

Asia & Pacific REVIEWS

Avra Banerjee Swar Lahari

Avra Banerjee



Composer Avra Banerjee's latest album draws, as is characteristic of his work, predominantly on his South Asian

roots, but with a healthy dash of Western musical elements. This means we have short *alap*-style introductions on a couple of the tracks ('Classically Perth' and 'Mor Pankh') and the rhythmic underpinning of *tabla* holding it all together, but with electric bass and keyboards, and a dash of somewhat diatonic vocal writing. At 35 minutes, the album is perhaps a little short, and while there is some lovely accomplished playing, the musicians don't have the space to really stretch themselves, apart from on 'Harmony of Rhapsody'. For me, this was the most interesting track, particularly in the way the performers deal with complex rhythmic cycles. The all-too-short 'Harmonious Flow' also shows off the exceptional abilities of Murad Ali Khan on *sarangi* and Praashekh Borkar on *sarod*, but it would have been good to give them more room to develop their ideas fully.

MARIA LORD

TRACK TO TRY *Harmony of Rhapsody*

Natty Dolaiasi Sifo

Wantok Musik



A prominent custodian of traditional Solomon Islands culture, Natty Dolaiasi hails from the Adegege

people of Lau, on the island of Malaita. His personal mission is to maintain the ancient chants, stories, poems and rhythms of his ancestors, while also making them relevant to a wider world. Dolaiasi has represented the Solomon Islands internationally for many years; back in 1995 he was involved with the groundbreaking project Siva Pacifica, and he has appeared at the Pacific Arts Festival, WOMADelaide, the Melanesian Arts Festival and the 2023 Pacific Games ceremonies. On his debut album, the title-track (which translates as 'Journey') chronicles the ancestral seafaring migrations of his forefathers across large stretches of open ocean, creating the island archipelago later known as the Solomons. The majestic 'Roi Roa' also pays tribute to the contributions of departed elders, and the beautiful 'Kiko' tells the story of a persevering farmer who tirelessly tends his fields, awaiting the fruits of his labour. There is minimalist instrumental backing, but it's

Dolaiasi's own expressive voice that perfectly centres this lovely album.

SETH JORDAN

TRACK TO TRY *Kiko*

Gamelan Salukat x Jan Kaderit Ashira

One World Records



There's something transcendental about this time-bending collaboration between

Copenhagen-based composer Jan Kaderit and Balinese *gamelan* orchestra Salukat. For those unfamiliar to *gamelan* music: it's performed by groups of musicians on drums, xylophones, gongs and various other percussion instruments. It contains unique rhythmic and tonal qualities, which have long fascinated Western composers such as John Cage, and is strongly associated with religious ritual in several faiths across Indonesia. The rhythms and melodies here seem to shift tempo and energy like altering states of consciousness; sometimes busy and sudden, elsewhere slow and elongated. Here's Kaderit on the thinking behind *Ashira*: "I'm fascinated by how rhythm shapes our perception of time. Music doesn't exist outside of time – you can't hear it without moving through it. At its core, this album is a playful exploration of that idea, culminating in a meditative final piece where time seems to dissolve into the eternal now."

TOM NEWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Kampana – Vibration, Trembling*

Wu Man Music from the Dunhuang Caves / Seeking the Tao of Strings

NCPA Classics / LongYuan Music



Wu Man, a contemporary master of the *pipa* (the Chinese lute) has recently released two albums that demonstrate her fascinating versatility and command of her instrument. The first relates to the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China which are famous for their Buddhist paintings dating from the fifth to 14th centuries. In 1900, a large number of manuscripts, including 25 *pipa* pieces dating back to the tenth century Tang Dynasty, were discovered. Wu Man has had an ambition to play these for years, but they needed a lot of work – in this case by Xia Yanzhou – to interpret them in contemporary notation. *Music from the Dunhuang Caves* presents her interpretations of the 25 pieces followed by seven improvisations inspired by the scores. These don't sound like the virtuoso traditional pieces for which she is known for – they are mostly just a single line at various speeds, plus occasional percussion. There's something meditative about them, taking you back more than a thousand years into Chinese musical history.

While *Music from the Dunhuang Caves* features ancient music on a modern steel string *pipa*, for *Seeking*

the Tao of Strings Wu Man plays 11 historic silk-stringed instruments from the 19th and 20th centuries that belonged to great *pipa* masters of the past and mostly chooses pieces associated with them. She begins with an instrument belonging to Jin Zuli and plays 'Flute and Drum Music at Sunset'. The sound is elegant and magisterial. One of three folk tunes is played on a smaller *pipa* from the Late Qing Dynasty (late 19th century), which sounds more nasal. It's the different timbres of the instruments that makes this disc particularly interesting. One of the highlights is the penultimate track, 'Ambush From Ten Sides', one of the most celebrated of the martial pieces in the *pipa* repertoire. It's full of battle sounds like drumbeats, cannon shots and clashing swords. Here she plays it on a flat, narrow-necked instrument from the Qing Palace in the Forbidden City. An album that reveals the riches of traditional *pipa* music.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Ambush From Ten Sides* from *Seeking the Tao of Strings*

VARIOUS ARTISTS Pōpoloheno: Songs of Resilience & Joy

Mahealani Uchiyama



A beautifully curated collection of music, *Pōpoloheno: Songs of Resilience & Joy* doubles as a powerful moment of

acknowledgement of a largely unknown part of African and Hawaiian history. The album addresses the presence and history of African people in Hawaii via traditional *mele inoa* (name songs), songs of love, songs of heritage and, perhaps most importantly, songs of tribute when it comes to the longevity of the African experience. *Pōpoloheno*, named after the *pōpolo* (a black-coloured berry found in Polynesia; also used as a pejorative term against people of African descent), is a compilation of songs and stories that reclaim the term, highlighting the vibrancy and legacy of this community. Notable creative visionary Mahealani Uchiyama has recruited some of Hawaii's most esteemed artists in bringing this compilation to life. Award-winning artists including Kalani Pe'a and Azure McCall weave empowering moments of storytelling and rhythms through the album, documenting this unique history with purpose and emotional impact. There is much to learn through an album such as this; the most significant lesson of all, is one of endurance, hope and perseverance.

SOSEFINA FUAMOLI

TRACK TO TRY *Pua Laulele*



Natty Dolaiasi