



Bryan Snyder

many moments on this album that remind me unexpectedly of 1980s pop-rock, only with banjos, guitars, dobros and fiddles. There is something about the atmospheric reverb-soaked string notes and precise male-female vocal harmonising of 'Better Days' that strongly recalls Fleetwood Mac circa *Tango in the Night*. And the vocal refrain of 'Perfect Crime/Ernest Durham' even brings to mind the Swedish pop-rockers Roxette, despite the muscular old-time fiddle and bluegrass mandolin. This is ultimately pretty middle-of-the-road fare, although the glam-rock stomp beat and bluesy dobro licks of 'Pearl Hart' are but one example among many on this album of why The Willows would clearly go down well on the main stage of a big folk festival.

MATT MILTON

TRACK TO TRY *Pearl Hart*

Wu Man & Son de San Diego
Fingertip Carnival

Wind Music (42 mins)

★★★★★

The Chinese pipa takes a trip through Mexican folk



Wu Man is a remarkable lady. The best-known exponent of the *pipa*, the pear-shaped Chinese lute, she has used the instrument to play anything from Chinese folk songs to compositions by Terry Riley, and has worked with Kronos Quartet and the Silkroad Ensemble. Now she teams up with the US band Son de San Diego to show that she can treat Mexican songs with the same ease and expertise.

It may seem an unlikely new fusion but it makes perfect sense. After all, Wu Man lives in San Diego, and Son

de San Diego play a variety of fretted, guitar-like instruments that include the *guitarra de son*, *leoncita* and different types of *jarana*, that work well alongside the *pipa*. The band specialise in the *son jarocho* folk style from Veracruz, and this gently charming acoustic set is dominated by Mexican traditional songs and instruments, with the *pipa* joining in.

But the two most memorable tracks don't feature Mexican songs but are instead new arrangements of Chinese folk songs with a Mexican-edged backing. 'China Blues', which includes vocals from Wu Man, is a slow, bluesy piece dominated by the *pipa*, while 'Dance in the Sunshine' is a delightful twanging work-out.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *China Blues*

Yom & The Wonder Rabbis
You Will Never Die!

Buda Musique (40 mins)

★★★★★

Dark Starling-esque klezmer



Clarinetist Yom's second project with his band The Wonder Rabbis comes seven years after the first one.

In between, he's released a collaborative album with Chinese Jew's harp player Wing Li, an attempt at American folk music, and even tried his hand at French electro-jazz. This discography gives you an idea of what kind of an artist he is.

On *You Will Never Die!*, Yom retains the klezmer core that he knows so well and embellishes it with a wealth of instrumentation. Each song rumbles with a primal energy created by the talented Wonder Rabbis: Sylvain Daniel on bass; Guillaume Magne

on guitar; Leo Jassef on keyboards; Mathieu Penot on drums; and Aurélien Nafrichoux also on guitar. They are carnival-like in energy, though with an unnerving darkness that unsettles that carnival spirit.

The album is strongest, however, in the peaks and troughs of the carnival roller-coaster ride. On the title-track, there is a raucous burst of electric guitar that surprises and lifts the whole song, while on 'Kiss Me Goodbye', the slower, more tentative style is a welcome relief from the intensity of the rest. Although captivating, the album could be better if Yom had imbued it with more moments like these.

ASHER BREUER-WEIL

TRACK TO TRY *Swimming in the Styx*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

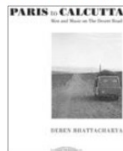
Paris to Calcutta: Men and Music on the Desert Road

Sublime Frequencies (4 CDs & book, 247 mins)

★★★★★

The sound of Deben

Bhattacharya's epic road trip



This handsome set matches a four-disc, unexpurgated record of Bengali ethnomusicologist Deben

Bhattacharya's 1955

epic field recording road trip, illustrated by a substantial 160-page book. Bhattacharya took off in his trusty converted milk van, funded by Argo and EMI, armed with Gaumont reel-to-reel tape gear, and a map that guided him from London to Calcutta. While his route didn't take him through Spain to trace the flamenco element, he stopped off virtually everywhere else, including Belgrade, Istanbul, Damascus, Amman, Tehran, Baghdad, Kabul and eventually Calcutta, documenting Arabic, Persian and Hindu traditions along the way.

At the time, Bhattacharya was in his early 30s, and this was just the beginning of a prodigious lust to document music, remaining strong until his death in 2001. Considering the journey's makeshift nature, these recordings are of reasonably high quality, the background talking, coughing and road noise adding to the sense of immediacy. This is an extensive collection, governed by a practical itinerary, and while the music is magical, an added dimension is provided by the book's many evocative photographs (Bhattacharya's own) and Bhattacharya's text.

There's a wide range of instrumentation on display – including a pair of percussive coffee grinders. There are two long Iranian pieces by Eskandare Ebrahimi; one at 16 minutes features an orchestra moving through multiple accordion, *setar* (lute) and vocal stages, like the perfect suite demonstration. Most of the players are named, but there are some 'unknown performers,' such as the coughing Afghan shepherd nose-flute soloist. The collection finishes well, with a pair of devotionals from Jai Chand Bhagat and Babu, Bombay street singers who also play tiny cymbals and the one-stringed *ektara*, segueing into a last snatch of Varanasi temple bells and drums.

MARTIN LONGLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Humayun* by Eskandare Ebrahimi

Saigon Supersound Vol 2

InfraCom! (74 mins)

★★★★★

Western-influenced wartime sounds of South Vietnam



This compilation of vintage rock'n'roll from South Vietnam during the Vietnamese war is a follow-up to the

first volume of *Saigon Supersound* released in 2017. Jan Hagenkötter has again selected historic recordings by bands from the Saigonese pop scene, who were influenced by blues, rock and Latin styles. Carol Kim kicks off the album with the catchy 'Sai Gon', a carefree depiction of people enjoying the sights of 'beautiful Saigon' to a relaxed Latin groove. The fun, exuberance and lyricism of the songs is balanced with sentimental, nostalgic lyrics about romance and love for the homeland. References to the war occasionally rise to the surface, but the playfulness of the music ultimately celebrates life in troubled times.

The final track 'Lo Tho To Lieu' (The Withering Willow), composed by the famous songwriter Pham Duy, takes a humorous look at courtship. It lightheartedly blends different influences, from the searing free-rhythm vocal line, which is inspired by traditional melodies, to heavily accented, jaunty singing over a Cuban-style piano vamp. This is an album that invites us to appreciate more fully some of the pioneers of Vietnamese popular music.

BARLEY NORTON

TRACK TO TRY *Trang Mo Ben Suoi* by Thanh Túy