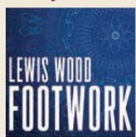


Lewis Wood
Footwork

Grimdon Records (35 mins)

★★★★★

Richly varied celebration of English regional step dancing



The debut album from English fiddler Lewis Wood is something of a concept album –

and it's a nice concept. *Footwork* takes as its neat premise step and clog dancing traditions from across the country. Each original tune has been penned in a style that suits each dance form, creating a richly varied instrumental album. Wood is a seasoned *ceilidh* musician and member of several bands on the UK folk circuit, most notably Granny's Attic (reviewed in November 2021, #172). For his first solo outing, Wood was keen to focus on lesser-known dance traditions of

the British Isles. People around the world are familiar with *ceilidh* dancing and even morris dancing, but the lesser known step and clog traditions bring a special value and character to this release.

And the character is enhanced by the sound of the footwork, from leading dancers Melanie Barber, Toby Bennett, Lynette Eldon, Lisa Sture, and Simon and Jo Harmer. Perhaps because of the attention to different dance styles, this is an unusually textured instrumental album with great variety of tempo and tone from the violin and guitar alongside the striking rhythms of the dancers' shoes.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *Mel's Hornpipe*



minutes long as she's strung sequences of related poems together. The lyrics are transcribed in Hungarian, but not translated. However, there is some superb instrumental playing with most tracks accompanied by a traditional string trio of violin, viola playing *kontra* and double bass, although one lengthy track is accompanied only by Zoltán Juhász on *furulya* (flute). The closing track is unaccompanied. For non-Hungarian speakers, the music isn't as appealing perhaps as the more catchy dance repertoire, but this is clearly a fresh and important exploration of the rich canon of Szék.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Gondold Meg Édesem Elejét-utóját*

Stampestuen
Bak Lås Og Slå

Stampestuen (41 mins)

★★★★★

Tales of burglars and outcasts



From thieves to murderers this is a collection of songs about outcasts of Norwegian society in the 19th century.

With a title that translates as 'Behind Bars,' there are songs featuring those who found themselves on the wrong side of the law and became legends such as Ole Høiland who robbed the Norwegian Central Bank in 1835, and some who, simply through poverty, became beggars and ended up behind bars. The stories are mostly told as ballads, full of character and history, but what makes this album so compelling is the wonderfully imaginative arrangements by this fine Norwegian quartet. Between them they play fiddles, guitars, banjo, accordion, dulcimer, reed organ and harmonica to accompany the vocals that are rich and bring a real sensitivity to the stories.

The textures seem fresh and alive with each track as you might expect from great performers who are already well known in Norway's folk and jazz scenes. Even if you don't speak Norwegian, you can feel the heartache of 'Stavangervise', the tale of a young woman whose only crime was poverty and homelessness, or find yourself caught up in the energy of 'Grusomme Skjebne' about a master thief who became a great writer while in prison. I'm looking forward to the next Stampestuen offering already.

FIONA TALKINGTON

TRACK TO TRY *Ole Høiland*

Steeleye Span
Good Times of Old England

Chrysalis (12 CDs, 600 mins)

★★★★★

The ultimate Span set



Span are still a touring and recording band, like their 70s folk-rock compatriots Fairport, and a

good portion of their repertoire still draws its strength from the albums collected in this 12-CD box set of their Chrysalis catalogue, spanning 1972-1983, from the rugged *Below the Salt* to the fade-out that was *Sails of Silver* in 1980, co-founder Tim Hart's last turn with the band. Between we get eight studio albums with a sprig or two of tasty extras, including alternate takes, instrumental versions and singles. Then there are the four live albums, finest among them a 1974 set from the Rainbow, and 1978's brilliant *Live at Last* that featured the return of Martin Carthy, accompanied by squeezebox king John Kirkpatrick. The studio album that preceded it, *Storm Force Ten*, is one of this set's revelations, and one of their most powerful albums.

The famous top-ten hit 'All Around My Hat' may be their calling card when it comes to taking their place at the banquet of music history, but there are lesser-known treasures aplenty, and the hours of music here include definitive interpretations of 'Sheepcreek and Black Dog', 'Thomas the Rhymer', 'Alison Gross' and 'Fighting for Strangers', and while some albums do contain filler ('Twinkle Twinkle Little Star', anyone?) they also contain strange wonders, and star turns from Peter Sellers ('New York Girls') as well as from one D Bowie (prior to his *Diamond Dogs* tour) playing mellifluous sax on 'To Know Him is to Love Him'. If you have a taste for crunchy folk-rock imbued with glam and pop aesthetics, the £40 or so spent on *Good Times of Old England* will repay dividends time and again.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Thomas the Rhymer*

Stella
Up and Away

Sub Pop (31 mins)

★★★★★

Modern Greek folk pop



While unapologetically poppy at heart, there's a redeeming musical depth and (there's