

Deco Ensemble**Líquido**

RecArt (52 mins)

★★★★★

Tango with knobs on

Opening with 'Triunfal', a typically lyrical, mood-swinging Astor Piazzolla number, this

UK-based quintet set out the stall of their second album, a follow-up to 2015's *Encuentro*. Whether playing compositions by celebrated Argentinian *tangueros* Diego Schissi and Ramiro Gallo or by their own Ricardo Gosalbo (pianist), the Deco Ensemble serve up a sophisticated, cerebral, slickly arranged concert tango – not so much for the sweat-scented dance salon as for the raised stage and an audience of clappers and foot-tappers. Argentinians like to speak disparagingly of 'tango for export' and, in a sense, this is music oriented towards foreigners and non-aficionados (ie those who want a light, recognisably 'classical' way into tango). Because Piazzolla is such an influence on this tradition, there's a familiarity to the astringency, the staccato, and the virtuosic showiness as each instrumentalist steps forward, jazz-style, to pull off his or her turn.

The liquidity alluded to in the title captures the cool manner in which the musicians gel and harmonise, riff and respond, but the sound itself is dominated by percussive pulsation and a kind of studied clamour. On Schissi's 'Líquido 3' they get all experimental and ambient. Then, on Gallo's 'Las Malenas' – the best of the 12 tracks – the skittish spirit of the *milonga* is permitted in, and a different kind of fluidity – instinctive, gleeful – with it. The album wraps up with three well-executed back-to-back Piazzolla pieces, the so-called *Diablo* trilogy. We end as we began. A homage, with knobs on.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *Las Malenas***The East Pointers**
Yours to Break

East Pointers Music (42 mins)

★★★★★

Fiddle pop from Canadian trio

During the writing of their third album, the three East Pointers were scattered across the globe, each a long

way from their base on Prince Edward Island, one of Canada's Maritime

Provinces. Tim Chaisson (vocals, fiddle, percussion) was in Costa Rica, his brother Koady (banjo, tenor guitar, Moog) was in Australia, and their mainland pal Jake Charron (guitar, keyboards) was in the UK. Perhaps that goes some way to explaining the sheer breadth of the genre-defying sound they've created here.

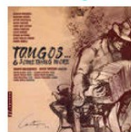
Since their award-winning debut *Secret Victory* from 2015 and through its equally-lauded successor *What We Leave Behind* a couple of years later, their music has proved a delightfully evolving dance between the traditional fiddle music they continue to celebrate (not least by continuing the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival founded by their grandfather) and a sound more akin to the pop songs they grew up hearing on the radio. Here, Nova Scotia-born producer Gordie Sampson, who has also worked with the like of Carrie Underwood and Rascal Flatts, lends a pleasing, audience-friendly heft to their sound. Lucy Farrell of the BBC Radio 2 Folk Award-winning Furrow Collective also contributes to a collection that consolidates their previous successes while pointing to some intriguing ways forward they could explore.

KEVIN BOURKE

TRACK TO TRY *Light Bright***Grupo Encuentros**
Tangos... & Something More

Navona Records (61 mins)

★★★★★

Breathing new life into tango

How to revivify tango? It's been a pressing question ever since Astor Piazzolla's death in 1992. Grupo

Encuentros, established by Argentinian musicologist Alicia Terzian in 1979 'to promote the new music of Latin American and Argentinian composers' (a blurb smacking of a Tory Brexitopath talking about 'the continent') has evolved into one of the more interesting responses. Terzian comes to the standards of Lucio Demare, Mariano Mores, the underrated Aquiles Roggero, Juan Carlos Cobián and Piazzolla himself from an experimental, classical background. On *Tangos...* she conducts a septet of excellent musicians, including Daniel Binelli, one of the finest working *bandoneón* players, and Marta Blanco, a gifted mezzo soprano.

Shaking up both old *tango canción* numbers as well as concert pieces, this formidable team give us arrangements

**TOP OF THE WORLD****BUY NOW**

Stacie Huckeba

Michael Cleveland
Tall Fiddler

Compass Records (48 mins)

★★★★★

Lofty bluegrass fiddle giant scales new heights

There is a temptation for top-level bluegrass musicians to make

pretentious, over-complicated fusion albums. This is not one of those. This is good-time bluegrass played by a fiddler at the top of his game. Anyone not grinning like a loon after the first few seconds of the high-speed opener 'Arkansas' probably doesn't like bluegrass and never will.

