

Fusion REVIEWS

Algeria, Israel, Chile, Russia, Mexico and Palestine. He sings them in a straightforward indie folk-pop style with no attempt to capture the musical cultures that begat the songs, but that does not detract from the potency of the project, which he describes as an album for 'people who are tired of pop music with no content.' His choices range widely, from Pussy Riot's 'Punk Prayer', which so upset Putin that it led to the band's imprisonment, to Billie Holiday's chilling 'Strange Fruit'. Bravely he also includes a Mexican *narcocorrido* eulogising drug bandits, alongside a more ethically right-on anthem by Chile's Victor Jara. Mari Boine joins him on a deathless 19th-century folk song from Norway's persecuted Sámi culture and his version of 'Open Letter' by the assassinated Berber activist Lounès Matoub is both striking and poignant.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *The Shaman and the Thief*

Mosaik Wolno!

Verge Sound (72 mins)

★★★★★

Putting all the pieces together



It's amazing how much has happened on the Polish traditional and folk scene in the last decade.

There's both the re-awakened interest in Polish traditions and the openness to the world, and both are evident in the work of Mosaik. Led by singer and violinist Jolanta Kossakowska, Mosaik formed in 2007 and this is their fourth album. It sounds like it's been intricately worked on – in a remote hut in north-eastern Poland, they claim – to create a web of melodies and textures that is absolutely enchanting. The five-piece ensemble keep Polish songs at the heart of the music, but bring in a range of instruments from all over the world, such as *balafon*, *ngoni*, *kalimba*, *duduk*, *oud* and a lot more besides. 'Zielona Grusia' (Green Pear Tree) starts with a *balafon* ostinato and funky bass, over which Kossakowska plays and sings the song. 'Afroberek II' takes an *oberek* dance but renders it on Moroccan *gimbri* (lute), Afghan *rubab* and more. It never sounds gimmicky, but shows what five creative musicians (and a couple of guests) can do with a carefully selected pile of instruments. They sound like a band to watch.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Afroberek II*

Notify InConcept

Ropeadope Records (39 mins)

★★★★★

Irish trad meets jazz and niftily avoids all genre car-crashes



Cross-genre fusion, particularly between jazz and traditional styles, is a very tricky thing to pull off without sounding contrived, derivative or just downright bad. Managing to avoid these pitfalls altogether, Irish maestros Notify present their second full album of stunning original tunes: blending their expert technical abilities on concertina, keyboards, guitar, bass and drums with a keen ear for a good arrangement. It's not folk music with a

pretentious jazz rhythm section underneath, but neither is it jazz spoiled by twee trad melodies on top. It's also not limited in scope; some numbers such as 'Floor Shark' really grab you with their incessant grooves and tasty changes, while others such as 'Panacea' are odysseys of many intriguing twists and turns. Each tune is exquisitely crafted and is like a showcase of collaborative writing. There are improvised solos but none are too long or over-indulgent and they are all woven into the tunes so well that they do not appear engineered. If you like Irish trad and you like jazz, and you like the idea of the two of them getting on harmoniously, then buy this album.

TOM NEUWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Wagtail*

The Ukrainians Evolutsiya! 40 Best and Rarest 1991-2016

Eastblok Music (2 CDs, 136 mins)

★★★★★

Celebrating 25 unlikely years



This double album marks the 25th anniversary of the intriguing phenomenon known as The Ukrainians. The band formed almost by accident, when Leeds-based indie band The Wedding Present recorded a Ukrainian set for John Peel's radio show, thanks to the Ukrainian heritage of the band's guitarist Peter Solowka. It was such a success that in 1991 Solowka, with Len Liggins and Roman Remeynes, decided to form a band



Nanosis/Machoudakis

TOP OF THE WORLD



BUY NOW

Xylouris White Black Peak

Bella Union (41 mins)

★★★★★

Dark 'n' stormy Aussie-Greek duo scale new heights



The duo that is Xylouris White – Cretan lute player (and Greek music royalty) George Xylouris and Melbourne-born drummer (and Aussie rock royalty) Jim White – have been touring the globe ever since the release of their impressive 2014 debut, *Goats*. Straddling the worlds of jazz, rock and world music, they've sold out venues, wowed festivals and attracted high-profile fans by the truckload. Now comes that difficult second album and happily, it's a work of raw power and rugged beauty, with instruments pushed audaciously to their limits. It has a visceral, elemental vibe, conjured by a deft use of tradition and invention, light and dark. In contrast to the largely instrumental *Goats*, vocals play a vital role here. The title-track, a paean to Crete's highest mountain, is all swirling thunder, with White's rolling percussion urging

on, and being propelled by Xylouris' fierce strumming and earth-shuddering baritone. 'Loneliness beats at me', he intones (in Greek), his lyrics taken from words by Mitsos Stavrakakis, Crete's best poet of the *mantinada* verse.

On its tail, 'Forging' maintains a furnace-like heat, looming like a threat and a promise; 'Hey, Musicians' has an almost hymn-like feel, with drums crashing portentously behind Xylouris' impassioned, melismatic voice. Cult American singer-songwriter Bonnie 'Prince' Billy sings ghostly harmonies on 'Erotokritos (Opening)', a homage to the famed 17th-century Cretan romantic verse epic that it takes its name from. Moody closer 'The Feast' features none other than Xylouris Senior, the iconic Cretan singer and lyra player Psarantonis, lending his talents. Astounding stuff.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Black Peak*