

REVIEWS



Photo: Lance La Breche

Vieux Farka Touré & Julia Easterlin



Photo: Simon Houllhan

Topette!!

VIEUX FARKA TOURÉ & JULIA EASTERLIN

Touristes Six Degrees 657036-1230-2-1



OK, I admit it: although I wanted to – on account of his lineage – I never quite warmed to Vieux Farka Touré's rather retro, four square rockist approach to his heritage. All a bit predictable and neither convincingly fish nor fowl. So this one lurked in the to-play pile for a while.

Silly me. Chuck any preconceptions out of the window immediately. The first track, vocalised by US singer Easterlin, has a hint of that wonderful 2007 Dee Dee Bridgwater *Red Dirt* album, with quirky vocal twists and no hint of bombast. It's followed by young Vieux (can I call him that?) leading on the slow burning *A'bashiye (It's Alright)*, with goose-pimpling, layered Lo'Jo-esque backing vocals from Julia, power stabs of brass and just the right amount of smoking electric guitar.

OK, this is going to be much more interesting than I thought! Enter a simple acoustic guitar intro in the Touré family tradition, a vocal wail, some deep and doomy brass, a twank of ngoni, a smear of Hammond-esque organ and – crikey – it's Dylan's *Masters Of War* like you never heard it, but possibly always should have.

The album would be worth it for that one alone, but off they go on further sonic explorations. Fever Ray's *I'm Not Done* begins with hints of the fabulous tUnEyArDs until the guitar, organ and brass crank it mightily. A straight Touré acoustic guitar and calabash backing – straight out of dad's style bag – introduces a left field take on Lead Belly's *In The Pines*, increasingly brooding as producer Zubin Hensler's trumpet fills in. Adama Sidibé's one-string njarka fiddle features behind VFT's next vocal lead *The World*, and comes into its own as part of Easterlin's *Took My Brother Down*, firmly in the Anaïs Mitchell mould of contemporary ballad telling and dealing with recent police vio-

lence in the USA. It's not the only time Ms Mitchell comes to mind on this CD.

Don't you just love albums that shouldn't work but emphatically do, where improbable mixtures sit so invigoratingly together that you can't imagine they didn't previously exist? And which absolutely prove that saying that you find in all sorts of traditions from all over the world that "you can't know where you're going if you don't know where you come from." Oh yes, they do.

www.sixdegreesrecords.com

Ian Anderson

FURROW COLLECTIVE

Blow Out The Moon Furrow Records Furr009

TOPETTE!!

Chez Michel EP Own label, no cat no

Two restorative tonics for the post-festival blues in the form of new, shiny mini-albums from everyone's favourite Anglo-Scottish and Anglo-French ethno-trad factions.



The Furrow Collective record comprises five splendidly atmospheric traditional songs – one led by each member, with a concluding lullaby in four-part harmony. Opener *Poor Old Horse* finds Lucy Farrell voicing a self-pitying horse over some intriguing piano, before Emily Portman sings a fine Liverpool version of *Shule Agra*. Rachel Newton ramps-up the spooky factor on *The Unquiet Grave* by having a chat with a ghost while hypnotically plucking the triad notes on her harp (always take your harp to the graveyard, kids). The final two songs were both contributed by Alasdair Roberts – *Lament To The Moon* from the singing of the late Packie Manus Byrne, and *Oh To Be In My Bed And Happit* via Anne Neilson, at a Glasgow Ballad Workshop meeting.

While each member continues to plough a distinctive solo furrow, the success of *Blow Out The Moon* is that it represents a real

advancement of the Collective, with their diverse instrumental and vocal talents combined to mesmerising effect. This all bodes very well indeed for their next long-player, forthcoming in 2016.

www.thefurrowcollective.co.uk



After all that most beautiful mourning and lamenting, a little dance music seems like a good idea.

Topette!! appear to be the brainchild of Barnaby Stradling, the bass maestro whose distinctive playing occupies as crucial a position

in Blowzabella and Eliza Carthy's *Wayward Band* as Danny Thompson's in *Pentangle* or the late Bernard Edwards in *Chic* and *Sister Sledge*. He's joined by his Blowzabella compadre Andy Cutting on diatonic button accordion, Julian Cartonnet on bagpipes and tenor banjo, James Delarre on violin and Tania Buisse on bodhran.

Flashes of individual brilliance abound – Delarre's playing on his own *Spot's Tail*, Cartonnet's banjo on *Meatballs, Whiskey And Beer* and his bagpipes gloriously fusing with Cutting's box on *Deule Duece/RSB* (which you can hear on this issue's *fRoots 56* compilation), but when they're firing on all cylinders, propelled by Buisse's drum and Stradling's punky-bourée bass lines, they're utterly irresistible

It's early days, and this seven-track is probably as much a demo as a 'product', but this EP is a brilliant calling card from a virtuoso dance band who've not only got euphorically great tunes but a palpable 'le last gang en ville' collective swagger that sets them apart from absolutely everyone else. In a time when all-star folk groups are regularly assembled purely for specific, one-off funding projects, it's hugely refreshing to have two proper groups, founded through friendship, common purpose and a shared sense of adventure.

Listen, dance, buy both of these CDs and play them on 'repeat'.

www.topette.bandcamp.com/releases

Steve Hunt