

## KELLY OLIVER

**Botany Bay** Kelly Oliver KOCD01

After releasing a pair of head-turning albums of almost exclusively self-penned material (*This Land and Bedlam*), singer-songwriter Kelly has decided to record an album consisting entirely of arrangements of traditional songs originally collected in her home county of Hertfordshire. And the result is every bit as fabulous.

Kelly's choice of producer – Stu Hanna – is inspirational, as are the settings Stu conjures from fellow musicians Toby Shaer, Jamie Francis, Lukas Drinkwater and Evan Carson. Their perkily tripping, uplifting sensitivity brilliantly complements Kelly's own bright, alert vocal timbre. There's a keen sense of drive and thrust, and possibly a hint of Americana at times too. Initial impressions may not convey any particularly radical or experimental tone to the arrangements, but their boldness reveals itself through deeper scrutiny of Kelly's intelligent reinterpretations. She invariably brings a significantly different complexion to these often familiar songs through the deployment of melodies that in virtually every case are considerably different from those commonly associated with the songs (I'd guess they're freshly composed). Kelly's captivating take on *Trees They Do Grow High* features a fiddle part by Phil Beer, and *Died Of Love* a gorgeous Luke Jackson harmony vocal; and Kelly's (wisely) carried out a partial rewrite of *Cuckoo's Nest* with today's attitudes to women in mind. The jury's still out, though, on her decision to use a vocoder on her a cappella rendition of *Lady Margaret*.

Kelly's brave new take on these traditional songs is a welcome, if unexpected development that will doubtless inform her future songwriting.

kellyoliver.co.uk

David Kidman

## LES TAMBOURS DE BRAZZA

**Kongo** Buda 6759246

Full of energy and rhythm, the music of Les Tambours De Brazza can be explosive. They've been going since 1991, and in that time have moved from more traditional origins of voice and percussion to incorporating a full suite of melodic instruments and new styles.

The album starts with what feels like their natural state – the state of constant party. Sharp rhythms, a percussive roll, cheering, and the music begins. It's the kind of track that would have you swaying at a gig, hands in the air, with full-beam smiles on the faces of the musicians. It is a bold opening and you start to get the sense that this band aren't shy types.

During the first half of the album, the music remains at a relatively high level of intensity. This is not dealt with too well from a production point of view, as the sound at times is a little overcooked and crunchy.

Tracks like *Ah Mé Bunsana* demonstrate much more sensitivity, throwing in jazzy guitar chords, which gives a unique element to their sound. There is a great level of skill in the combined bass and guitar parts in *Brazza*, which sound flighty and playful, like two dragonflies dancing around each other. It takes until track 8 for things to really start to mellow down, which may be a bit long for some people.

One of their best tracks is *Nsaka Soukous Tambours*, led by their Malagasy member Julio Rakotonanahary, which has the flowing melodic lines and more unusual chord

changes of music from Madagascar. It is an infectiously rhythmic song with a peculiar slow-mo section that wouldn't sound out of place in an indie folk band.

There are a couple of more traditional voice and percussion tracks, especially the final one of the album, but in general if you like your Congolese music poppy, upbeat and dancey, then this is for you.

budamusique.com

Joshua Coppersmith-Heaven

## ANANDI BHATTACHARYA

**Jays Abound** Riverboat TUGCD 1116



In music it always helps if you have an entrée. And who better than your father when he's the renowned Indian slide player, Debashish Bhattacharya? It's not unusual for young Indian vocalists to announce their presence with a lighter

album, and Anandi's current influences are said to range from Bollywood singer Lata Mangeshkar to Ella Fitzgerald and Joni Mitchell. On the cover she looks like a floppy-haired popstar but at her best her pure voice and tone and a frequent light-hearted use of vocal gymnastics contrast with a firm grounding in Indian traditions.

*Jai Ganesh* proves an ideal opener, the monsoon-inspired *A Pluviophile's Dance* shows maturity and the devotional vocal line on *Radha Enraptured* possibly echoes that on George Harrison's similarly influenced *Within You Without You*. Occasionally there is a second vocalist, as on *Flor de Puja (Flowers of Rain)* with Carola Ortiz (heard on this issue's *fRoots 70* compilation). Influences tend to be quite subtle. *Tagore* is mentioned; there are hints of a western harmonic influence and Indian folk appears very obviously on *Migration Of Colours (Buleria Meets Holi)*, with musicians from Jodhpur and Ortiz adding clarinet.

Her father Debashish, as producer, has done a fine job with a varied and intelligent mix of various Indian, world and popularly influenced pieces. In live situations Anandi performs with her father and uncle, the tabla player Subhasis Bhattacharya, and to this base Debashish has added non-Indian instruments (oud, rubab – featured on *Radha Enraptured* – mandolin and keyboards). Spanish composer and clarinetist Carola Ortiz is an important contributor to the latter stages of the album. Debashish's slide styles

Anandi Bhattacharya



(on both Indian instruments and guitar) also joyfully abound, but are not too dominant. He provides shifting musical colours and finesse, occasional drive as on *Maya's Dream*, and a strong focus throughout.

At 22 it's early days for Anandi, but she shows real promise for the future.

worldmusic.net

Phil Wilson

## FANTASTIC NEGRITO

**Please Don't Be Dead** Blackball Universe / Cooking Vinyl B07BNQZYQ3

The latest from Bay Area blues adventurer Xavier Amin Dphrepalezz AKA Fantastic Negrito offers a state-of-the-fractured-US-nation address delivered with a boldly broad musical palette. The front-porch blues, raw funk and folk storytelling of his previous work are still very much in evidence, but the rock influence, always lurking in the mix, is now more to the fore (even more so in live performances). Clearly, this is a man who's listened to Led Zeppelin and Nirvana as well as Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Sly Stone and Prince.

If this sounds like a mess, it isn't. Negrito is a born musical magpie in the best sense, with a gift for taking his borrowings and creating something all his own. His lyrics are poetic, sometimes allegorical, but it's clear what he's on about. References to burning down walls and fighting fear may be universal, but delivered in the current US political climate, have a very specific relevance. Musically, it's a thick, spicy stew of wailing call-and-response vocals, amped-up guitar, soul combo organ and drumming that would do the late John Bonham proud.

The opening *Plastic Hamburgers* sets out this stall from the start. *A Letter To Fear* is modern, mutant gospel and *A Cold November Street* echoes *House of the Rising Sun* in its verses. The closing *Bullshit Anthem*, with its 'take that bullshit and turn it into good shit' chorus, ends things on a surprisingly positive note, all dressed up in some sparse James Brown funk.

If Negrito sanded off his edges, ditched the politics and poetry and ramped up the rock even further, he could probably find some mainstream success in his home country. The fact that I don't believe he will (and probably couldn't even if he wanted to) is cause for celebration.

fantasticnegrito.com

Jamie Renton