

ANNA FALKENAU AND LENA ULLMAN

I Can Hear You Calling Scroll Music SM1701

Anna Falkenau and Lena Ullman's album *I Can Hear You Calling* is an eclectic release combining traditional Irish and Appalachian Old Time music, with Ullman's Swedish roots and Falkenau's South Indian influences. Despite having played together for many years, this is the duo's first recording, featuring a mix of traditional and original works showcasing the interconnectivity of the two musicians.

Falkenau and Ullman open the album with *Chilean Horseman*, an energetic number exhibiting Falkenau's virtuosic fiddle playing, indicative of her involvement in the US East Coast Trad scene, and Ullman's driving Old Time clawhammer banjo style. The record continues with an original by Falkenau, *Apatchy Hunting In The Garden*, another rhythmical, lively tune with added moments of spontaneity and a live session feel. As the fiddle's last note lingers Ullman's unaccompanied voice begins her take on the traditional *Red Rocking Chair* delivered with an emotional, raw vocal aesthetic. Similarly, Ullman's vocalisation, rich in Appalachian style, sings the second traditional song of the record, *Black Jack David*, an expressive rendition with sparse, yearning harmonies. Packed between these two and displaying the duo's rich cultural influences, is a curious tune from Ullman, *Waiting For Anna*. Beginning with an unusual use of South Indian-style playing from Falkenau, it transitions into Swedish polka with Ullman's relentless banjo playing supporting throughout.

Moving towards the end of the album, Ullman's voice is heard for the final time in *Homeless*, a chirpy tune swaying and flowing into our ears much like the rivers she sings about. The record finally glides into *Easter Lambs*, a moving piece, more classical in style but in keeping with the overall aesthetic of the album, bringing the record to a peaceful and reflective close.

Other highlights include another vocal number, *Blueberry/Snowdrop*; an unusual original in a ragtime style *Fog*; and an additional roaring traditional *Goodbye Girls*.

Overall, brought together through years of sessions and collaboration, this raw album delivers a live, organic feel in both the playing and recording quality. Falkenau and Ullman have produced a distinctive and mature refinement of their shared creative pursuits and varying musical sensibilities.

www.annafalkenau.com

Amy Hollinrake Tune

LEMON BUCKET ORCHESTRA

If I Had The Strength Outside Music

A muted, jazzy torch of an introduction suddenly and abruptly trills into the crazed and energetic stylings of *Crooked*. Relaxed openings morph into discomfiting screams, martial rhythms, and get very worked up and unsettled indeed. There is no discernible break between the two tracks, as if a hostile argument has bled into an exchange of sweet nothings. This radical segueing approach continues throughout, making for album of single piece or suite rather than a collection of disparate, downloadable, disconnected tracks. A concept album then, but one of sharp, clipped, affected and effective energy.

Fate and *Goodbye* continue this startling approach, the former being a gritty, bloody and visceral scream of a dance, while the latter drives matters into a higher tempo of spectral and minimal arrangements. And the

Bulgarian voices-style *When* creates a sacred space that is then shattered by Montréal rapper Boogat – in a hymn to the notorious Central European brandy, Palinka. Band leader, Mark Marczyk has spoken about these disparate worlds and inspirations. He began the project “in a musty train car overlooking the fields and valleys of our youth, through permanently smudged windows”, but this became a mad sprint “for dear life” when memory intruded, and he admits that the players felt compelled to try and “catch up” with their “past selves”. In practice, this means a bewildering but intriguing set of unusual arrangements for a tight filigree of sounds, coupled with fascinating thematic incongruities and connections, with inspirations as varied as old Slavic prison ballads and the musicians' first-hand witnessing of the ongoing war in Ukraine. “A statement of resistance and celebration”, as Marczyk puts it. These inspirations have tendencies both to “liberate” and to “imprison”.

Arrangements and production aesthetics reject the compression and compactness of so many contemporary recordings. Ideas are allowed to breathe into each other, to argue, and to tussle. In album closer, *Peace*, a stately homage to the late, great Adrienne Cooper, 60 voices fill a sudden sky. After the tense restraint of the preceding tracks (delineated with inventive percussion, the lightest of fiddle, accordion, brass and woodwind, frenetic celebration and uncomprehending wistfulness) a choral vastness releases this dark-tinted dream of a record into silence.

lemonbucket.com

John Pheby

JIM GHEDI

A Hymn For Ancient Land Basin Rock

Jim Ghedi's second album sees the English guitar prodigy connecting classical and contemporary folk styles across seven ambitious tracks. Like his sometime collaborator Toby Hay, his compositions take the form of responses to remote landscapes, but Ghedi's arrangements are densely orchestrated, with redolent string parts heightening a sense of rural reverie.

Whilst the guitar provides most of the ascending larks in the musical foreground, it also acts a perfect foil to other solo instruments – particularly the harp that graces *Cwm Elan*. However, the most surprising featured instrument is Ghedi's own voice, heard on both *Phoenix Works* (a poem found in an

Jim Ghedi

old scythe works near to his home) and *Banks Of Mulroy* – a traditional Irish song sourced from his grandfather's tape collection. Affectingly set and sung to a striking piano accompaniment, the song offers the clearest indication that Jim Ghedi's already-celebrated skills as a composer and solo guitarist represent only a fraction of his rapidly-emerging talent.

jimghedi.com

Steve Hunt

VALÉRIE ÉKOUMÈ

Kwin Na Kinguè Val2ValProd

Valérie makes a fairly rapid follow up to her debut album and even a cursory listen to this offering tells us that we are listening to a very considerable talent.

We are reaching the stage with Afropop and Afrobeat where many singers like this one are second generation Africans who are able to draw equally on the Western birthplace (Paris in this case) and their African heritage (Cameroon). Here she sings in varieties of a Bantu languages spoken by the Duala and Mungo peoples of Cameroon but this album is likely to appeal beyond language and genre. The songs are written by her and offer a great variety of pace and mood. All the musicianship is first rate with a particular mention for the outstanding percussion and to the overall quality of the production which she shared with producer Guy Nwogang.

She has not rushed into a solo career having worked eight years in the band led by the great veteran Cameroonian, Manu Dibango, one of the earliest and most successful pioneers of melding the exuberance of African drumming with the sophisticated chording required of a successful jazz saxophonist. Clearly she has also absorbed a lot from working with the likes of Papa Wemba, Rokia Traoré, Youssou N'Dour, and Courtney Pine.

Put this experience alongside years studying at the American School of Modern Music and you will understand why she sounds like a top professional rather than someone at the start of her career.

Don't be put off by the fact that the details given in the review's heading are minimal; the album is available from a number of leading French internet sites and from this Facebook page.

facebook.com/ekoumevalerieofficial

Vic Smith

