

REVIEWS



Photo: Judith Burrows

Catrin Finch & Seckou Keita



Photo: Brian Shuel

The Young Tradition

CATRIN FINCH & SECKOU KEITA

Clychau Dibon Astar Mwlden AACDA 025

ELLIKA SOLO RAFAEL

Now Country & Eastern CE26

She was a highly respected Welsh harpist, he was a Nottingham-based master of the West



African kora... together they made beautiful music! No, not the tagline for the unlikeliest rom-com ever made, but rather a description of *Clychau Dibon*, a meeting of musical minds that works like a treat. You can read the cover story of *fRoots* 361 to find out the tale behind the album, but you really don't need to know the details in order to appreciate the simple pleasures on offer here. Finch and Keita play with and around each other as if Wales and Mali were natural musical bedfellows. At times it's hard to work out who's playing what, as the strings ripple and shimmer for all they're worth. There are many wonderful contemplative moments here, but surprising improvisatory edges and flourishes too, with both players pushing just enough to move things away from the pleasant and twee. Some people spend a lot of money on illegal substances in order to attain the kind of mood this music evokes.

www.astarmusic.co.uk

The template for such Euro-West African acoustic shenanigans was set, in part at least, by



Tretakt Takissaba, a 2003 collaboration between Swedish violinist Erika Frisell and Senegalese kora-man Solo Cissokho, which deservedly bagged a BBC Award for World Music back then. A decade later and they've joined up with percussionist Rafael Sida Huizar (originally from Mexico, now based in Sweden) for a three-way cultural conversation that somehow sounds like they're all

speaking the same language. It's less impressionistic and more song-based than *Tretakt Takissaba* with Cissokho taking the vocal lead in typically gruff griot style. But it's instrumentally that the trio really shine. Where the Finch & Keita album sounds all of a piece, *Now* is full of unexpected twists and turns. The kora can suddenly sound like a Mexican harp, the percussion West African and Frisell's fiddle and viola dance round it all. Very well worth seeking out.

www.countryandeastern.se

Jamie Renton

THE YOUNG TRADITION

Oberlin 1968 Fledg'ling FLED3094

THE YOUNG TRADITION

The Young Tradition/So Cheerfully Round/Galleries/Chicken On A Raft BGO CD1103

Forty five years on but even now – or maybe especially now – Young Tradition blow your head off. Built around Peter Bellamy's famously idiosyncratic phrasing and eccentric stylisation, they sound like they've just landed from another planet with a brief to turn traditional folk song on its head. This they achieved in spectacular fashion and few groups of the modern era (or indeed any era since they abandoned ship at the fog end of the 1960s) have replicated their extraordinary passion, power and sense of identity. More's the pity. When Young Tradition sang a song, they sang it to within an inch of its life and it was hard to imagine anyone else doing it afterwards... even when it was drawn directly from the tradition's primary sources like Harry Cox and the Copper Family.

The recently discovered live recording from Oberlin College in Ohio in 1968 is especially fascinating, capturing them in something approximating their prime and duly restored to a pretty



decent sound quality. All the distinctive YT facets are there – Bellamy on soaring, whooping overload while Heather Wood's voice dances elegantly on top of it with Royston Wood's bass vocals giving the whole thing a coherent root. Completely unaccompanied, it includes many of their old favourites, including *Banks Of Claudy*, *Banks Of The Nile*, *The Foxhunt* and *The Two Magicians*; each member of the group takes a solo with Heather Wood getting the best audience reaction with her deft *My Husband's Got No Courage In Him*. But inevitably Bellamy's is the voice that keeps you gripped, wondering where it will dip and dive next. Shanties were their speciality and, never mind folk groups, any rock band of the time would have struggled to match the intensity with which they erupt into *Haul On The Bowline*. And those who consider *Little Sally Racket* one of Bellowhead's most extreme tracks might be interested in the ferocity with which YT attacked it in 1968 under the title *Haul 'Em Away*.

www.thebeesknees.com

The BGO double CD collection basically puts the entire YT studio sessions – including the 1968 *Chicken On A Raft EP* – under one roof in digitally remastered form. It's thus a valuable resource for anyone wishing to understand why they made such a sensational contribution to the folk revival – and why wouldn't they? The chronological course, though, suggests they were running out of ideas by the end and their tentative and ill-advised move into early music territory on *Galleries* probably doesn't rank beyond curiosity value despite the contributions of Dave Swarbrick, Dolly Collins and the Early Music Consort.

