

The standard of engineering is exemplary, and Allan's guitar, where used, is kept in sensible perspective within the complex, often quite lavish texture. Super-Audio CD at its very finest, housed in a sturdy state-of-the-art hardcover package incorporating a full-colour 54-page book containing a multi-language background essay, an abundance of photos, complete lyrics and song notes and even full personnel listing for the 53-piece orchestra. All told, a beautifully produced release. www.allantaylor.com

David Kidman

THE BOOKSHOP BAND

Curious And Curiouser The Bookshop Band CDTBB009

The first in a planned series of ten (yes, really!) releases this year by The Bookshop Band – a flexible cast of musicians around a core duo of Beth Porter and Ben Please, who “write songs inspired by books, and play them in bookshops”. Played on a wondrous array of instruments including guitars, ukuleles, accordion, cello, harmonium, oboe, glockenspiel, viola and brass, their music encompasses elements of folk, classical, indie, jazz and soundtrack.

The theme of this album is “books with a sense of the fantastical,” which include classics like *Alice In Wonderland* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, along with contemporary titles including Mark Hodder's *Burton And Swinburne In The Strange Affair Of Spring-Heeled Jack* and *The Coincidence Engine* by Sam Leith. *Once Upon A Time* is cleverly composed entirely of book first lines.

There's no necessity to have read any of the books to enjoy these songs, but after listening, you might well have a mind to. They all have properly good tunes and Porter – long-respected as an instrumentalist, excels as a singer, too.

The CD package is an attractive, cleverly-crafted design, totally in keeping with the contents. Two bonus tracks are included – an extract from David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks*, read by Fiona O'Shaughnessy, and Stanley Dogwood reading from *Humor*.

thebookshopband.co.uk

Steve Hunt

TAMBOURS CROISÉS

Chapter Two Buda Musique 860292

Fifteen artists from seventeen French Overseas Departments plus some from Senegal were gathered together in 2011 in France (The Year of France Overseas). They rehearse songs together to develop a show to take to range of venues, theatres, exhibitions, educational establishments. Some of the time is allowed for jam sessions. It is a success and is repeated, though the programme is radically changed and developed each year. This CD was recorded of most of the items that were included in the 2015 tour. They explain their methodology in this way – “The notions of creation and passing on in our approach as much as the performance”.

The format is fairly simple. Voices are heard singing individually or in small numbers singing in harmony. The only accompaniment is hand drums in a wide variety of rhythms and what sounds like a referee's whistle. The singing seems to be structured in a way that invites audience participation. The performers sound as though they are having the time of their lives as they record. If so much palpable joy is conveyed from a recording, how much delight must there be in seeing them live?

www.budamusique.com

Vic Smith

RICHARD BONA

Heritage Qwest Records 2342145

Richard Bona has got a hell of a lot going for him. His recording career shows that he has tried his hand at a wide range of musical genres but this most recent release shows that he has found a platform in which he can excel. He has a singing voice that many would die for, a voice ideal for the smooth Afro-Cubism music of which he is a leading exponent. His album is clearly very expensively produced and he has been able to surround himself with a bunch of hugely talented musicians. They may come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds but they work together in a way that is tight, effective and very carefully planned with nothing left to chance.

So there is his voice, but there is also his musicianship. His main instrument is given as bass guitar but here he also contributes guitar, keyboards, percussion and that core instrument of Latin music, the... err... electric sitar!

Originally from Cameroon, he is now based in France and this album was recorded and mixed at top studios in Paris and New York. His upcoming world tour takes in twelve countries including one stopover in the UK at the Albert Hall on 22 August as part of the BBC Proms no less!

www.richardbona.com

Vic Smith

ADMIRALS HARD

Upon A Painted Ocean Believers Roast BR018

Admirals Hard are the brainchild of Cornishman Andy Carne, who persuaded several of his fellow London-based West Country exiles – members of such diverse cult bands as Cardiacs, Knifeworld, Gong, Mediaeval Baebees and North Sea Radio Orchestra, to form a folk group. Utilising harmonium, hurdy-gurdy, melodeon, hammered dulcimer and seven voices, their repertoire is derived largely from Cyril Tawney and The Yetties (surely the most unlikely of alternative icons, even in a scene that latterly celebrates Shirley Collins and Anne Briggs as goddesses of underground cool).

It's genuinely refreshing to hear musicians unaffectedly celebrating the beloved sounds of their childhoods. While the likes of *The Eddystone Light*, *The Broadside Man* and *All For Me Grog* offer few surprises, their inventive yet respectful arrangements, and the shuffling rhythms applied to shanties, the discordant harmonium on *Martin Said To His Man*, Richard Larcombe's fluid guitar picking on *Rounding The Horn* all provide plenty of evidence that these old chestnuts are still as tasty as ever they were.

Admirals Hard



Admirals Hard are an appealing bunch. Whilst they don't possess the vocal firepower of some of the more established shanty groups, their manifestly impressive instrumental chops – Billy Pigg is another cited influence – (showcased on *The Random Jig I'll Get Wedded In My Auld Claes*), skilled harmonies (featured unaccompanied on *Leave Her Johnny Leave Her*) and good-natured enthusiasm carry them through handsomely.

facebook.com/admiralshard

Steve Hunt

ADAMA DRAMÉ

Dakan Buda Musique 4790380

In a part of his notes on a professional career stretching back over 50 years, Adama writes, “Why the hell did I choose the hard job of music – and why of all things the djembe?... all this was crowned with multiple disappointments, both professional and personal.” Well, with many Manding jalis whom I have met, it is not a matter of them choosing music as much as music choosing them for family and heritage reasons and Adama learned his life and music skills from his father and grandfather. And Adama, if your career has brought as much enjoyment as this outstanding release brings, then you will have given enjoyment to huge numbers.

Some tracks have a very straightforward Manding sound with a small group playing traditional instruments and lovely female response singing; the balafon playing of Sololamane Diabaté plays a prominent part in these. Elsewhere, the approach is more modern with Western instruments added, but there is the feeling that the solidly Manding core reaches out to incorporate suitable additions from wider influences. The very attractive booklet gives translations of the lyrics in French and English which show the typical mix of praise songs and moral guidance. Particularly pleasing is *SNC* which starts with a sort of soundscape and gradually segues into a gentle song in praise of a cultural event with balafon and violin leading the accompaniments.

Most of the music was recorded in a town in eastern Burkina Faso with later smaller additions in Paris. Adama's partner in the production was that great musical mind, Ray Lema and between them they have supervised an album of great variety and high quality.

In spite of the huge satisfaction given by the nature of these arrangements, the outstanding track is a nine-minute plus djembe solo where the sheer diversity and technique of the sounds produced by a solo drum is mesmerising.

www.budamusique.com

Vic Smith