry Carol' is a one-take solo piano piece that's perfect for the still of a Christmas night, while the new 'Winter Folk Carol' proves to work fine a *capella*, with the duo in fine voice. All you can say is 'Hallelujah!'

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Whitethorn*

Daniel Pereira Cristo
Cavaquinho Cantado

Tradisom/Associação Cultural Museu Cavaquinho (44 mins)

★★★★★

This little uke's time to shine



The *cavaquinho* is an ancestor of the ukulele and has a long-standing tradition in Portuguese music, particularly in the northern region of Minho. It travelled to Brazil, where it also became a regular in popular music. Apart from Júlio Pereira's exemplary work, it's not an instrument that usually gets put under the spotlight in Portugal any more. It plays a pivotal role in a series of traditional Portuguese song forms, but it remains

a team player rather than a star. But the young Daniel Pereira has picked it up and dedicated a whole record to it.

Born in Braga, Minho, Pereira first started playing at age eight and quickly turned into a versatile interpreter of string instruments. Along the way, Júlio Pereira (no relation) noticed him, believing him to be an ideal musician to guarantee his work on the cavaquinho does not continue to be a solitary job.

Cavaquinho Cantado doesn't ignore tradition, but tries to expand on its popular potential, putting together a group of songs that balance themselves between the folk and pop worlds. For better or for worse, there is nothing revolutionary to be found here. Still, Daniel provides us with a charming introduction to an oft-neglected little instrument.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Tirana*

Benjamin William Pike
A Burdensome Year

Gin House Records (40 mins)

★★★★★

Handy with the guitar, this hangdog Yorkshireman



Sometimes on this Yorkshireman's second album, Pike's downbeat vocal with guitar and strings can feel over-familiar, as can some lyrics: 'When it comes to memories / I can always remember which ones to forget.' But as textbook as *Year* can be at times, there is also something very pleasing about it. The immaculate fingerstyle

playing throughout brings to mind players such as Ryley Walker and he carries the songs well. The vocals too, although rarely animated, have a charm that has served the likes of Eels' Mark Everett well across the years.

But it's the guitar playing that really separates this album from the pack; the 30-second arpeggio into 'Keep Me in Your Mind' is so pretty that you want the same amount of it again before the vocal starts. Wishing for more isn't a criticism here and, ultimately, Pike does nothing wrong. *Year* confirms him as a talented performer, up there with contemporaries like Hiss Golden Messenger. I just can't help wondering if interspersing the songs with some instrumentals – something Martin Simpson manages so well – might have added some extra layers to the album.

GLENN KIMPTON

TRACK TO TRY *Keep Me in Your Mind*

Karine Polwart with Pippa Murphy
A Pocket of Wind Resistance

Hudson Records (57 mins)

★★★★★

Resistance is futile: a streamlined musical treat



From the first note to the final, pulsing heartbeat, this is not merely an album of songs but a full 57-minute composite of music, field recording, song and spoken word. The results are devastatingly powerful. At first I was intrigued, then admiring, and soon totally gripped as by a great film – I could hardly bear to listen but felt unable to stop. This album from the multi-award winning Scottish folk singer Karine Polwart, in collaboration with sound designer Pippa Murphy, results from a theatrical commission she created for the Lyceum Theatre for the 2016 Edinburgh Festival. The project as a whole is the result of profound experience and has a spiritual, meditative quality. The title springs from the way the geese that migrate to Polwart's local moor help each other in flight by creating 'pockets of wind resistance.' This sense of inter-connectedness moves into a wider theme of childbirth in which Polwart, a mother herself, examines the fragility of life and the dangers of childbirth from which modern healthcare shields us.

Drone-like chords earth the music in the peat bog of the moor, while Polwart's desolate wail at times brings

to mind Islamic spiritual chants. The whole is a giving of thanks to the binds that tie us together, both human to human and across all life on Earth.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Place to Rest and Mend*

Sarakina
Balkantron

Pismo Folkowe (54 mins)

★★★★★

Polish troupe experiment with Balkan flavours



Many casual listeners today tend to think any music from Eastern Europe is Balkan – which sees even

Gogol Bordello occasionally mislabelled as a Balkan Gypsy band. Sarakina are from Poland, yet on *Balkantron* they play Balkan music, which is likely to only add to the confusion. Polish folk music has often relied on *klezmer*, which once flourished in Poland's now destroyed Jewish communities and village folk traditions, yet nothing has made the same kind of impact that the music from the Balkans has, further south east. Sarakina are a technically gifted quintet – bolstered here by guest musician Peyo Peev on *gadulka* (bowed lute) and are led by accordion and bagpipes player Jacek Grekow. They have released six albums previously and whether or not *Balkantron* is Sarakina's one-off tribute to the Balkan region is unclear. I imagine so, as the band's sound is, overall, far closer to contemporary classical in the phrasing of instruments, with the Balkan influence seemingly being only an added spice; they cover three Bulgarian songs here but none of the tunes sound very Bulgarian in this setting. This is a well played and produced album but, with so much great Balkan music to choose from out there, I can't imagine returning to it very often.

MATT MILTON

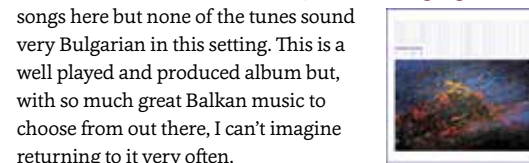
TRACK TO TRY *Alizon Device*

Sarah-Jane Summers
Virr

Eighth Nerve (36 mins)

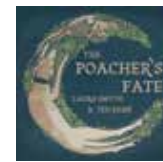
★★★★★

Virring on the avant-garde



Sarah-Jane Summers is a Scottish fiddle and viola player, based in Norway. Many readers will know her as one half of the celebrated duo Widdershins. Summers' diverse talents have seen her performing on festival stages around the world in a wide range of musical contexts.