Michael Cleveland has teamed up with some extremely talented pals here. Weatherbeaten lead vocals from guest Tim O'Brien make the barnstorming '20 Cent Cotton and 90 Cent Meat' and the more reflective 'Old Time River Man' collaborations made

in bluegrass heaven. O'Brien also rustles up some gobsmacking mandolin beside Béla Fleck's ebullient banjo on the jazzy instrumental '5-String Swing'. Even the rather cheesy honky-tonk country of 'Tennessee Plates', which edges towards double-denim line-dancing territory, is pretty enjoyable: this time it's Sam Bush on vocal and mandolin duties. The Cleveland-Fleck fiddle and banjo duet 'Tarnation' doesn't disappoint. An epic voyage, it starts off as head-nodding blues before dramatically upping the tempo. The pair give every millimetre of their instruments such a thorough going over that it's a wonder they haven't been sanded into sawdust by the end of it.

MATT MILTON

TRACK TO TRY *5-String Swing*

that are deconstructions as well as developments, commentaries on, and reworkings of familiar melodies and time-honoured tropes. A range of moods is explored, with the accent on *chiaroscuro*; the payoff between nostalgia for the past and the timeless sway of the dance beat on the one hand, and the layering of dark histories, changing roles, collapsing hegemonies on the other. The music breaks down on occasion. Eerie flutes and crashing piano disturb the harmonies. Scatting shatters the flow. This is tango for now and for *mañana*. Reborn? Not fully, but like Frankenstein's creation, this zombie tango is questioning and questing.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *Malena*

The Lonesome Ace Stringband Modern Old-Time Sounds for the Bluegrass and Folksong Jamboree

The Lonesome Ace Stringband (42 mins)

★★★★★

The Canadian trio know how to throw a good party



Jamboree is a wonderful, whimsical American word, which generally refers to a lavish, rambunctious celebration or party invariably involving music, dancing and excessive revelry. The Lonesome Ace Stringband's fourth album serves as a self-contained jamboree inclusive of the Canadian trio's wide-ranging repertoire and formidable vocal and instrumental acumen.

A dozen covers by an eclectic group of songwriters from the Stanley Brothers ('Stone Walls and Steel Bars') and the Carter Family ('I Never Will Marry') to Marty Robbins ('Big Iron') and the late Lhasa de Sela ('Fools Gold') constitute an engaging compendium of time-honoured bluegrass, folk and country classics along with a nod to the contemporary roots scene. Chris Coole (clawhammer banjo, vocals), John Showman (fiddle, vocals) and Max Heineman (double bass, vocals) bring an extraordinary combination of smoothness and tightness to their playing, honed by years of performing as the house band at the Dakota Tavern in Toronto. This is 21st-century acoustic music at its stripped-down, sharply rendered best.

DOUG DELORCH

TRACK TO TRY *Stone Walls and Steel Bars*

Lord Tanamo & Friends Festival Jump-Up

Doctor Bird (2 CDs, 148 mins)

★★★★★

Rare Jamaican mento, calypso and ska recordings



Now, the first CD here is something of a revelation, containing as it does the first ever reissue of Lord Tanamo's extremely rare 1965 LP *Festival Jump-Up*. Here are mento and calypso tunes performed by one of Jamaican music's early stars. Ironically, by 1965 the ska era was in full swing and Lord Tanamo had enjoyed a ska hit with 'Come Down' in 1963 – not on the original album but gathered with 12 other bonus tunes on disc one – so the recording of this album must have been seen as a time capsule of sorts. For anyone interested in calypso/mento, *Festival Jump-Up* is a fascinating document, lively and cheeky but also old fashioned (compared to the then ruling ska sound). Tanamo recorded for Sep and Gaydisc, two labels owned by Lindon Pottinger, the first black Jamaican to set up his own recording studio on the island in 1961.

The Pottinger name is now synonymous with Sonia Pottinger – Lindon's wife and Jamaica's first and, for decades, only female record producer and label owner – but what's contained here are Lindon's efforts. Disc two contains 28 tunes he recorded and released across 1963-4, largely ska. Of special interest are four cuts by Jimmy James – who would later be a stalwart of British black music and enjoy several disco hits in the 1970s. Superb liner notes and packaging make this essential for anyone interested in the development of Jamaican music.

