

sion. Together, Aidan Shepherd, Rosie Holden, Ben Insall, Owen Hewson, Thom Harmsworth, James Gow and Andy Renshaw proudly encompass a healthy range of musical disciplines from improv and prog rock to ceiliidh bands. The outfit's driving force – and composer of virtually all of its repertoire – is accordionist Aidan, who gives his name to *Clearing's* opening track, which happens to be the only one on the disc to feature a recognisable tune from the folk world (in this instance Amy Cann's latter-day session staple *Catharsis* which appears after the interestingly irregular time-signatures of the track's ruminative opening section).

The ensuing sequence provides suitably contrasted and rewarding musical experiences. Legato clarinet and accordeon figures offset with the choppy euphonium and guitar rhythms that form the basis of *Ciao Ragazzi*, while an insistent cyclic motif conjures the motion of the lathe for *The Woodturner*. *Summertime* opens with a passage of creative electronica (courtesy of Seth Scott) that rather recalls Soft Machine, and its enigmatic lyricism is succeeded by the chunkier, forthright, almost violent fiddle-stabbing gestures of *V12*, the intriguing *Soundtrack*, the jittery Nymanesque busyness of *Medway Services* and the exuberant gallop of *Morning After* with its exhilarating Terry Riley counterpoint twixt fiddle, accordeon and euphonium. Finally, the playful Latin-inflected rhythms of disc closer *Chasing Tales* even afford opportunity for brief solos within the piece's taut three-and-a-half-minute span.

Arlet produce an intelligently coordinated blend of sounds and timbres, and admirers of 'progressive instrumental chamber folk' of the ilk of Penguin Cafe Orchestra, some of the more refined excursions of Caravan, or more recently the music of groups like Lau and Spiro perhaps, will find much that is subtly stimulating here.

www.arlet.co.uk

David Kidman

LAJKÓ FÉLIX

Mező / Field Fonó FA 283-2



At the time of writing this has been number one for two months in the World Music Chart Europe airplay chart. Félix Lajkó (in Hungarian name-order Lajkó Félix) is not only an elusive master of tradition-based fiddle improvisation, but also a brilliant player of the Hungarian fretted zither.

For this album, for the first time, he concentrates entirely on the latter, the multi-scrolled, open-based, table-played Hungarian zither, with two groups of fretted strings, the rest open as drones, related to the other European fretted zithers and their emigrant brother the Appalachian dulcimer. He plays fast-chop-strummed and wild, accompanied by his current band of Michael Kurina on cimbalom, Antal Brasyó's viola and Ferenc Kurina on double bass.

The same line-up, but with Félix playing both fiddle and zither, played their hearts out in a show at Poznan's always acutely-programmed Ethno Port festival this year that was a lifetime-memorable piece of pure music, with Félix totally immersed in and possessed by the music he was tearing out of his instruments, supported with perfect empathy by the band. It had the festival director in tears of fulfilment, and me close to, and was a gig that nothing could follow (except that immediately following it trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf and his band, on the last show of their tour, did another lifetime-great gig of total musical communication and emotion).



Lajko Felix

During the first few tracks of this album I was tending to the thought that without the fiddle as contrast, while the massively high-energy drive of Félix's zither is immediately attracting, it might be one of those albums that makes popular radio play a track at a time but as an album tends to sameyness. But then as the tracks pass it gets a grip, as I'm drawn into Félix's intense flow of consciousness and creativity. As was clear from the live show, this isn't a man showing off or calculating, it's a person putting his whole being into the music as it streams out of him. And when the last track finishes, in the silence there's a sense of loss, a feeling of 'what just happened?'

www.fono.hu

Andrew Cronshaw

MATILDE POLITI

Vacanti Sugnu China Felmay 8212

TRINÀCRIA

Tu Comu Stai? Buda Musique 860239

FOLKABOLA

Jolla Pipiola Felmay 8201

The enthusiasm for the high quality of the music of southern Italy currently emanating from fR HQ is shared around here and there is much to enjoy in these two Sicilian releases, especially the first one.



