



George Xylouris teams up with drummer Jim White for their album *Goats*

Wu Man, Luis Conte & Daniel Ho
Our World in Song

Wind Music (43 mins)



Intrepid cellist polishes up some old chestnuts



“What would it sound like,” pondered Wu Man, “if I played folk songs from around the world such as

‘Frère Jacques’ and ‘Cielito Lindo’ on my *pipa*?” Well, to help her achieve this slightly happy-clappy ambition, she is joined by Cuban percussionist Luis Conte and Hawaiian guitar and ukulele player Daniel Ho. There’s no denying the musicianship on this record, but you can question the aesthetic. Do we really need to hear ‘Waltzing Matilda’, a Spanish guitar evergreen, Zimbabwe’s ‘Shosholozza’ complete with Taiwanese choir, Mexico’s *mariachi* favourite ‘Cielito Lindo’ and the French children’s rhyme ‘Frère Jacques’ in exotic arrangements, even if the latter is curiously in 13/4 time? It sounds like some surreal cruise-ship band, probably dressed in embarrassing costumes, who would generate some chuckles and polite applause. I suspect that, as principal arranger, Daniel Ho is to blame – you can’t win six Hawaiian music Grammys without a few cheesy inclinations. It’s a far cry from Wu Man’s last brilliant cross-cultural collaboration, *Borderlands* with Master Musicians from the Silk Route.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Frère Jacques*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Dubs & Versions I

Glitterbeat (45 mins)



Mali’s reggae influences exposed



Glitterbeat Records have created an original album that is like an echo of a ‘Best Of’: they have given dub makeovers to their most successful Malian artists. The best-known of the original tracks is Tamikrest’s ‘Itous’, which had a reggae-like bounce even before producer Dennis Bovell took the controls. The result, ‘Itous Dubwise’, sounds like it’s been set free, with the drums and claps enhanced brilliantly. A short clip of Lobi Traoré’s ‘Dibi’ is repeated and sampled by Larry Achiampong, an innovative

British Ghanaian producer, for ‘Back Talk’, digging into what made the late Bamako guitarist great.

Ben Zabo’s experiences as a sound engineer provide a rich instrumental base to the tracks he contributes, remixed by Berlin’s electronic dub legend Mark Ernestus. Each one of them remains a slick, poly-rhythmic percussive feast, with the dub being pushed to the horns and vocals. Fundamentally though, *Dubs & Versions I* is testament to reggae’s global reach. None of these versions sound forced, but rather bring out reggae elements that, as Glitterbeat observe in the sleeve notes, are integral to nearly every electric band in Bamako.

CLYDE MACFARLANE

TRACK TO TRY *Itous Dubwise* by Dennis Bovell & Tamikrest

The Rough Guide To Music Without Frontiers

World Music Network (2 CDs, 119 mins)



Music from minority voices



The compilation market is over-crowded; genuinely valid albums offering anything new

are so rare that it is hard to suppress a groan when yet another arrives for review. But hallelujah – here’s one that’s hugely worthwhile, with an intelligent theme, an admirable cause and a fascinatingly diverse and interesting selection of music too. Produced in association with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), every track is by a group or artist representing the culture of indigenous minorities and peoples in unrecognised or occupied territories. The Roma sounds of Parno Graszt, the Saharawi singer Mariem Hassan, the Kurdish music of the Kamkars and the Basque songs of Korrontzi are joined by little-known examples of Oromo, Uyghur and Balachi music and tracks from Palestine, Corsica and Mongolia. All stake out their right to cultural preservation, defying the pressures of assimilation by dominant and often oppressive rulers. A second disc of traditional Tibetan songs of freedom by the Dutch-based Tibetan singer Namgyal Lhamo is a welcome bonus. One rather large gripe, though: a booklet giving some background to the music and the struggles represented should have been essential.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Kan Ati Fettun Asani Infedhani* by Ali Mohammed Birra

Moira Smiley & Voco
Laughter Out of Tears

Whim Records (45 mins)



The world’s first crowdsourced polyglot backing singers?



Moira Smiley has cemented her status as a musical polyglot with her latest release alongside

her female choir Voco. Not only does *Laughter Out of Tears* explore musical diversity ranging from classic Appalachian banjo sounds, Celtic rhythms, Balkan polyphony and rich Scandinavian harmony, it also displays the young Vermont resident’s ability to sing (rather convincingly) in a variety of challenging languages including Swedish and Serbian.

Many of the backing vocals on the album were the result of an online viral project that enabled users from all over the world to download tracks before release and submit their own voices. To some, Smiley’s approach may sound too wildly ambitious to pull off effectively without sounding forced but, thankfully, in this case the result is very rewarding indeed. Her voice soars with a delightful tenderness and crisp clarity with the backing vocals providing profound warmth and depth throughout the collection of original and classic compositions. This is the product of an extremely well-travelled and alert musician.

MIKE FLECK

TRACK TO TRY *Whistle Daughter Whistle*

Xylouris White
Goats

Other Music Recording Company (36 mins)



Wild man of the Greek lute meets a Dirty drummer



The lute player George Xylouris grew up in Anogia, a town in the mountains of Crete not too far from the Ideon Cave – the alleged birthplace of the great god Zeus. His sometimes wild, always compelling playing style – like that of his iconic father, the singer and lyricist Antonis ‘Psarandonis’ Xylouris – has all the space, height and giddiness of his childhood surrounds.

This inspired pairing with Australian drummer Jim White, lynchpin of post-rock instrumental trio The Dirty Three, adds fitting Zeus-like thunder and a kind of rugged pathos to Xylouris’ melodies and riffs. The two men are old friends, and the way they variously hold back, muck in or respond with lightning speed to each other’s musical phrases reflects as much. Tracks such as ‘Old School Sousta’ and ‘Psarandonis Syrto’ are propulsive and insistent, like the brisk Greek folk dances they are named after. Xylouris’ fine warbling tenor comes as a surprise on ‘Fandomas’, the only sung number on this neat nine-track album, delivered as if on the road. Movement is key throughout *Goats*, a disc that’s as exciting and stirring as it is moving and audacious.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Old School Sousta*