

PAUL JAMES

The Drowned Lover And Other Dark Tales Mummerfy-01

Blowzabella's long-serving reed man takes centre stage with an album primarily based on "interpretations of traditional English songs with strong stories that are as relevant now as then". Recorded in his own home studio and self-produced, James sings and plays saxophones, border bagpipes, bass guitar, drums, percussion, piano, electric piano, organ, other keyboards, synths, samples and programming, gralla, shawm, whistle and concertina, while a huge cast of guests (including familiar names Beth Porter and Gregory Jolivet) contribute everything but the kitchen sink.

Shirley Collins once memorably remarked that she dislikes jazz because it makes her fidget, so it's likely that the Grande Dame of English folk song would choose the simple voice, piano and concertina arrangement of *The Topman And The After-guard* over the busier, more complex settings of *The Drowned Lover* and *The Ballad Of Sara Grey*. The one non-traditional song – *Big Corn (in The Fields)* (by James' late friend Desmond Simmons) features an uncluttered and effective rock band backing with violin, very much in Oysterband territory.

James cuts loose with his sax on the frenetic dance tune *Once There Was A Lone Wolf* and border pipes on *Falco E Colomba*. The atmospheric *Dulcinea De La Mancha* floats on electric piano and electric guitar, whilst *Wakeful* recalls his late 1980s work with Nigel Eaton as Ancient Beatbox.

Paul James is, of course, a hugely accomplished and versatile musician, but he's really just finding his own voice as singer. While the instrumental arrangements here variously recall (for this listener) Ti Jaz, Soft Machine, Harold Faltermeyer and Shamal-era Gong, it's the traditional songs that provide the focus. A courageous and personal record that rewards repeated listening.

pauljames.eu

Steve Hunt

WARSAW VILLAGE BAND

Sun Celebration Jaro 4335-2

"Therefore, if the solar fire is resemblant of the fire abiding in the bodies of living beings, the sun itself must be alive" is the Cicero maxim that introduces the elegant packaging of Warsaw Village Band's vast but thrillingly focused seventh album. Evocative photography juxtaposes retro urban nostalgia and rural sublimity around a two disc sonorous, deep excavation of modern and traditional solstice evocation. *Midsummer Rain Song* has just such depth, a rumble of rich and deadly serious strings, counterpointing voices raised in dark celebration.

Eighteen years into their career, the desire this time was to compose connections that the band have heard, learned and felt with musicians from throughout their career and across the world. However this is no artificial connectivity or compromised tradition, but collisions so beautiful that boundaries become obsolete in a beguiling tension the band describes as: "The two natures of the world: Yin and Yang, male and female... day and night, the sun and the moon."

As with many of the tracks, *Viburnum Orchard* features Mercedes Peón, happily lost in this most vivid of lucid dreams. She burnishes and echoes obvious and comfortable melodies into a brilliant outsider narrative, a disturbing dance with a percussive background. The result is Galicia meets Warsaw. Brass, when it unexpectedly arrives, is radical and genuinely ethereal in contrast.



Photo: © Judith Burrows

Paul James

These songs may be experiments within estranged folklores, or glimmers cast by new instruments in unfamiliar contexts, but the band insist that the recording sessions saw a complete trust in the "heterogeneity and charisma" of their guests. There are delicate contributions from Ustad Liaquat Ali Khan on revelatory sarangi, Michał Zaborski on viola, DJ Feel-X behind the decks, and Amrat Hussain and Sanjay Khan (of the Dhoad Gypsies from Rajasthan) on tabla and harmonium respectively. They fit seamlessly into the familiar WVB set-up of fiddles, viola, dulcimer, hurdy-gurdy, bass, extensive percussion and brass. And Kayan Kalhor, playing the Iranian kemanche, is listed in the liner notes, quite simply, as "genius"; the band talk about how his contributions made them feel "as if every single cell, all nerves and synapses, vibrated". And all this listener's synapses seemed to do exactly that, too.

www.kzwww.pl

John Pheby

SERANDOU

Zinder Hirustica HIR011966

The ingredients that make up this stew are very diverse: lovely Malian voices, Irish wooden flute, calabash percussion, experimental jazz tuba, kamélé n'goni, African flute, live electronics... let's mix in some more flutes; let's try pifano and 'Flute Japurutu' (whatever that is!). We need some more percussion so we'll put in some Brazilian pandeiro and some godjé from Niger. Now the sauce: that should consist of free-form improvisation, cook slowly and we can dish up an album called *Zinder*.

