

FATAU KEITA & THE NAAWUNI BIE BAND

Selinam Goete Institut Ghana LC07203

Dagbamba singer Fatau Keita hails from the northern region of Ghana, and together with his eight-strong band Naawuni Bie (meaning 'God's Children' in Dagbani), he creates a music that could best be described as updated highlife with a palm-wine edge.

Although the musical basis of this album lies firmly within Ghana, Keita's Dagbamba culture means his vocal style leans more to the Islamic West – it's often reminiscent of Baaba Maal and he places highly within his influences singers such as Youssou N'Dour, Kante Manfila and Salif Keita.

The best pieces here come about when these two spheres of influence blend most seamlessly. *Tie Kumm* is your track for this – it's a stripped-back, dark and hypnotic groove that could probably carry on all day if it weren't for the fade-out. The last piece, *Won Bora* (labelled on the album as a bonus track) is another highlight and a bit of a contrast from the rest of the album: a lovely acoustic palm-wine with just guitar, shaker and vocals.

It's not a perfect album, by any means. Most of the tracks are of a rather average quality, and in a few places it sounds as if rather heavy autotuning is used on Keita's vocals: it's strange, as his qualities as a singer are obvious and the use of the autotuner serves no musical purpose.

However, for this reviewer, the album as a whole is ruined by its third track, *Act As A Woman*, which is (as its title would suggest) a rather misogynistic song imploring a woman to know her place. It's unsavoury and, while it may be more acceptable for the local market, is rather misjudged for an international release.

That's a shame, as it puts a dampener on a mostly enjoyable album which contains a couple of standout tracks.

www.goethe.de/ghana

Jim Hickson

VENTANAS

Arrelumbre Own Label No cat no

Ventanas are a trans-Mediterranean group, based in Canada, led by singer Tamar Ilana. They embrace the instrumental and melodic traditions of North Africa, the Balkans, Turkey and Spain on oud, bağlama, darabuka, flamenco guitar, voice and flamenco dance. Ilana is an excellent singer whose roots, from an early age, are soaked in the two Spanish traditions of flamenco and the, less well-known songs of the Sephardic Jews. What Ventanas produce on this their second CD is a heady full-on brew of complementary sounds with a leaning towards the flamenco end of the spectrum. Paco Peña once said that although he enjoyed playing solo flamenco guitar it is only when you add the other two elements of dance and song that flamenco really comes alive. Ventanas prove this point. The combination of tap dancing, flamenco guitar and voice is fiery. Add darabuka and it becomes explosive!

The other cultures they encounter also get good treatment. *Makedonsko Devojce* from Macedonia hosts some beautiful Trio Bulgarka-style harmonies and there is some notable oud playing from Athens-born Demetrios Petsalakis. However, the lasting impression comes from the incandescent flamenco combination of voice, dance and guitar, featuring the virtuoso flamenco guitar of Dennis Duffin.

www.ventanasmusic.com

Mark T

ROSAPAEDA

Inna Different Stylee Felmay Fy 8231

Rosapaeda is the name of both the singer and the band and it's a name that should be familiar to those who enjoyed their track on the *fRoots* compilation of Southern Italian folk from a couple of years back. Rosapaeda the singer has a striking, powerful voice. She's a strong woman with deep musical roots and a willingness to experiment with other influences.

What I wasn't aware of until now was that she started out singing reggae and here goes full circle on an album (her first for a while) produced by UK dub reggae master Dennis Bovell, whose previous production work includes Sharon Shannon, The Slits and Fela Kuti, along with a host of big name reggae artists.

Mixing Italian tarantella and dubby reggae is no new thing (The Insintesi Dub crew, for instance, have been doing so with aplomb for some time now) and the opening track here *Aliena* is very much in that style, with its one-drop rhythm, warm horns, chanted vocals and Bovell's baritone rap. But from there things start to take unexpected turns, getting better as they go along.

So, whilst the next couple of tracks are a bit too bombastic for my taste, all heavy drumming, rock guitar and Italian language rap, subsequently the combination of folk, dub, funk and a catchy pop sensibility take shape. Se slips between genres beautifully as Rosapaeda switches from sweet folky vocals to bi-lingual toasting; there's a haunting rendition of the traditional *Nia Nia* opening a sequence of tracks as good as any I've come across recently, culminating in the excellent *Voglio Stare Di Piu* which is reprised in a dub version to close the album.

Throughout, Rosapaeda is in fine voice, delivering lyrics which deal with the strength of women and the lot of the oppressed. At least that's what the notes in the CD booklet tell me. But there's no need to understand these worthy sentiments in order to feel the power of most of the music on offer here.

www.rosapaeda.it

Jamie Renton

Rosapaeda



ADRAN D

Ffiniau Alto ALTO007CD

The second offering from Dave Danford's folk synthesis collective was overdue; their debut, the spirited *Ascent* which hinted at so much to look for, came four years ago. However finally *Ffiniau* appears and was it worth the anxious wait? Yeah, in spades.

A revolving door in personnel means a 50 percent change. In come Calan fiddler Patrick Rimes, vocalist Lynwen Haf Roberts and Rhys Taylor on sax. Such flexibility allows the core members to almost pick and choose for each project and as such increases the effectiveness of each line-up. Maestro Danford has crafted nine punchy items which reference hard funk, garage, indie, dance and rock with a trad core based in old Welsh songs. It's canny stuff and with the vocals of Miss Roberts damned hard to resist. My advice is to give in.

Slip on a pair of headphones, sit back and marvel at the production here. The mix, especially the interplay between saxophone and fiddle is wondrous, reminding me of Moving Hearts at their most dizzying. The way *Drws-y-Coed* bowls along with the spotlight on Rimes means he comes out of this as one of the stars. Likewise guitarist Aled Owen whose range of styles from hushed, acoustic picking to howling feedback squeal is absorbed into the whole by the mix and sounds totally appropriate. In lesser hands than those of Danford there might have been trouble.

There's nothing slapdash or freewheeling here though. *Dros Y Ffin* has Taylor cutting loose on a sax solo which hints over a howling guitar line that there should have been more of him honking out the new tradition. *Yr Eneth* with two differing versions of the same song secreted away in the arrangement, sets up the album nicely, Roberts' rich, expressive voice leading the charge. She shines again through *Nain Nyts* with its whirling jazz and grunge intertwining elements.

Another doozy then, a powerful statement that while eyes may have been watching more acoustic Welsh sources of late or even those with more hippy trippy inspiration, the loud brigade are not to be overlooked. We're still waiting for the third instalment of Taran (y'hear Kilbrides?) but meantime swim with Adran D. This is a soulful Cambrian fusion mish-mash of unalloyed joy.

www.adran-d.co.uk

Simon Jones

VISHTÈN

Terre Rouge Own Label PTVish05

THE EAST POINTERS

Secret Victory Own Label EPCD15

Canadian trios; both from Prince Edward Island. PEI is the smallest of the Maritime Provinces. It has a small (four percent) community of French-speakers with a strong traditional music commitment, prominent within which are the very talented Vishtèn, a trio whose albums have been enthused over in these review pages before.

As you might expect from a family band (twin sisters and one of their partners) reared in a traditional music environment, the playing and harmony singing is tight. What you might not expect is the sheer musicality and variety that they bring to every track. All three are talented multi-instrumentalists and fine singers, the album is well-programmed with a combination of carefully researched and reworked local traditional material alongside modern songs and tunes. Double-tracking gives some tracks a richer, fuller sound than might be heard from a trio. For