



Steve Gullick

Sam Amidon

Nonesuch Records (38 mins)



Folk's Frankenstein: the singer transforming traditional songs



Sam Amidon, the radical recombinator of traditional folk music, has concocted a delightfully diabolical set of experiments, unleashing a Frankenstein's monster among the villagers. Something of an extension of his 2019 EP *Fatal Flower Garden*, Amidon's self-titled album borrows liberally from *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music* for both foundational material and alchemical inspiration. Drawing from a sonic palette replete with spooky reverb, jazzy tempos and funky percussion, recalling 2017's *The Following Mountain*, Amidon transforms familiar Appalachian songs, murder ballads and novelty tunes, such as 'Maggie', 'Spanish Merchant's Daughter', 'Pretty Polly' and 'Cuckoo' into new weird ditties

imbued with their own compelling power, characters and charm.

Playing Igor to the Vermont-born, London-based mad scientist's role in the West Hampstead laboratory at HOXA Studios were frequent collaborators including multi-instrumentalist Shahzad Ismaily and drummer Chris Vatalaro, augmented by Belgian guitarist Bert Cools, bassist Ruth Goller, saxophonist Sam Gendel, and Amidon's wife, Beth Orton, lending harmonising vocals to three tracks. In addition to transmogrified traditional fare, Amidon includes imaginative arrangements of Taj Mahal's 'Light Rain Blues', Harkin Frye's 'Time has Made a Change', and 'Hallelujah', a shape-note song dating from 1835 published in the sacred harp collection of early American folk-hymns.

DOUG DELORCH

TRACK TO TRY *Cuckoo*

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Azymuth

Azymuth JID004

Jazz is Dead (41 mins)



Brazilian veterans prove they still have what it takes



Revered Brazilian jazz-funk trio Azymuth continue to amaze, as much for their longevity (they came together in 1972) and productivity (they've released over two dozen albums) as for their remarkable ability to reinvent and stay current. The London-based Far Out label can take much credit for helping the ageless genre-blending *samba doida* ('crazy samba') group curry favour with a remix-friendly club-floor audience, and here bassist Alex Malheiros, percussionist Ivan Conti and synthesizer wizard Kiko Conti – who in 2012 replaced founding keyboard player, the late José Roberto Bertrami – continue to push at the boundaries of all things samba. Here, ingeniously teamed with rap-and-soul fusionists and producers Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad (A Tribe Called Quest), Azymuth springboard off their template – electronic instruments, angular arrangements and trademark combinations of jazz, funk, rock and samba – into new territory woody with beats, infused with light and space and with synchronicity at a premium.

Tracks composed by Younge and Muhammad with and without Azymuth are mellow yet brisk, laid-back but funky, experimental and accessible, and playful while packing a punch. Added guitars, flutes, percussion and horns blend with keyboards including, on standout track 'Sumaré', the monophonic synthesizer and electro-mechanical Mellotron. Analogue synths wheel and a marimba chimes patterns on 'Cat Jump' and 'Pulando Corda'; throughout, both generations seem to be having a ball.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Sumaré*

Contento

Lo Bueno Está Aquí

El Palmas Music (32 mins) VINYL & DIGITAL ONLY



Forget sultry salsa, this is Latin music for robotic dancing



Paulo Olarte and Sebastian Hoyos, the two Colombian expats who make up Contento, like to call their music

'salsapunk.' At one level this is classic dancehall music, built around the usual rhythmic structures and repetitive phrasing. But it gets a pervasive DIY treatment, with pared-down keyboards, gnarly bass lines, witty sonic jokes – a plinky sound like a drop of water here, an artful misquote from Led Zeppelin there – and club-friendly beats that play around the *claves*. On several tracks – notably 'Loco Por Tu Amor' – a driving synth and affectless vocals make you think of robots doing a funeral salsa (an image identifiable during nights out in Cartagena).

