

Photo: © Judith Burrows

**Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino**

keep you guessing (offbeat claps and dysfunctional banjo included) and a couple of live tracks, it's a fierce beast alright.

It's seldom pretty, but then nor is life. Or death. A powerful antidote to the determined prettification of folk song.

www.timeriksenmusic.com

www.eliza-carthy.com

Colin Irwin

CANZIONIERE GRECANICO SALENTINO

Quaranta 40 Ponderosa Music & Art cd128



It's 40 years since Mauro Durante's father founded Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino in Puglia, the area that's the heel in the boot of Italy. They've built and grown in those four decades, much as the country itself. But the biggest

changes to the band have come since 2007, when Mauro took over the leadership. They've become lauded not only for their music, which combines the local tradition with some highly political original songs, but also for their storming live performances, and they've been rightfully praised to the rafters in these pages.

Quaranta doesn't see them resting on any laurels. If anything, all the plaudits have pushed them to produce music that's even more intense. No-one else sounds like them, and few can match their intensity. The voices and the dry pounding of the frame drum hark back to a rural past, but many of the lyrics are in the here and now. The build and burn of *Solo Andante*, for example (lyrics by Eric de Luca), deal with the waves of immigrants seeking something hopeful as they cross the Mediterranean (and die in uncounted thousands – it's no coincidence that the album carries an Amnesty International logo).

It's definitely an album that overwhelms the listener, sonically and emotionally. The musicianship is superb (kudos, too, to the excellent production by Ian Brennan) and they're not afraid of self-deprecating humour – witness *I Love Italia* – but this is music to send you shuttling back and forth through the ages, from the brooding lullaby of *Ninna Ninna* to *Taranta*, a bitingly modern take on the dance for which Salento is famous, which could happily have lasted another ten min-

utes. This is co-written with famed composer pianist Ludovico Einaudi, who also contributes piano to the track.

The a cappella *Mara L'Acqua* won't be bringing the Watersons to mind, but will stir down to the bones, as rough-hewn as a mediaeval well, while *No Top* – with added Fanfara Tirana – is like Lo'Jo refracted through a thousand broken fun-house mirrors, very apt for a piece slating the system of modern Italy. It's an album that's constantly at boiling point, and filled with instrumental surprises, like the brief title cut, yet always in touch with its roots, a remarkable balancing act. The melody and gorgeously reverbed bouzouki (Salento was a Greek province long before the Romans existed) of the traditional *Pu È To Rodo T'Orio* would fit easily in English folk. And then the lyrical, loving finish of *Respiri*, just to round things out. Do they live up to all the hype they've received? Hell, yes! Are they one of the best bands in the world at the moment? Without a shred of doubt. And keep going for the bonus cut. Jake Thackeray on a foreign holiday.

www.canzonieregrecanicosalentino.net/

Chris Nickson

Niyaz



NIYAZ

The Fourth Light Six Degrees 057030 12222



When US-Iranian project Niyaz emerged onto the international scene a decade or so ago, they sounded like yet more heavy-handed purveyors of the ethno-techno/global dance sound which was just reaching its fag-end at the time. Subsequent

recordings have shown a growing focus and lightness of touch and this, their fourth album proper, is their most consistent and satisfying to date.

Niyaz's not-so-secret weapon is front-woman Azam Ali who combines an attractively powerful voice with a striking look (best described as Middle Eastern gothic) and who, along with multi-instrumentalist Loga R Torkian, makes up the core of Niyaz. Their stock-in-trade is soaring vocal and instrumental trance-inducement, heavily influenced by Sufi culture. It's a tightrope-walking balancing act of deep roots and digitalism and on *The Fourth Light* they have the combination of Middle Eastern instrumentation (oud, kanun, rahab, santour, riq, kopuz etc), Western guitar, bass and drums and electronic programming balanced to a tee. Of the nine tracks featured, three are original compositions, the remainder being radical reinterpretations of traditional songs and poems from Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey (the album was part recorded in Istanbul, but mostly, strangely enough, in Quebec). They've always had their moment, but those moments have never come as thick and fast as they do here.

www.sixdegreesrecords.com

Jamie Renton

JACKIE OATES

The Spyglass & The Herringbone ECC 015



There are no flies on Jackie Oates. This, her sixth studio album, is one firmly embedded in and inspired by the old school, mainly English traditional songs delivered with the guileless innocence of a modern Shirley Collins flanked by lithe and lively accompaniments of a pure folk vintage.