

MOONLIGHT BENJAMIN

Siltane Ma Case MACASE025



"Some Haitian Voodoo inspired by The Black Keys and The White Stripes... The powerful and original fusion between the Caribbean voodoo melodies and rhythms, and '70s blues rock; the shock between Moonlight's powerful and rebel-

lious voice and the tension of saturated guitars... the voodoo trance in a new and explosive style!" goes the excitable little blurb on her label's website. But they're not wrong.

Her multi-racial rock quartet (guitar, bass, drums, percussion) fronted by guitarist and arranger Matthis Pascaud is quite something. We were all brought up in the last century to believe that French rock music wasn't very good. Well, maybe that was then and this is now because they're really tough and on the nail. Better than most of the predictable blues rock that you'll hear from the tired old Anglophone world, anyway, and with – instead of anticipated Caribbean lilt, other than on the stand-out *Port-au-Prince* which goes all surf-compas – even a little hint of that desert blues thing in there, adding spice in among the choppy Wilko-esque crackle and ringing clang. And non-lead drumming too, just that little lift behind the beat which is a rare plus in the rock world.

But it's her voice that's the star, a flexible growly gutbucket wowl of a thing, singing in Haitian Creole and French. She teases and cajoles you, all Port-au-Prince rootster, soul blues mama and punky rock queen at the same time. Impressive, especially on the short voodoo chant *Simbi* to just a frantic percussion backdrop.

If this sounds like your thing, hop on YouTube and check out the video for opener *Memwa'n*. If that taster doesn't convince you, there's little hope. Oh, and she's selected for a WOMEX showcase this year.

moonlightbenjamin.com

Ian Anderson

BLOWZABELLA

Two Score Blowzabella 4



If I've counted correctly, the good brethren and sistren of Blowzabella – Andy Cutting, Jo Freya, Paul James, Gregory Jolivet, Dave Shepherd, Barnaby Stradling and Jon Swayne – play somewhere between 26 and 32 different instruments through the

course of this gramophone record, charging between electric alto hurdy gurdy, bass clarinet, diatonic button accordion, border bagpipes, alto sax, electric bass and, er, triangle. Small wonder they sound like nobody else... and in the course of their 40-year career, they never have done.

A wily old poke in the eye to Brexiteers everywhere, they simultaneously sound very English – especially when Jo Freya takes on a vocal like *Adam Was A Poacher* and *Uttoxeter Souling Song* – yet still, after all these years, rampagingly Euro... and often quite mad. Brass presents a hefty rhythm stomp, while hurdy gurdy, fiddle and accordion weave patterns that whip you into some far distant parallel universe where you dance, you sing, you do somersaults among bluebells, you quaff magic ale and you smile until your ears fall off. It sounds like it is the music of some ancient tradition, yet it is fresh and alert also. There is virtuosity a-plenty in their instrumental interplay, musical banter and complex



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arrangements yet, even with the likes of Andy Cutting, Paul James and Gregory Jolivet aboard, the individual brilliance is still surpassed by the sum of the parts.

Here, on what must be something like their fourteenth album, their own song and tune writing gets a generous airing – with some radical adaptations along the way, such as the *Lark Descending/Bushes & Briars* variation assembled by Paul James in homage to Vaughan Williams; the sprightly *Grenoside Processional Dance*, created by Dave Shepherd's dad Dick Shepherd in 1951; a bunch of polkas written by Jo Freya and a wild and wonderful tune by Paul James called *Coteeto*, which at times wanders into the realms of modern jazz.

The music is played with a broad smile and an uplifting spirit that will warm the cockles of your heart... and the heart of your cockles.

You heard a track on the Spring issue's *fRoots 68* compilation

blowzabella.co.uk

Colin Irwin

MARIZA

Mariza Warner Portugal 0190295639143



Easily the best part of this year's Eurovision 'Song' Contest was the opening fado sequence, with Ana Moura followed by the great Mariza, her *Barco Negro* accompanied by a phalanx of percussionists. Portugal didn't pull off the double this time – they were, after all, up against an Israeli chicken impressionist in a kimono – but

oddly, this new album indicates that they might have seriously missed a trick with what they entered.

I hardly need remind some of you of the scorn previously heaped on producer/pianist Javier Limon in these pages, who has consistently managed to drag some of the world's great women vocalists down into soulless MOR territory. So it's more than a pleasure to report that this superbly constructed album doesn't sound like any sort of previous Limon production I've encountered at all: indeed there's barely the tinkle of a cocktail piano to be detected, and Mariza herself is singing from the heart, as only she can. That voice really is in best possible shape here.

Even more startling, the repertoire often strays reasonably widely from 'traditional' fado into a range of modern songs that would, frankly, have wiped the floor with anything heard on that annual TV marathon. They might not be classic fado or typical Mariza fare, but more mainstream tracks like *Amor Perfeito* or the jazz-inflected ballad *Por Tanto Te Amar* have 'international hit' written all over them.

Everything is perfectly anchored in a clear production with Mariza's voice at the centre, with José Manuel Neto's Portuguese guitar always strongly featured alongside guitarist Pedro Jóia, US-based Australian bassist Lucy Clifford, and inventive percussion from Israel 'Piraña' Suarez (on *Verde Limão* in particular). Credit where due: Limon has pulled off the trick of making a more broadly commercial album that long-term Mariza fado fans shouldn't have any difficulty with at all.

I needn't have left it in its shrink wrap on my desk for several days while I summoned up the courage to play it after all. Phew!

mariza.com

Ian Anderson