

Europe REVIEWS

The album takes a while to get going, as the first two tracks are slow, repetitive and pensive, like Gregorian chant. Things brighten up with 'Jubel', its call-and-response vocals and eloquent joushikko solo lifting the mood. Käppi's playing comes to the fore on the exquisite instrumentals 'Gråtkvæde' and 'Maanitus', but without the wild feedback and blues of his own albums. The main pleasures of the album are the contrasting timbres of their instruments and vocals. All in all, this is a subdued, restrained byway in these artists' illustrious careers.

WIF STENGER

TRACK TO TRY *Gråtkvæde*

Nytt Land Aba Khan

Prophecy Productions
6/10



Nytt Land have long combined traditional Scandinavian dark-folk with the musical elements of their native Siberia.

On their latest record, husband and wife duo Natalya and Anatoly Pakhalenko pay homage to their homeland, carving out a sonic picture of the region's ancient spiritual histories. Throat singing, frame drums, *talharpa* and flutes are layered to evoke buran winds and ritual rhythms. Tracks like 'Totem' and 'Mansi' draw heavily on frenzied shamanic invocations, propelled by big drums and heaving drones, while on cuts such as 'The Oath' and 'Prayer', the duo slow things down and evoke

grave processions. 'Uitag' is a glacial, intricate piece of ambient, built on flute trills and soft, guttural croaks, and the closer 'Tygir Tayii (Heavenly Sacrifice)' is six scorching, cinematic minutes of duelling vocals and atmospheric interludes. This is music immersed in its traditions but amplified by more contemporary dark-folk tropes. A bold and enveloping dedication to Siberia's spiritual geographies.

OLIVIA CHEVES

TRACK TO TRY *Totem*

Rahu On the Dancefloor

CPJ-Music
7/10



This is a super-tight Latvian acoustic dance band whose sets range from Talking Heads and Neil Young covers to

a revved-up African-American spiritual and a Bob Wills country chestnut. The core of their repertoire is bluegrass fused with Latvian folk songs and polkas, with a spritz of klezmer for good measure. A decade on from their formation, their third album is a lively hoedown, recorded with an enthusiastic crowd at an old mansion in Riga. It's a tribute to dance traditions from around the world, including an English two-step, a French *bourrée* and the Australian sheep shearing song 'Lachlan Tigers', based on a Scottish air and sung by the group's Aussie saxophonist. The instrumental half of the setlist is the most appealing, as the other male

vocalist can be a bit hammy, delivering American tunes in a raspy, exaggerated accent. The live gig gets better as it goes along, with the band sizzling on the last three instrumentals, culminating in the totally irresistible 'Mūžīgi polkas (Polka 4 ever)'.

WIF STENGER

TRACK TO TRY *Çezablis*

Raül Refree & Maria Mazzotta

San Paolo di Galatina
Galileo Music
8/10



These last few years Raül Refree has become the go-to producer for southern European singers wanting to

carve out a new sound for themselves – from Rosalía and Niño de Elche to Lina and Sílvia Pérez Cruz. Apulian singer Maria Mazzotta, famous for her work with Canzoniere Grecoanico Salentino, also contacted Refree a while back. The two of them finally met in Apulia in 2022, when Mazzotta introduced Refree to a set of songs from her region's repertoire and taught him about *pizzica* and its social role. When they later reunited to work their way through the Apulian songbook, Refree and Mazzotta approached these songs through a liturgical palette of voice, choir, organ and guitar and are at their most charming whenever they keep it as bare as possible. This is especially true when Refree's sensitive guitar phrasing and Mazzotta's heartfelt, sinuous

Mediterranean singing come fully into view, as they do so gorgeously on 'Damme Nu Ricciu' and 'Moroloja'. It's comforting that Refree and Mazzotta joined forces and were able to create their own lovely little world. Not as easy as it may seem.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Moroloja*