Matilde Politi really is something special. A degree in Cultural Anthropology was followed by work in music and in experimental theatre. Since the millennium, she has moved into extensive research in the traditions of Sicily and surrounding Mediterranean areas. Frankly it shows. sings songs from her native island as well as modern songs written in that tradition. We also hear definite influences of style and accompaniment from Sardinia and North Africa. The accompanying musicians make a strong contribution to the album but the really outstanding elements of the album are all to do with the Politi voice. She betrays a deep understanding of her form with a voice that is full of a range of emotions and a quality and power that is utterly arresting. She deserves to be considered alongside the major female voices of Southern Europe such as Céline Ricard and Elena Ledda. Perhaps she already is but has just been missed in this quarter. Performances of the quality of *Raggia Du Mari* and *Nici* heard here don't turn up every day.

Trinàcria is the name the Ancient Greeks gave to Sicily, the three-cornered island and here is a trio giving fine performances that are steeped in Sicilian culture, though mostly they are modern compositions mainly by their Salvatore Meccio who plays a range of local guitar-like instruments. He is joined by Vittorio Catalano, playing mainly local flutes and bagpipes, and Massimo Laguardia on a range of hand-held percussion. The songs are sung in Siculu which seems to be sufficiently different from standard Italian to merit translations in the excellent booklet. The English versions which are also provided suggest that the songs have a cerebral quality, including even the love songs.

Like the others in this batch, the four musicians in Folkabola come to their album with many years of experience of their music and culture. The band has been around since 2000 but the members have all been involved in the music before that.

They are from the south of Sicily around Avola. At the centre of their sound is Sebastiano Nanè playing the friscalettu, a small but strident wooden whistle originally associated with shepherds and farm workers. The album notes suggest that considerable research has gone into their choice of repertoire. The album mixes songs and dance tunes in roughly even quantities which they seem equally adept and at ease with. The album notes do not say they play for dances but the way they attack their tarantellas suggests strongly that they do.

www.felmay.it

www.budamusique.com

Vic Smith

TIM EDEY

Sailing Over The Seventh String Gnatbite Records GB20

When Tim Edey was crowned musician of the year at the 2012 Radio 2 Folk Awards, there were more than a few raised eyebrows. His brilliant performance on stage with Brendan Power on that memorable night of the gongs in Salford instantly explained the choice although the suspicion lingered that *Wriggle & Writhe*, the album which also won Edey and Power the best duo award, was exciting but flawed, mostly because the vocals weren't very good.

No vocals sully this album, on which Edey offers a thoughtful, measured, witty, thoroughly engaging and beautifully produced (by Robin Wynn Evans) display of his mind-boggling talents both as guitarist and melodeon player. With Patsy Reid, Lucy Randall and one of his own heroes Steve Cooney on fiddle, percussion and guitar respectively, giving the whole thing a deeper texture, Edey guides us warmly from jazz guitar interludes to gorgeous Irish airs, polkas, rumbas and even an unexpected blast of electric guitar on the traditional tune *Journey To Mull*.

He's a master of so many different styles – playful on *Rumba Negra*, precise on Jon Sanders' *Jenny's Tune*, reflectively lush on *Beautiful Lake Ainslie*, in Django gypsy mode on *Swanee River* and smooth if perhaps a tad cheesy on *My Prayer* – it's small wonder so many other musicians hold him in such esteem. Yet despite his easy versatility and enforced virtuosity, at no point does this album feel unnecessarily showy; indeed there may be parallels to be made with Irish fiddle player Martin Hayes in the effortless way he switches style and mood so seamlessly, hypnotically taking the audience with him through every turn. The temptation must have been to make a fast and furious grandstanding album of constant somersaults; credit to all involved for going with this much classier option.

www.timedey.co.uk

Colin Irwin