The resulting meal is very indigestible at first. It would be easy to follow an early dismissive opinion but experience tells us to persist. These practiced musicians all have good reputations and they would not persevere with this unless they were onto something.

Repeated listening does bring some rewards. The traditional Malian parts are the easiest to latch on to. The delightful voice of Yacouba Moumouni accompanied by the harp-like kamélé n'goni provides a calm oasis but then the links between what the flutes are contributing begin to emerge as they start to follow the same complex lines and gradually the music begins to touch the right spots for the listener. In the end it is the longer tracks that are the most satisfactory, especially the nearly ten minutes of *Hardouy-*

ounousou. This is never going to be easy music to listen to. It does not reveal all its facets at first glance, but stick with it and you will get there in the end.

www.hirustica.com

Vic Smith

TREBUNIE-TUTKI & QUINTET URMULI

Duch Gor – The Spirit Of The Mountains Unzipped Fly UFCD 010

After their unlikely but entertaining collaboration with reggae band the Twinkle Brothers, family band Trebunie-Tutki from the Tatra highlands of southern Poland have been looking for other effective combinations, and they've found a good one, indeed a much more natural and integrated blend, with the Georgian traditional vocal and instrumental quintet Quintet Urmuli.

The Georgians don't just bring their rich polyphonic vocals but Georgian instruments too: Georgian lutes panduri, bass panduri and bass chonguri, bagpipe, salamuri whistle and bowed chuniri.

In Krzysztof Trebunia-Tutka's high-straining voice in traditional Góralaska style I hear a lot of his late father Władysław, who was the patriarch of the family and band, which now comprises Krzysztof on vocals, fiddle, bagpipe, wooden single and double whistles and long wooden trumpet, Jan Trebunia-Tutka's vocals and viola and Anna Trebunia-Wyrostek's voice and chugging highland cello, with Andrzej Polak and Kuba Wilk on fiddle and double bass.

The material comes from both groups. It includes fine versions of several of Trebunie-Tutki's best known songs, including Hej Giewoncie, Krzysztof and Władysław's slow tribute to their local mountain Giewont. The slow songs soar and surge, and the up-tempo songs are a coming-together of the celebratory spirits of the two traditions.

The contrast with the shapes of the Georgian songs brings out Tatra highland music's strongly characteristic scale with its natural-scale type augmented fourth. Most striking exposition of this is the tensely serene final track, Anna Trebunia-Wyrostek's singing of *Aniol (Angel)*, to droning bowed bass, dusty harmonic slithering fiddles and touches of duduk melody

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Andrew Cronshaw

ROSIE HODGSON

Rise Aurora Rosie Hodgson

Rosie Hodgson describes her music as "with-out bells and whistles", trusting on the audible magic woven by her and Rowan Piggott through voice, fiddle and guitar. And, by and large, this rings true. *Rise, Aurora* is an impressive debut album by this young singer-songwriter who has risen through the folk circuit to become a BBC Young Folk Awards finalist. This album shows startling originality, with every track either written or arranged by her or Piggott – stretching from an adaptation of a Kipling poem to a *Liverpool Lullaby* written when Hodgson was only fourteen.

When trying to describe Hodgson's voice, comparisons to the distinctive singing voices of figures such as Bella Hardy and Kate Rusby can easily be drawn – her tones are certainly haunting and beguiling. Whilst the smooth sound of her voice sometimes has the tendency to push songs towards a slower, more restful rhythm, Piggott's smooth and infectious fiddle lines manage to pick the tune up and carry it onward, forcing the listeners to tap their feet and keeping the song moving.