Rocé Palmier

Hors Cadres
7/10



A long-established presence in French hip-hop, Rocé brings depth and restraint to his latest release, *Palmier*. The album

unfolds as an atmospheric, cinematic production that lends the music an unforced elegance, drifting into trip-hop territory, while elsewhere rich string passages heighten its widescreen feel. Some of the tracks evoke the atmosphere of Miles Davis' *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, but with rapping. Palmier encapsulates the best things about modern France. It distils a contemporary sensibility that is cool, stylish and reflects the cultural crossroads from which Rocé emerged. Despite all the lyrics being in French, language is no barrier here. His delivery is measured rather than showy, melodic yet percussive, carrying conviction and momentum that resonates well beyond their literal meaning. The album might lack ▶

ITALY by *Ciro de Rosa*

Spanning the Mediterranean islands and Holy Week's ritualism, then travelling up to the northern Apennines to meet the repertoires of the 'Four Provinces', this is a focus on some essential listening that dynamically carries forward and reimagines musical traditions.

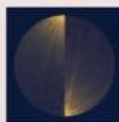


Sardinian for 'continuation', *Sighida* (Mare e Miniere, 8/10) pairs veteran composer **Mauro Palmas** on *liuto cantabile* with young *organetto* virtuoso Giacomo Vardeu. Together, they

fuse the island's dance forms with Basque influences, treating Sardinian traditional music as an evolving, shifting dimension of possibility. This creates translucent textures, which also includes reinterpretations of songs by Riccardo Tesi and Abdullah Ibrahim. While the title-track pairs gentle melodies with string arpeggios and improvisation, 'Danza Maggiore' navigates various vibrant regional dance pulses. The album reaches its peaks on 'Nanneddu Meu' and 'Libera me Domine', as polyphonic harmonies from Cuncordu e Tenore de Orosei join the duo, adding profound depth.

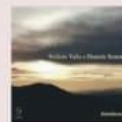


Shift to the poignant vocality of the Sicilian-born, France-based **Luisa Briguglio**, whose debut, *Truvatura* (Liburia Records, 7/10), represents a sophisticated entry into contemporary folk songwriting. Under producer Ernesto Nobili, the album's musical semiotics span everything from the minimalist 'Figghia mia figghia' to South American and Balkan rhythmic flair and French *chanson*. Briguglio's evocative power is most visceral in the raw, timbral grit of 'U 'nnamuratu e a morti', a Sicilian adaptation of a Spanish romance. Ultimately, *Truvatura* exudes sheer delight.



Mater Nullius (ViaVox, 9/10), Latin for 'Nobody's Mother', is the second release from Calabrian singer and multi-instrumentalist **Davide Ambrogio**. This 14-track cycle metaphorically mirrors the Via Crucis during Southern Italy's Holy Week to tell a story of spiritual rebirth. Ambrogio possesses a 'lithic', ancient vocal quality, accompanying himself on the *tamburo*, *trococle* and guitar. Partially recorded in a cave, this ritualistic foundation is augmented by Walter Laureti's electronics and sound design,

and Vincenzo Gagliani's percussion. Highlights include the dreamlike 'Il Bosco' featuring declamatory singing and the powerful polyvocal invocations on the Arbëreshë-inspired 'IX Vallje'. Elsewhere, 'x Turba' offer fierce sociopolitical critique, while the obsessive 'vi Ballu di diavuli' displays unsettling, dissonant intervals.



Piffero master **Stefano Valla** and accordionist **Daniele Scurati** are pillars of the 'Quattro Province' tradition, a northern Apennine cross-regional territory. On *Instabasua* (Felmay, 8/10),

meaning 'At Dusk', they are mediators and innovators, offering a refined exploration of local musical expressions. Their interplay shows contrapuntal elegance as the duo, enhanced by some vocal and instrumental guests, balances agile, melodic and harmonic variations with the robust rhythmic drive essential for social dancing. On 'Alessandrine' and 'Valzer in agosto', the piffero's piercing timbre finds a sophisticated accordion counterpoint. From the intricate intertwined instrumental phrasing of the wedding song 'Bella Növa' to the passionate 'Marcellina', the album provides an earthy yet refined insight into these vibrantly alive repertoires.