Avant-garde and experimental sounds are the order of the day on her new solo album, *Virr*. The compositions were inspired by harsh weather conditions, with tracks such as the beautifully eerie 'Aisk', meaning a haze, mist or bank of fog, successfully capturing the essence or atmosphere of their subject. It's a wild and adventurous journey, but, without a traditional fiddle tune in sight, *Virr*



It's always refreshing to hear music that has nothing to hide behind. The London-based folk duo of Laura Smyth & Ted Kemp have recorded an album that is an

unpolished representation of who they are and what they do: there's something very bracing about its clarity and directness. Both of them sing, and the opening title-track immediately whacks the listener round the ears with bold harmonies reminiscent of the Watersons circa *For Pence and Spicy Ale*. Not many contemporary folkies sing songs unaccompanied, but tracks such as 'Brave Benbow' here reveal how powerful a *capella* songs can sound. Their instrumental arrangements are all the more striking for their economy: Smyth's sombre cello and Kemp's rippling banjo and guitar parts give the darker songs, such as 'Here's Adieu to all Judges and Juries' and 'The Manchester Angel', a wintry sobriety.

Kemp shows off his concertina skills on an instrumental set and takes the lead vocal on a few tracks. His performance on 'Murder in the Red Barn' is assured but not entirely convincing, just sounding a little too handdog to be the song's cold murderer (though the second his partner joins in, he's a lot more assertive). He comes into his own on 'Wild Rover', managing the feat of making an old staple of singarounds since time began enjoyable again. There's one original track: 'Alizon Device' concerns one of those accused in the Pendle witch trials and has a chorus that sounds effortlessly of a piece with tradition. A very promising debut indeed.

MATT MILTON

TRACK TO TRY *Alizon Device*

Sarah-Jane Summers
Virr

Eighth Nerve (36 mins)

★★★★★

Virring on the avant-garde



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is not always an easy ride. There are one or two moments where I suspect Summers had more fun playing than most people will have listening. Tracks like 'Katrisper' and 'Bost' (on which it sounds like she's replaced her bow with a pair of rusty scissors) are intentionally difficult to listen to, just as some weather conditions are difficult to endure.

MERLYN DRIVER

TRACK TO TRY *Aisk*

WÖR
Sssht

Appel Records (46 mins)

★★★★★

Wör's this all about then?



'All tunes written in Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven and other nearby places during the 18th century,' the CD

sleeve proudly proclaims. It's an admirably clear, if possibly daunting, introduction to the music of a Belgian group whose first album had the even more upfront title of *Back to the 1780s*. It would be a mistake to imagine, however, that we might be compelled to contend with some sort of dry, historically constrained reconstruction. On the contrary, the remarkable thing about Wör, as anybody who saw them at last year's English Folk Expo will know, is the dynamic way the quintet breath new life into these striking melodies, which may have languished in obscurity for many years but are invigorated here by a modern folk band with clear influences from Celtic, jazz and pop music. Baritone and soprano sax help lend swing and swagger to an instrumental line-up of fiddle, bagpipes, accordion and guitar. A refreshing and mature collection.

KEVIN BOURKE

TRACK TO TRY *VB 71bis*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Queens of Fado: The Next Generation

★★★★★

ARC Music (57 mins)

Your guide to female fado artists



Not that long ago, no youngster in their right mind would confess to liking *fado* in Portugal. In the years that followed the Portuguese Revolution in 1974, *fado* had a reputation for being a conservative music and was only

admissible as a musical preference between parents and grandparents. But suddenly and unexpectedly, Portugal came to terms with its own cultural history and, after Camané and Mísia paved the way, *fado* began regaining an unforeseen popularity and attracting a bunch of new artists.

But as it became fashionable, it also naturally lost focus. And the crowd of singers that took over *fado* houses overnight often can't live up to the expectations. *Queens of Fado* gathers a significant number of *fadistas* who have made a name for themselves during the last decade. You don't have to be an expert to hear how Gisela João and Carminho stand out, and to know they will play a relevant role for many years to come, while Cuca Roseta and Raquel Tavares, on the other hand, are still struggling to find their way. It's an uneven album, and hardly an unforgettable musical experience, but you do get a reasonable snapshot of who's on the rise in female *fado* today.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Bailarico Saloio* by Gisela João

The Ultimate Guide to Welsh Folk

ARC Music (2 CDs, 156 mins)

★★★★★

Eclectic box of Welsh delights



This richly varied introduction to the Welsh folk music tradition is an important contribution from

the lesser known and often overlooked cousin of the Celtic family. It is refreshing to note that nearly as many female artists as male are featured, in a tradition often portrayed as being dominated by men: from legends Nansi Richards and Mary Hopkin to the new wave of talent, Gwyneth Glyn, Catrin Finch and Lleuven, not forgetting the fine voices of Julie Murphy, Sian James and Linda Griffiths. That said, there are still male voice choirs, as you'd expect, alongside triple harps, world music-influenced fusions and surprising honorary folkies such as Euros Childs and Max Boyce. The liner notes are informative and detailed. Cerys Matthews has worked as a mysterious cupid in compiling this CD, bringing together songs old and new, sometimes from artists who have long left the building through to talented young musicians such as Calan and 9Bach, bringing a new energy to the scene.

ELLIW IUAN

TRACK TO TRY *Wasod* by Fernhill