

Europe REVIEWS

course, instrument maker Tudual Hervieux made a series of new instruments to fit with the modal scales of singing from his native Lower Brittany. His instruments link these modes with other modal cultures.

Over the course of their studies the band have worked with a range of masters musicians including Fawaz Baker, Mehdi Addab, Yom, Naisam Jalal, Titi Robin and Samir Kurtov. The resulting music is a virtuoso blend of reeds, electronics, and rhythms, recorded live for this CD from three different venues in Brittany. Some of the arrangements and tracks are too reminiscent of the precedent collectives (each based on a different theme, ie bowed string instruments or, in this case, bagad bands), yet there are still beautiful discoveries for aficionados, like the fourth track, which starts on a beautiful and unexpected Moondog composition.

ANNE GE

TRACK TO TRY *Witch of Endor/Ololé/Pibroch*

Kvarts To Tiår

Kvarts (41 mins)

★★★★★

Pleasant Norwegian folk that doesn't push any boundaries



Norwegian quartet Kvarts return with their eighth album *To Tiår*. Featuring a multi-instrumental line-up spanning 12 tracks, Jo Asgeir Lie, Øystein Rudi, Tom Willy Rustad and Erlend Styve play a variety of instruments ranging from strings (including Hardanger fiddle) to accordion and jaw harp. If you're looking for pleasant Nordic folk sounds, then look no further, though for experimental, boundary-pushing material, you are wiser to look elsewhere. That said, there is plenty of variety here – joyful dances alongside darker material – to keep you satisfied, and the album is long enough to properly immerse yourself without feeling short-changed. A variety of instruments as you go through each track avoids the pitfall of each number sounding like a variation of the other. There's energy and polish to the more uplifting material, with bright tempos and a deft touch from the players. And there's an equally yearning sorrowfulness in other tracks. The ensemble playing is tight and assured, surely a result of two decades of playing together. Booklet notes with personalised descriptions of the

inspiration for each track make an interesting read (in Norwegian). A pleasant, rewarding and varied album.

JAMES RORISTON

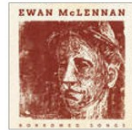
TRACK TO TRY *Berg*

Ewan McLennan Borrowed Songs

Ewan McLennan (36 mins)

★★★★★

Songs of the people from conscientious Scots troubadour



It is rare to hear an album that confronts you with such a powerful sense of who a person is and what they're about. Throughout this acute, politically engaged work of protest folk, Ewan McLennan's voice rings out loud and clear. Although McLennan is only in his early 30s, the London-born Scot has now been a standard bearer for traditional song and the songwriting inspired by it across several albums. His approach is similar to that spearheaded by Ewan MacColl and developed by singers such as Roy Bailey. Songs move seamlessly from familiar trad numbers to his own perceptive songs without a jolt, aided by his fluent acoustic guitar and propulsive banjo. The latter imbues the songs such as 'Blacking the Engines' with some of the flinty lyricism of old-time American music.

McLennan's art is impressive enough to well deserve comparisons to Dick Gaughan or Leon Rosselson. But it impresses almost a little too easily. Both *Stick in the Wheel* and *Lankum* have recently shown how an acid wit can sharpen the edges of political folk music into a jagged weapon. Some of their energising vitriol wouldn't go amiss in scouring a little more urgency into McLennan's music. Nevertheless, there's a powerful sense of purpose here, a palpable commitment to speaking of and for people.

MATT MILTON

TRACK TO TRY *Blacking the Engines*

Megson Little Bird

Ed.J Records (38 mins)

★★★★★

Folk songs for kids from one to 92



More incisive, searing social and political commentary revealing how folk music can speak as much for our times as it could for 19th century industrial workers... hang on, that was Megson's last studio album,

Debbie and Stu Hanna, aka Megson, sing folk songs for kids of all ages



Rob Bridge

Con-tra-dic-shun (#147). If you want the perfect antidote for these achingly serious times, try *Little Bird: Another Collection of Children's Folk Songs*.

I know it's a hackneyed old phrase, but these really are folk songs for kids from one to 92. There are the classics – from 'Bobby Shaftoe' to 'Coming Round the Mountain' and 'Ha Ha This a Way' – alongside brilliantly inventive new material, such as 'Marjory Clogs', a song that sounds like a timeless nursery rhyme. For those older, folk aficionado kids, there's also a transatlantic flavour with a couple of songs taken from Pete Seeger's repertoire – 'All Around the Kitchen' and the title-track. And this album's version of trawling Roud folk ballads involves Iona and Peter Opie's *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Even if you think you've heard things like 'Coming Round the Mountain' enough for one lifetime, Megson's treatment brings you something new – in this case, a beautiful minor note at the end of the chorus that transforms the song. Lovely, uplifting stuff – and there's even a spaniel called Nathaniel. What more could you want?

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Coming Round the Mountain*

Christy Moore Magic Nights

Columbia (2 CDs, 101 mins)

★★★★★

Capturing the magic of the Irish icon's live performances



Fifty years after his debut LP, Christy Moore's latest solo offering sees the Irish icon trawling through his live back catalogue for a two-disc set of 26 never-before-released recordings.

Drawn from appearances across Ireland and the UK, *Magic Nights* proves a perfect companion to 2017's similarly sourced *On the Road*, adroitly showcasing Moore in his element: before a live audience. Start with the second disc where the accent is on soul-bearing intimacy.

There's a gripping account of Jackson Browne's 'Before the Deluge', haunting Appalachian accents on the fretful 'Only Our Rivers Run Free' and the forlorn 'Missing You'. Moore's take on Trent Reznor's 'Hurt' dilutes Johnny Cash's valedictory anguish with keening regretfulness. And oh, to have been there for the knowing winks and silky playfulness of 'Johnny Jump Up' with its momentary, crowd-pleasing lapse of memory. Marked by greater variety, the first disc boasts a searing take on Charlie Murphy's 'Burning Times' recorded in Belfast and dedicated to journalist Lyla McKee and a softly stirring 'Spencilhill' with the Glaswegian audience singing along with quiet rapture. Moore aficionados will find much to please here in a blend of familiar songs and some welcome surprises. Kudos, too, to engineer David Meade and producer Jimmy Higgins for clarity of sound and engaging atmosphere.

MICHAEL QUINN

TRACK TO TRY *Hurt*

Stéphane Wrembel Django l'Impressionniste

Water is Life Records (67 mins)

★★★★★

Django disciple reimagines little-known pieces



Perhaps best known for his Grammy-winning soundtrack to Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*,