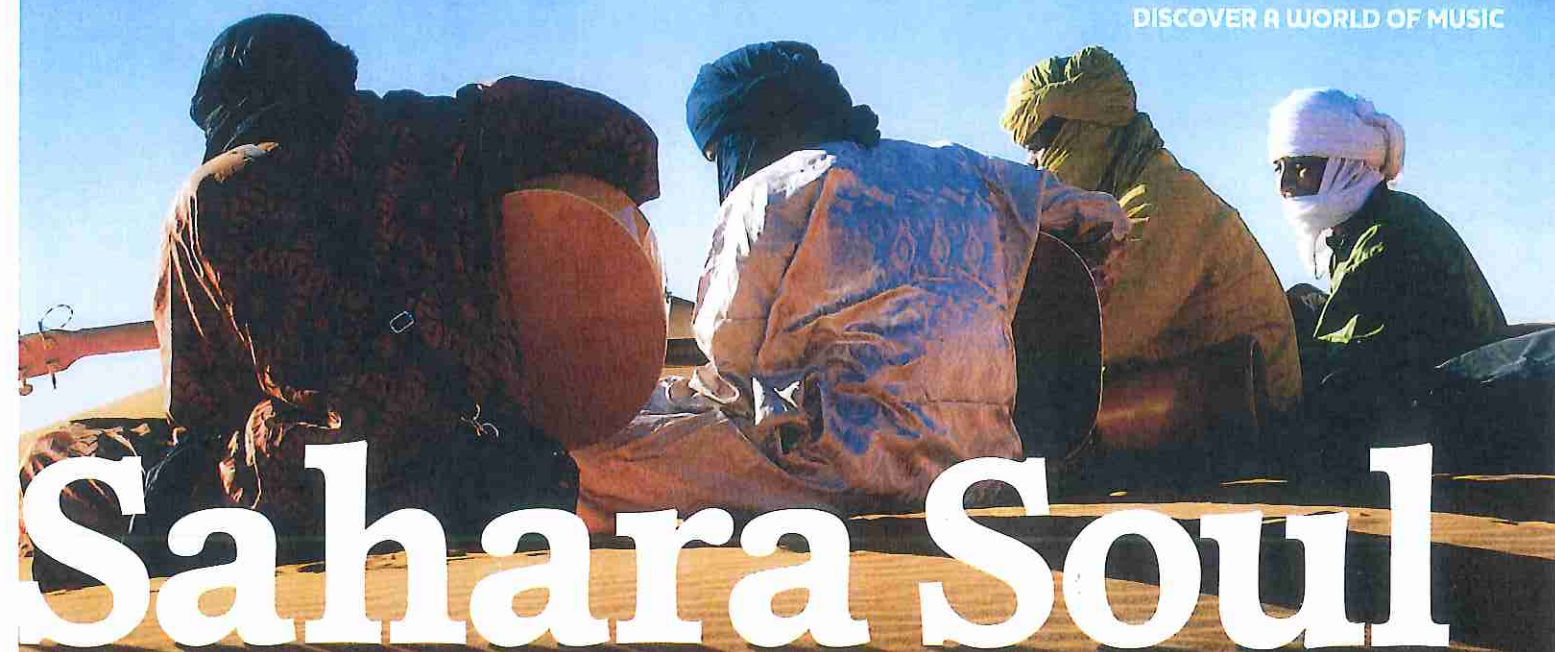


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Europe REVIEWS

Gather the Good finds the two pairs of brothers – David and Martin Howley and Enda and Fergal Scallan – adding Canadian and Scottish touches to their already rich mix, together with piquant splashes of the blues and the occasional assistance of James Blenner Hasset on double bass. The transatlantic acoustic mash-up proves hugely enjoyable, the quartet pushing through one smartly crafted, deftly executed performance after another. What results is an altogether seamless and sophisticated mingling of traditional instrumentals, original material and cover versions; Enda Scallan's touchingly reflective 'It's Hard to Be 3' and an evocatively lonesome-sounding take on the Johnny Cash standard 'The Long Black Veil' being the standouts.

All four take on banjo duties throughout and variously take up mandolin, guitar fiddle and viola. Seven-time all-Ireland champion Martin Howley reveals himself time and again to be a dazzling force of nature and while David Howley's and Enda Scallan's vocal contributions may perhaps sound less persuasive to some, there's no denying the instrumental prowess of all concerned throughout.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *Pressed for Time*

Nick Wyke & Becki Driscoll A Handful of Sky

Wildgoose Records (50 mins)

★★★★☆

Not a cloud in sight

This is a pair of musicians steeped in the folk music and traditions of the south-west – Becki Driscoll comes from Bridport and is now based in north Devon with Nick Wyke. Both have worked with Wren Music, the West Country's purveyors and educators in local folk traditions, with Wyke being an aficionado of the tunes of William Andrew of Dartmoor. *A Handful of Sky* combines traditional

tunes with original works, but the main focus is on songs and tunes from the south-west – the opening salutary narrative of 'Rambleaway', the equally cautionary 'The Cornwall Apprentice', and tunes such as 'The Bridgewater Hornpipe/The Dorchester Hornpipe'.