The title-track departs from the same idea but splices in layers of ultra-fast percussion and an infectious Afro-Cuban *tumbao* on piano. Four of the eight tracks (the first 'side' of the album) are pared down and cool verging on chilly, at least for salsa. Then on the fifth, 'Paso Palante', they show they can also do warm and melodious, with one foot in Africa and the other in the Caribbean, and their four hands on a brazenly smoochy alto sax. But the duo soon revert to their lo-fi, tongue-in-cheek deconstruction of modern salsa. Throughout, the singing is limited to chants and summons to move – though as a solo *salsero*, speeding on solipsism. Forget sultriness and the tropics, this is Latin music for Berliners and Genevans; no touching, no gender, no faking it.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *Lo Bueno Está Aquí*

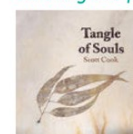
Scott Cook

Tangle of Souls

Scott Cook (48 mins)



Americana singer carrying on the good fight



Tangle of Souls is the seventh full-length album by American-born, Edmonton, Alberta-based,

globe-trotting troubadour Scott Cook. By full-length, we're talking a dozen tracks on CD (or vinyl) accompanied by a 240-page, cloth-bound, hardcover book filled with notes on the music including lyrics and chords, lovely artwork by Australian Cecilia Sharpley, splendid photographs, poetry, stories and ruminations gleaned from Cook's travels. The music is straightforward Americana roots seasoned with hearty helpings of folk, bluegrass and country.

In simple, descriptive turns of phrase, Cook sings about social ills and personal travails with

North American
troubadour Scott Cook



Steven Teusuizen

perspicacious precision. *'The whispers of your conscience/That get drowned out when you're bingeing/Come back around to haunt you/Whenever you turn off the engine'*, Cook croons in 'Tulsa', alluding to his own struggles with self-medication. In 'Say Can You See' demagoguery and oppressive corporatism are set in contrast to the ties that bind citizens in a common cause: *'See, I got a neighbour, we don't always agree/He's a bit of a redneck, according to a hippy like me/But if you're in the ditch, he'll pull you out, I know he will/And that's more than I can say for all those dickheads on the hill'*. In the tradition of Woody Guthrie, Hazel Dickens and many others, Cook is carrying on the good fight.

DOUG DELORCH

TRACK TO TRY *Tulsa*

DJ Click
DJ Click y Coleo
Identidad Mapuche

No Fridge (30 mins)

★★★★★

Musical tourism among the indigenous of the Southern Cone



The Mapuche are the sole surviving indigenous community in the Southern Cone. Settled mainly in the temperate Andean regions of Argentina and Chile, they are known for their fierce resistance to Spanish and Creole forces in the past, and to land-grabbing developers today. Their music, not well known in the Americas, is based around a wooden trumpet with an animal horn called a *trutruca*, a ceremonial drum and various flutes and bowed instruments. It responds to the wind, sea, nature and peaks with ethereal sounds and chants in the native Mapudungun tongue, but has none of the carnival energy of Peruvian and Bolivian ethnic music.

This collaboration with French-based DJ Click ranges from percussion-free evocations of nature that fuse synths and traditional instruments – as on opener 'Danza Mapuche (Spiritual Mix)' and 'Lonko Mew' – to tracks combining teasingly gentle beats with the earthy tones of the Mapuche, generating something halfway between electro-jazz and ambient lounge ('Wajkolxa'). On 'Bio Bio', named after a river that has played a central role in Mapuche wars and eco-campaigns, the tempo is upped a little and old-school keyboards create a chillout vibe. As for Coleo's contribution, they are in fact an MoR pop-rock band who have had to pack away their guitars and soaring vocals to do this disc. While providing a worthy window on an unfamiliar culture, the release contains just six tracks and two remixes and the light-touch interventions make it feel more like a work in progress than a fully-fledged exploration, musical tourism rather than on-the-road fieldwork.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *Danza Mapuche (Club Mix)*

Grupo Rebolú
Tiempos Buenos

Grupo Rebolú (30 mins)

★★★★★

NY Colombian outfit look forward to Better Times



Grupo Rebolú are the best Afro-Colombian ensemble working out of New York City, and arguably the best of their kind in the US. Their upbeat, danceable blend of the traditional roots music found along the Afro-Caribbean coast of Colombia with contemporary instruments and the outward-looking vibe of the Big Apple has, since their formation in 2008, resulted in the albums *Abriendo*

Caminos (Opening Roads) and *Next Stop* – forward-looking titles that reinforce a remit to stay true to cultural roots while forging new paths.

