

and recording the follow-up to 2014's *Tudo* both her mother (Miúcha Gilberto) and her father (João Gilberto) died. Perhaps it's the pain of loss or perhaps it's simply the seasoned ripeness of her years but *Agora* feels like her finest offering in perhaps a decade and a half.

She describes the record as '*more mature and extremely sincere*' – and for once it's more than press release hype. Singing exquisitely in both English and Portuguese she fuses bossa nova, Latin jazz, ambient moods, a sultry sexuality and diaphanous, downtempo electronica. Producer Thomas Bartlett (Sufjan Stevens/St Vincent/The Gloaming) lends a smart pop shimmer but never lets the sheen get in the way of Gilberto's sensuous voice and alluring melodies. The result is a melting, enveloping sound that both soothes and thrills.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Tao Bom*

Yoandri Castro Max (Max Max) Bar de Paco

Tumi Music (44 mins)

★★★★★
Cuban singer steps into the limelight for debut solo album



The rich and versatile voice of Cuban singer and composer Max Max (aka Yoandri Castro Max) will be familiar to fans of bands including Tomeczlao, with whom Max toured to acclaim in the early 00s, and Pupy y Los Que Son, Son, the hard-driving band fronted by erstwhile Los Van Van pianist Pupy Pedrosó and featuring Max Max as lead vocalist for nigh on five years. Conservatoire-trained by Cuban and Italian vocal coaches, and with stints in Cuba-generated musicals such as *Bésame Mucho* (bolero hit songs from the 1920s to the 80s), Max has a wide-ranging tone made all the more authentic by his precise, easy *fraseo*.

Remarkably given his pedigree, *Bar de Paco* is his solo debut. It's a polished ten-track recording featuring classics such as Rubén Blades' 'Pedro Navaja', a salsified version of 'Mac the Knife' that Max tackles with relish, and originals including the title-track, a romantic paean to a tiny bar in Andalucía's Alpujarras that was co-written with keys player Julio Montoro and Tumi label boss Mo Fini, who has a home there. A line-up of crack musicians on horns, bass and percussion lend texture and nuance to a work that

extends to son, bolero and *chachachá*. A fine showcase for Max, who deserves a bit more stardom.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Bar de Paco*

Luiz Murá Origem

Luiz Murá (52 mins)

★★★★★
Delicate solo performances in tribute to João Gilberto



Luiz Murá is a diverse musician. He sings in Portuguese, Japanese, English and Italian,

performs samba, *bossa nova* or any other sort of traditional song with just his guitar. Somehow even on record Murá comes across as a live performer tendering to a Friday night crowd in a local bar where he is keen on pleasing everyone. But he sings so in tune with João Gilberto's whispering style and in such a delicate voice that it is hard not to sense the passion Murá has for each one of these tracks.

Put together as a tribute to João Gilberto, who passed away in 2019, *Origem* delves into bossa nova as Murá tries to explore his own musical identity; amid all his different references, he seems to summon up his hero's legacy as a means to make his own path clearer. And if it is clear Tom Jobim and João Gilberto are key influences in Murá's career – he pays homage to both with thoughtful renditions of 'Corcovado' and 'Bahia Com H' – he is more interesting when he goes a step further and tries out 'Calabrisella', a beautiful Italian waltz in a Caetano Veloso style, or when he goes into samba territory for 'Até o Sol Raiar'. *Origem* proves Murá is an undeniable talent as a self-sufficient solo acoustic performer, but it falls short of marvelling the listener.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Calabrisella*

Orquesta Failde Failde Con Tumbao

Ebrem (34 mins)