Their playing is exemplary, their ability to draw the ear of the listener having been honed by their experiences as itinerant Mediterranean buskers, and their work on fiddle and viola is *A Handful of Sky's* greatest strength. Wyke's vocals sometimes seem to me as too youthful to convincingly handle some of the darker lyrical matter, though Driscoll's wispy, delicate take on 'The Cruel Mother' is suitably chilling set to a pizzicato background. But their arrangements and performances are the set's main meat – the tunes, dances, and the beautiful, haunting title-track.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *A Handful of Sky*

Yom Le Silence de l'Exode

Buda Musique (57 mins)

★★★★☆

The one-take wonder of klezmer clarinet



French clarinettist Yom has made seven albums that reflect an eclectic spirit that defies categorisation,

underlining the malleability of his instrument. His latest release – loosely inspired by the three-score years his Jewish ancestors endured in Old Testament Sinai – underlines his clarinet's ability to gel with different musical and instrumental repertoires. The Iranian percussion of Bijan Chemirani, double bass of Claude Tchamitchian and Oriental cello wielded by Farid D all find ample expression alongside Yom's soaring clarinet. *Le Silence de l'Exode* was originally commissioned by the Île de France festival in 2012 and Yom successfully recreated a live feel via a one-take, minimal editing studio recording. The result is a far cry from the electronic mixtures Yom created in *Green Apocalypse* (2012), the rock-infused *Unue* (2009) or the intimate klezmer sounds of *The Golem on the Moon* (2004). This ambitious tapestry is a pleasant homage to distant roots through instruments forging a common language that is smoothly meditative and uplifting.

DANIEL BROWN

TRACK TO TRY *Sarab*

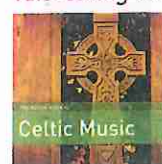
VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Rough Guide to Celtic Music

World Music Network (2 CDs, 104 mins)

★★★★☆

Tale-telling tunes



On the plus side, this is a substantially more satisfying compilation than the now-deleted 2005 collection of the same name. That's in part due to the theme of storytelling that underpins the otherwise catch-all definition of 'Celtic' here. Best, perhaps, to ignore the generalised rationale and go straight to the music. But with the Celtic traditions of Ireland, Scotland and Wales taking up nine of the baker's dozen of tracks, there's little room for wider context. Yann-Fañch Kemener & Aldo Ripoché's beautifully melancholic instrumental arrangement of François Couperin's 'L'Angélique' is the only offering from Brittany, but hardly indicative of the region. North America's Irish inheritance is evidenced by the brisk virtuosity of Solas, the subtle bluegrass accents of fellow compatriots Vishtèn and a lively fiddle-guitar offering from Canadians Liz Carroll & John Doyle.

Elsewhere, contributions by Capercaillie, Altan, Cara Dillon, Gráda and Welsh outfit Ffynnon catch the ear – but not enough to securely stitch the album's concept together. A bonus CD, 2007's *Rooz* by Cornish trio Dalla, provides a pungent taste of a tradition ignored by the main album.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *The Butcher Boy* by Gráda

Vintage Balkan Beats

JSP Records (69 mins)

★★★★☆

It's all Greek to me



While this compilation's title cheekily refers to that club craze for remixes of Balkan brass tunes, the recordings here are of vernacular music from the southern Balkans unadorned by modern, electric or electronic instruments. Here you have musicians – some celebrated, others obscure – who sang for the communities they lived in during the first half of the 20th century. The music they made then has lasted well and it makes me wonder if recordings

of the likes of Shantel or Balkan Beat Box will also stand the test of time.

Do note: this album might be more accurately titled 'Vintage Greek Beats', so predominant is the *rebetika*. There are individual tunes from Bulgaria and Turkey but they are overwhelmed by the amount of Greek recordings. Where the Balkan beats scene largely used brass bands, there's not a single brass recording. This is primarily for rebetika aficionados.