The story of the band's core members – singer, composer and *gaitero* Ronald Polo and master percussionist Morris Cañate (childhood friends from Barranquilla) and vocalist and *cuatro* player Johanna Castañeda – has been channelled into the crowd-funded *Tiempos Buenos* (Better Times), a work inspired by stories of immigrants leaving their homelands in search of a better life. Ten songs composed and arranged by the golden-voiced Polo embrace Afro-Colombian rhythms including *gaita*, *tambora*, *chalupa*, *bullerengue* and the ever-popular *cumbia*; instruments range from the native *gaita* (flute fashioned from a hollow cactus stem) and *alegre* drum (think an Afro-Colombian *djembe*) to guitar, bass and horns that keep things bright and grooving. Standouts include the effervescent title-track and 'Que Paso', on which Castañeda gets to shine.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Que Paso*

Kitchman/Schmidt
As Long as Songbirds Sing

Kitchman/Schmidt (47 mins)

★★★★★

Rethinking Appalachian music



Since meeting, literally on stage, at a late-night jam session in London's West End, jazz and folk guitarist James Kitchman and vocalist Sylvia Schmidt have made it their mission to push, stretch and rethink Anglo-American folk songs from the Appalachian Mountains, that traditional English, Scottish and Irish music that had evolved in endlessly fascinating ways since encountering African-American culture. Their unique style, bound to infuriate traditionalists of any stripe, layers influences of jazz and chamber music onto their source material, a fearless approach greatly influenced by American composer John Jacob Niles. A pivotal figure in the American folk music revival of the 50s and 60s, Niles collected traditional songs from oral sources, giving them new life through an interpretation described by Schmidt as *'sounding like a cross between Jeff Buckley and Nina Simone'* and by Bob Dylan, no less, as *'eerie and illogical, terrifically intense – definitely a switched-on character, almost like a sorcerer.'* Their lack of reverence allows

them to logically close the album by blending Bertolt Brecht's love poem 'Das Elfte Sonett' into an adaptation of North Carolina folk love song 'I'm Goin' Away'. But perhaps the most convincing track here is a version of 'Lowlands', inspired by another quietly rebellious figure, Anne Briggs.

KEVIN BOURKE

TRACK TO TRY *Lowlands*

Edmony Krater
J'ai Traversé La Mer

Heavenly Sweetness (42 mins)

★★★★★

Retro-drenched sounds from Guadeloupe by Parisian singer



Apparently involved in the avant-garde scene, Edmony Krater brings none of that malarkey here, as he subjects his Guadeloupean heritage to an accessible retro-fusion process. Krater is a Parisian singer, percussionist and occasional trumpeter, emerging from his native *gwo ka* roots, peaking early in the late 1970s and early 80s, but now revived via a recent return to recording. The collaboration between Stateside saxophonist David Murray and the Gwo-Ka Masters, almost two decades ago, is the highest profile example of such a blending of jazz and Guadeloupean traditional music. This is a much lighter affair, but shares a similar zest.

Krater retains a sonic aura from 40 years ago, his band awash in treacly keyboard synths that have poor settings and are invariably too high in the mix. It's the leader himself who provides the earthy qualities, in his vocals and percussion, leading a lively backing chorus through a set of propulsive numbers, with influences hinting at Afrobeat, US funk and South African piano. Krater's glossy crew encircles a roughened frontman spirit, and it's a shame that the decorative horns, pricking guitar and inventive percussion aren't highlighted more in the spread. Standout 'Se Tan Nou' ▶

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