★★★★★
Put on your danzón shoes: celebrating Cuba's musical history



Cuban bandleader and flautist Ethiel Failde is the great-great nephew of Miguel Failde, the Matanzas composer who in the late 1800s created *danzón*, the partner-dance

style celebrated on this third album by the current incarnation of his eponymous ensemble. Charming, ambitious and urbane, its eight tracks span one hundred years' worth of Cuban musical history. There's a cover of Miguel Failde's ignored 1883 *danzón* 'Nievecita', unknown except on Mexico's thriving *danzón* scene. There's the sung poem 'Me Desordenó', given life and love by evergreen singer Omara Portuondo, and the canny inclusion of cutting-edge players such as trumpeter Julito Padron of Havana jazz band Interactivo. There are clever arrangements by the celebrated likes of pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba (elegant opener 'Concierto en Varsovia') and US-based saxophonist Yosvany Terry (the glorious 'It Do Me Good'), and a sharp reimagining of Camila Cabello's hit tune 'Havana', which has begged to be thoroughly Cubanified.

Whichever way you look, *Failde Con Tumbao* swings like a winner. There's also a social media campaign that presents the charismatic, moustachioed Ethiel Failde as a cartoon character in a cartoon world lit by the sort of colours that zinged in Cuba back in the day. Sepia-tinted tradition, then, made bright.

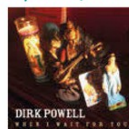
JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Me Desordenó*

Dirk Powell When I Wait For You

Compass Records (50 mins)

★★★★★
Legendary producer proves to be a powerful storyteller himself



For the success of her widely acclaimed 2019 Smithsonian Folkways release, *Songs of Our Native*

Daughters (reviewed in #147), Rhiannon Giddens gave a lot of credit to producer and accompanist Dirk Powell in whose Louisiana studio the album was recorded. *When I Wait For You* is an engaging journal of personal reflection and keen observation from an exceptionally talented multi-instrumentalist, singer and storyteller. The album is a 13-track, genre-hopping excursion ranging from Scots-Irish ballads and reels to American roots, folk-rock, classic country and traditional Cajun music. Powell's session-mates include Giddens (fiddle, banjo), Sara Watkins (fiddle, vocals), Sean Watkins (vocals), Powell's daughters Amelia and Sophie on vocals, and members of the Transatlantic Sessions house band:

Donald Shaw (accordion, piano, production), Mike McGoldrick (flute, whistle), John McCusker (fiddle) and James Macintosh (drums).

There's a quiet huskiness to Dirk Powell's voice that lends itself to certain performances (such as on 'The Bright Light of Day') more than others ('One Note'), while the harmonising passages with his daughters on tracks such as 'The Little Things', brighten the proceedings with a sonorous sheen. As an album, *When I Wait For You* imparts a sweet, alluring intimacy without being cloyingly overbearing about its intentions.

DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *Ain't Never Fell*

Silvio Rodríguez Para la Espera

Ojalá (41 mins)

★★★★★
A nostalgic trip that leaves you still waiting for more



A folk superstar in Latin America, Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez embodies a

fast-ageing fantasy of left-leaning pan-continental unity spearheaded by white guys in khaki and their indigenous footsoldiers. *Para la Espera* means something like 'Still Waiting.' Aren't we all? His 80s anthems, 'Canción del Elegido', 'Ojalá' and 'La Maza', are campfire favourites and he enjoys a status south of the Rio Grande comparable with Bob Dylan's north of the border. Now aged 73, his voice has retained some of its fruity textures and his earnest *nueva trova* schtick remains pretty unchanged: crisp vocals, poetastery lyrics, simple chord sequences on acoustic guitar, mellifluously melancholic picking.

There aren't any crowd-rousers here, and the lyrics are winsome and wise rather than overtly political. But Silvio, as fans know him, was always oblique. He can, though, command attention with scant resources and is engagingly soulful on songs like opener 'La Adivinanza' and 'Noche Sin Fin y Mar'. He rarely deviates from the balladeering script; 'Conteo Atrás' has a half-hearted blues quality as he sings about missing a train in Cuba is magic realism. What's lacking now was always lacking: a direct address to Cuba's leaders. In fact, even the US gets off lightly. The *trova* is no longer *nueva*, but rather *nostálgica* and polite.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *La Adivinanza* ▶