GARTH CARTWRIGHT

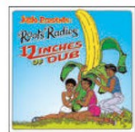
TRACK TO TRY *Naughty Little Flea*

Roots Radics 12 Inches of Dub

VP Records (32 mins)

★★★★★

Dub companion album reminds us that size does matter



During the late 1970s, the Jamaican music scene was completely reconfigured when aspiring producer Henry 'Junjo' Lawes began working with The Roots Radics, a hot young crew of session musicians

based at Channel One studio in western Kingston. Steering Jamaican music towards the evolving dancehall style, their output was distributed overseas by Greensleeves, which scored an unlikely success with General Echo's ribald deejay album, *12 Inches of Pleasure*; for reasons that are not entirely clear, the dub companion album expertly mixed by Scientist at King Tubby's studio remained unreleased until now and it's a true killer from start to finish.

Emphasising the rhythmic anchor provided by drummer Style Scott and bassist Flabba Holt, Scientist allows sparse organ lines, wah-wah guitar chops and percolating percussion to drift in and out of the mix, mesmerising the listener with the group's sheer musical abilities. Rhythm tracks originally laid for Barrington Levy and Rod Taylor sound particularly brilliant here, devoid of any vocal distraction. On the companion disc with the original deejay album, Echo's comedic takes on adults-only themes may not be to everyone's taste (especially in the #MeToo age), but lovers of classic dub works for the late 1970s will not be disappointed.

DAVID KATZ

TRACK TO TRY *Set Your Dub on Fire*

Kiki Valera Vivencias en Clave Cubana

Origin Records (70 mins)

★★★★★

Classic salsa with variety: that's the clave to success!



Kiki Valera is a fantastic *cuatro* (double-coursed, steel-strung guitar, much like a *tres* but with one extra

string) player. Valera, along with famed vocalist (and childhood friend) Coco Freeman, has delivered 12 original songs that constitute a brilliant debut. *Vivencias en Clave Cubana* is a fantastic homage to classic salsa. Valera adds some jazz-influenced solos, while Freeman brings a crooning feel to his perfectly executed melodies. The opening track 'Mi Son' starts with a *cuatro*-led *guajeo* (ostinato riff present in lots of Cuban music), light percussion and soaring vocals from Freeman. After the first verse, the bass brings in a change of harmonic feel. The bass and percussion enter in rhythmic stabs and exit throughout the song, emphasising the groove and leaving space for Valera and Alexis Barós' squeaky trumpet decorations.

Later on in the album, we are offered a different feel with 'Para Continuar', which offers interlocking congas and bongos from Pedro Vargas, creating a bubbling texture for Freeman to share a simpler melody. Despite the clear concentration on creating a 'classic' salsa sound, there's enough stylistic variation in this album to make it worth listening to from start to finish.

CHARLOTTE ALGAR

TRACK TO TRY *Mi Son (Radio Edit)*

Villalobos Brothers Somos

Villalobos Brothers (65 mins)

★★★★★

Mexican brothers deliver global, inclusive album in hard times



Behind *mestizo* musics often lie unique stories. In the case of the three Villalobos brothers, it's a tale for our torrid times. Born and raised in Xalapa, capital of the troubled Mexican state of Veracruz (682 murders and 122 kidnappings between January and March 2019), classically trained in US and European conservatoires, energised by a chance benefit gig at Carnegie Hall along with a call to write their own material, they found their final home and voice through personal and musical trials. The result is a kind of sophisticated jazz-inflected Tex-Mex sound. This sounds like a put down, but theirs is an unashamedly mainstream music meant to have a broad (ie culture-crossing) appeal. That's why they've been contracted as the house band at the Latin Grammy shows and done turns with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

Underpinning the music is rootsy *son huasteco* and more genteel Mexican *trova*, a fair portion of pop, a bit of funk. The brothers share vocals, delivering either high-note romanticism ('Destino'), Latino power balladeering ('Chiquitita') or soft-rock protest ('Lo Relativo'). There's also a political edge; 'Hombres de Arcilla' (Men of Clay), which has the literalness and gravity of a Mercedes Sosa anthem, is dedicated to the families of Ayotzinapa, the town where 43 male students disappeared from a rural teachers' college in 2014. The title-track is a self-affirmative ('Somos' translates as 'We Are') in the face of Trumpian discrimination and the Villalobos' own naturalisation trials.

Somos is a stylish album with enough jazz and folk to give it depth, ▶