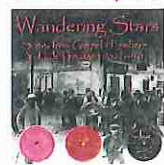
GARTH CARTWRIGHT
TRACK TO TRY *To Moiroloi Vathi* by Kitos Harisiadis

Wandering Stars: Songs from Gimpel's Lemberg Yiddish Theatre 1906-1910

Renair Records (76 mins)

★★★★☆

The smell of the greasypaint, the roar of the crowd

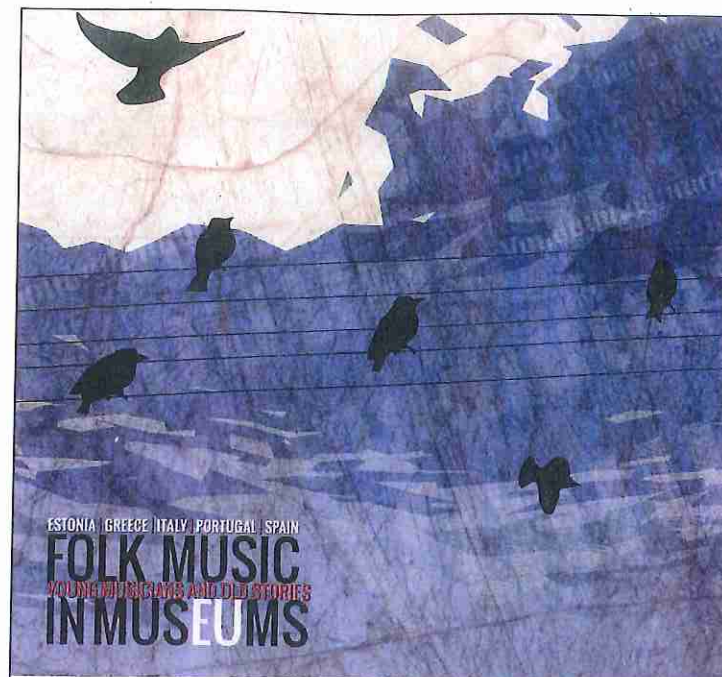


This extraordinary collection of Yiddish theatre songs, produced by Julian Futter and Mike Aylward, is the outcome of a ten-year project involving the restoration of numerous old recordings. Gimpel's theatre in Lemberg (now Lviv in the Ukraine) was a venue that endured for almost 50 years. It retained strong links with other Yiddish theatre ventures in Europe, New York and London with performers often moving between those places. Although the 25 tracks are from the Yiddish theatre repertoire, they cover an extensive musical range: opera, operetta, Jewish liturgical music, classical music and Yiddish and European folk song. They illustrate a rich Yiddish cultural life in one place while confirming the mobility of the culture across countries and continents.

Piano and violin predominate, with some tracks incorporating full orchestral accompaniments. In 'Blumale Duet', Leon Kalisch and Helene Gespass conduct a duet concerning the agonies of teenage love. We hear operatic influences mixed with a range of surprising musical styles. Some tracks feature words only; a theatrical kind of rapping recitative. Futter and Aylward have brought rare materials to the contemporary listener, and are clearly pointing the way towards further unveilings and a deeper study of the Yiddish musical repertoire and tradition: a tremendous achievement.

HELEN BEER

TRACK TO TRY *Ein Ueberkerenisch* by Komisches Terzett



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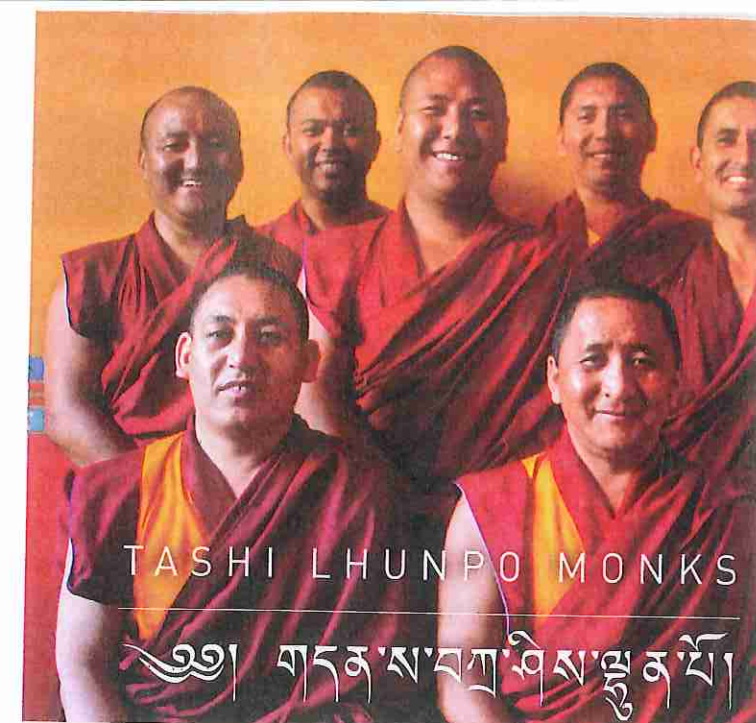
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