



The James Hunter Six

THE JAMES HUNTER SIX

Hold On! Daptone Records DAP 040

Some things never go out of fashion – and one of them's a first-rate soul/R&B band with a blasting horn section in its engine room and a great singer up front.

Brooklyn's Daptone Records has made this style of music its own in recent years, so James Hunter's recent signing to the label makes perfect sense. With Daptone's Gabe Roth in the producer's chair, the band's sound gains an extra level of precision and punch here which makes it clear they've found the perfect home.

With the exception of keyboard player Andrew Kingslow, the sextet's line-up has remained intact since 2006's *People Gonna Talk*, giving them the almost telepathic tightness that only long comradeship can provide. From the first snap of track one's opening snare drum, you know you're in safe hands. The driving, staccato horn riffs at the heart of every song are sharp and inventive, underpinned by Kingslow's organ work and a rock-solid rhythm section.

Hackneyed as the comparison is, Hunter's voice really does stir memories of classic soul artists like Sam Cooke and Ray Charles. I know he gets sick of reading that, but really there's no better way of summing up his vocal gifts. He draws inspiration from that era's disciplined approach to recording too: only one song here is allowed to exceed the 3:30 mark, and every solo's kept short and focused.

There's a Latino sway to some tracks, including *This Is Where We Came In*'s tale of a relationship nearing its end. This conjures a ballroom full of elegantly-clad dancers swirling round the foot of the stage as Hunter croons away. Elsewhere, we get more exuberant numbers such as *(Baby) Hold On*, where Hunter's own guitar duels against Damian Hand's sax, and the full-throated soul of *A True Heart*.

The party peaks with three consecutive stunners towards the album's close. The sprightly, hook-laden *Light Of My Life* is surely a chart hit waiting to happen. *Stranded* proves equally infectious, while the instrumental *Satchel Foot* soundtracks an imaginary 1960s movie with a combination of groovy guitar twang and those trademark horns. All three of these songs had me dancing in my chair the second they started.

As you'll have gathered, I like this album a lot. My only quibble is that it's a mere 31 minutes long which, given that Daptone's priced it as a full-length CD, seems rather short measure.

www.jameshuntermusic.com

Paul Slade

SABA ANGLANA

Ya Katama Hod Felmay fy8229

Italian-Ethiopian singer Saba Anglana's latest album *Ya Katama Hod* ('Belly Of The City') aims to explore the organic and ungoverned spaces that exist in all the world's great globalised cities. The musical styles successfully alternate between her Italian and Ethiopian roots throughout the record, with varying results.

While the songs with their feet in Italy sometimes feel a tad earnest (opening track *Gabriel* being a case in point), the more Ethiopian-influenced tracks are far more promising. Tracks such as *Tariken* and *Zarraf* will have sounds and styles familiar to any fan of the *Éthiopiennes*, combining as they do accordeons, pentatonic scales and the off-key jazz spirit which has left such an indelible mark on world music.

The record works best when Saba combines her almost classical Italian vocal style with her Ethiopian musicianship as on *Roob* – a string-led stomp and a stirring ode to the rain. Overall this is a promising record by a writer with a deep understanding of Ethiopia's musical heritage.

www.sabaanglana.it

Liam Thompson

JITKA ŠURANSKÁ, IRÉN LOVASZ & MICHAL ELIA KAMAL

Tři Hlasy/Three Voices Indies Scope MAM556-2

Recorded live at the Folk Holiday Festival in the Czech Republic last year, this collaboration emerged from just two days of rehearsal. It's a ceremony of resolute but brittle music, convoluted around different voices, different languages, different traditions and two renowned folk ensembles. Shum Davar and Light In Babylon shared a very busy stage but discovered a vital stateliness to their combined playing, whispers of virtuosity beside unassailable but hurt vocals. Participants have remarked on the magical consultations and synchronicity between the musicians, despite working from the almost wholly unrelated and difficult languages of Czech, Hebrew and Hungarian. The result is an inspired and beguiling release, with intimations of customary toe-tapping and melodious jazz-folk held at bay by meaningful and mellifluous vocals. As the singers translated songs between languages and cultures, an empathic tenderness emerged, leading to a record of precious mystery and rousing life.

Israeli singer Michal Elia Kamal, Hungarian singer Irén Lovasz and project director Jitka Šuranská sing as one, in an overt eschewing of national preoccupation in traditional music. Voices entwine seamlessly, subsuming political difference and artistic sovereignty. *Hej, Jancsika, Jancsika* is a captivating take on familiar fare, with vocals that are both strong and uneasy, healing through memorable hooks and simple drama. Lovasz has spoken about the need to express a 'borderless freedom', crossing and ignoring the relatively recently accrued barriers between culture, linguistics, music genres, and arbitrary lines on the map. Michal Elia Kamal, in turn, has spoken of innately knowing all the 'stories' and 'places' that are delineated in these once 'foreign' songs. She sings passionately through difference, inhabiting where she has never been.

Shecharchoret is all recognisable pastoral, the whole company revealing assertive and deceptive simplicity, typically judicious and deft arrangements from a vast intercultural ensemble just as intent on overcoming artificial obstructions between peoples and people, as on spotlighting outstanding vocalists lost in language. In the epic slow burn of *Hava Nagila*, shared vocal intensity and intent stirs both fine bands into full traditional display, violins, guitar, mandolin, accordeon and percussion in absolute thrall to these bewitching, intoxicating and unified vocals.

www.indies.eu

John Pheby

DIANA RASINA

Romanian Tales Bayla BAY010

This was the first new CD to be played in this house in 2016 and it could end up being one of the best.

Diana studied opera at home but left Bucharest to further her singing career in Vienna where she studied a range of other singing including jazz. The outcome of the search for a suitable métier brought her back to her first love, the Romanian tradition.

Still in Vienna, she formed a small group of musicians of other eastern Europeans and they make a sizeable contribution to the success of this project. The double bass of Jovan Torbica from Serbia underpins the arrangements well. Dimitar Karamitv from Bulgaria, on kaval (looks like a recorder, sounds like a flute) provides an interesting foil for the voice, echoing and repeating what has been sung but it is Laszlo Racz from Hungary who, alongside the voice, provides the album's most interesting moments with his emotion-charged, adventurous playing of the cimbalom.

There is a suggestion that the intended market is not the domestic one of Romania and the surrounding countries. There is something very 'clean' and accessible about the whole project; the album was recorded in Austria yet the interesting booklet notes are given only in English. Does this matter? Well, that is a matter for personal choice. The outstanding thing about the album is the high quality of the singing and musicianship.

www.galileo-mc.de

Vic Smith

PEVARLAMM

Deltu Paker CD PAKER PROD 018

Pevarlamm is a Breton folk-rock band formed in 2013 by bombarde, binioù, uilleann pipes and low whistles player Konogan An Habask, who was earlier in Bagad Kemper and Startjenn. He's joined by fiddle, electric and acoustic guitars and other frets, bass and drums in full-on, high-energy, expertly played wild-dance music, both traditional and new.