There are some surprises in their earlier material. While *Byker Hill* from their powerhouse 1965 debut is classic explosive YT, they follow it with a movingly tender lead vocal from Bellamy on *The Bold Fisherman*, and Royston Wood – sometimes dismissively considered merely the bass voice tempering Bellamy's vocal gymnastics – turns in a glorious unaccompanied solo delivery of *Dives & Lazarus*. There's some strong material on *So Cheerfully Round*

too, including a beautifully pure *Bold Dragoon* from Heather, and Bellamy's *The Old Miser* offers an interesting flavour of the colourful solo singer he was to become.

And, for all its faults, *Galleries* does offer a contrasting perception of their voices when pitched against the precise musical accompaniment of the Early Music Consort. It also includes a great version of *Bitter Withy*, plus a rare chance to hear Bellamy as impressive old blues howler – albeit in parody form with record scratches and all – on *Entracte: Stones In My Passway*. He could have been a serious blues man, he really could. And this package serves as both valuable introduction and joyous celebration of a group who still sound entirely different to anything before or since.

www.bgo-records.com

Colin Irwin

MLIMANI PARK ORCHESTRA / INTERNATIONAL ORCHESTRA SAFARI SOUND

Zanzibara 7 – Sikinde vs Ndekule Buda Musique 860241

A *Zanzibara* release, but important to note that the label actually deals with all the east coast of Africa. Dar es Salaam is where this music here comes from, a late-'80s assembly of superb *musiki wa dansi* tracks from two of Tanzania's leading orchestras of the time. It's all arranged in the form of a Battle of the Bands with alternating tracks from the Mlimani Park and Safari bands. Sounds a bit contrived, but in practice this does not make for bad listening. It does underline the differences – and actually corresponds with the bands' status as the two best in Dar es Salaam, each followed by their hordes of partisan fans. The rivalry began in 1985 when local impresario Hugo Kisima poached six members of the Mlimani Park Orchestra – then the unchallenged kingpins, high-stepping residents at the Mlimani Park bar – to be the nucleus of a reformed Safari band to play at his Safari Resort in the suburbs. Feelings ran high at this treachery. Battle lines were drawn. The bands released message-laden songs and counter-songs that stung. Great fun – and they spurred each other to new musical heights.

Mlimani Park Orchestra



Photo: Ian Anderson

Musiki wa dansi was built on the Congolese rumba model, with gentle exposition and then, foundations laid and anticipation high, stopping and moving up a gear with the supercharged *seben* section. Many emigré Congolese musicians fleeing Mobutu's Zaïre found work in East Africa. But the Tanzanian style, incorporating local elements to produce a more compelling product, ended up faster and some would say more exhilarating than Congolese rumba. When you have either of these great bands at full stretch, smooth harmonies urged on by blazing brass, light drums skittering beside circling guitars, it's a very special kind of music. This anthology captures the magic perfectly.

www.budamusique.com

Rick Sanders

CAPERCAILLIE

At The Heart Of It All Vertical Records VERTCD100

Thirty years on, and with their first album in ten years, Capercaillie once again demonstrate convinc-



ingly they are still masters at introducing new life into traditional Gaelic songs and tunes. Karen Matheson's singing is as glorious as ever whether singing up-tempo waulking songs or doomy ballads, and Charlie McKerron, Manus Lunny, Donald Shaw, Ewan Vernal and Mike McGoldrick have always been in the 'band to die for' category despite all the young masters and mistresses that have emerged more recently.

Coming back full circle with pretty much an entirely acoustic album, the opening waulking song *S'Och A' Dhomhnaill Oig Ghaolaich* features atmospheric sax from Edinburgh jazzier Tommy Smith weaving in and out of the fiddle and pipes but that and some modest brass elsewhere is about as far as it goes on the innovation front – there's nothing to frighten the horses. Just frighteningly good music and beautiful singing, with occasional friendly help from the cream of the crop like Gerry O'Connor, Kathleen MacInnes, Julie Fowles, Kris Drever, Aidan O'Rourke, and some fiery piping from Jarlath Henderson.

The Jura Wedding Reels and *Cal's Jigs* show they can still rock acoustically with the best of them, without any fuss or bother, like a well-oiled machine... just wonderful. They

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