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My Life As A Victim Of War and the vocal delivery sounds like a traditional British ballad. The singer Keut Ran has a style that Brennan compares to the "hollerin' style of the American south" (although her *Have Mercy On My Mother* sounds more like a straight Appalachian ballad than hog-calling songs). And then there are those that sound like Peruvian party music. On some pieces in the chapie dong veng style of not-unfamiliar slack lute sounds, the angularity of the language gives the music a surprisingly hypnotic tonal rap effect.

Not all of the songs are about the harrowing effects of war and cultural disruption, or are as grief-stricken as their titles imply. Drunken and philandering husbands find typical comment and there are several songs extolling respect for elders. A song by Han Nai, a musician from the north of the country, may even be taken in the spirit of its poetic title: *Evening Stars Are The Masters*. But many of the other translated titles are suitably oblique. Is there a deeper meaning to *Punch Meah [Defeat The Giant]* by Soun San, or is it just a traditional ballad?

Not many of the artists are well-known outside the country. The blind singer and chapie dong veng (long-necked lute) player Kong Nai ("Cambodia's Ray Charles") has come to the attention of the Cambodian Space Project and his excellent *Mekong Delta Blues* album is released on Long Tale Recordings. But this album crucially brings others to the fore: in particular another fine exponent of the chapie dong veng, Soun San, and Keut Ran.

A 'Cambodian survivors' tour sounds like a good idea.

www.glitterbeat.com

Phil Wilson

VIEUX KANTÉ

The Young Man's Harp Sterns STCD1127



Confusion reigns on the first listening to this remarkable album. The digitally modified cover photo shows a man playing what looks like a hunter's harp (donsan ngoni). You can still occasionally hear these played in compounds in The Gambia and Senegal but its simple six or seven string lyre form makes it suitable for an undemanding accompanying role in 'home' music rather than a performance. No, surely this sounds more like

Vieux Kanté



Photo: Banning Eyre

a very talented performer on that other instrument that bears the name ngoni, with a dowel fixed through a calabash resonator making a fretless fingerboard. It takes a grainy viewing of this blind young man on YouTube to show that Vieux has adapted and expanded the range of the instrument of the album's title (kamala ngoni) to produce the remarkable sounds heard here with wide tonal ranges and using the hand that is not plucking to produce effects similar to bending strings, hammering on, harmonics etc. There is even a section where he makes his instrument sound like a primitive flute or whistle.

Vieux died in 2005 at the age of 31 and made few recordings. The seven tracks that make up this album have only emerged recently and they must be regarded as a great and important find. He works with some great singers – male and female – and a very nifty djembe player; not well-known musicians but the sort of highly-disciplined, astonishing talents that seem to abound in Mali's capital. He saves his innovative pyrotechnics for when he is soloing and provides the ideal sympathetic backing to the singers.

Some fine photos and a fine introductory essay by Banning Eyre in the well-designed booklet add to the pleasure this release brings.

Vieux Kanté was one of those remarkable and precious performers who was able to work within a tradition and but whose innovations extend its technical and emotional range.

www.sternsmusic.com

Vic Smith

ROBERTO TOMBESI

In 'Sta Via – Traditional Music From The Dolomites To The Lagoon Of Venice
Culturale Atelier Calicanto CAL / 017



Enthusiasts for Italian traditional music will doubtless remember the band from Veneto, Calicanto, who toured here in the 1980s and '90s. Roberto Tombesi was their leader and melodeon player.

Listening to this CD has been a great delight for me, as I knew them well, way back then, and recognise, albeit slightly vaguely, a good many of the tunes played here. Anyone but the most arch of traddies will tell you that tradition is a living thing, and that it does, and should, change gradually over time. So it should be no surprise that a 21st Century Roberto Tombesi no longer sounds exactly like the Calicanto of more than 30 years ago.

Comparing a Roberto Tombesi CD of 2016 with a Calicanto of the '80s is not, actually, so unreasonable, since he's joined by some ten other musicians here, and the band sound hasn't changed as much as might have been expected over such a long interval.

Stand-out tracks – for me – are *Polesana / Pairis di Lamon*; I loved and learned (and recorded) the first as a dance tune, and so was very surprised to find it as a song here, albeit wonderfully sung in harmony by Roberto and Claudia Ferronato, before changing into the dance tune I remember. Also *Gajarda*, a two-part dance, has two tunes; the first is a fairly standard AAB 32-bar polka, while the second is a three-part tune ABCDD. What's more, the A and the B strains are in seven/eight time! This was titled *Polka Volta* on one of Calicanto's early LPs, and a slightly modified version found its way into the Tiger Moth repertory.

The title of *Tarantella Agordina*, may confuse some readers because it's not the frantic tarantella of the deep south, but the far nicer (to my ears) and more sedate version

they play in some parts of the north. Then there's a lovely processional march followed by an equally lovely mazurka – gorgeous! The scotis *Gran Vechia* is one of those elaborate semi-ragtime tunes that Flowers used to delight us with, back in the day – and it's no surprise that it came from the repertoire of a cornet player! It also serves to remind us that the schottische was played in very different ways all over the world.

Having played this CD a number of times now I'm pleased to say that I think I've got used to the 21st Century version of Roberto Tombesi – and enjoy it hugely.

Rod Stradling

STEIN URHEIM

Strandebarm Hubro HUBROLP3555/
HUBROCD2555



Stein Urheim's self-titled album of a couple of years ago stood out, with its blend of other-worldly effects and aching slide guitar, as a major player in the 'subtle, fascinating instrumentals' field, and the Norwegian multi-instrumentalist has added more

tones, textures and influences on his third solo outing. Present throughout are drones, sometimes constant, sometimes, as in the opening to *Water – Part 1*, shifting and made up of different sounds. Urheim's track record with drone specialists The Last Hurrah comes to the fore here, aided by co-producer Jørgen Træen on modular synth and general effects, such as the loops and delays that open *Fjellbekken*, before mandolins come in like birds wheeling along a shore and an archaic-sounding slide plays hypnotically over a one-note bass-string pulse. A different sort of drone, that of sympathetic strings on tamboura and open strings on Turkish tanbur, underpins *Water – Part 2*, with gentle blues shuffle guitar and chanted words, and *Oh So Nice*, with lyrics by Kurt Vonnegut and East/West guitar that evokes Peter Walker's 1960s explorations.

You'll gather that Urheim isn't really classifiable in any one genre, hurrah! If anything counts as a unifying factor it's the abundance of space in his music – even in the industrial and frankly threatening and menacing *Drage Over Templehof* – and his trademark unhurried, limpid slide playing, echoed to the hilt. Yet even this doesn't take centre-stage overall – the title track is ostensibly a take on a traditional Norwegian fiddle tune, which here sounds like Cantonese music reinterpreted for classical guitar (and beautiful to boot), and *Berlin Blues* features some classy ragtime and jazz guitar motifs that slide into chaos before briefly re-establishing the lounge-jazz mode at the end. If there are fewer blues-based references than before, the huge widening of atmospheres and moods makes *Strandebarm* all the stronger and more intriguing. www.hubromusic.com

Ian Kearey

COOPE BOYES & SIMPSON

Coda No Masters Co-operative NMCD48

In keeping with the usual meaning of the word, *Coda* marks a conclusion to touring for the folk world's foremost a cappella trio (with associated farewell tour scheduled for May 2017); it's also trailed as their final studio album. *Coda*'s fifteen tracks see Barry, Jim and Lester going out on a high while they're still at the top of their game, and on the evidence of the new original songs on offer here, they've still plenty to say and their trademark perspicacious fiery anger still burns bright.