

where the studio itself is as much an instrument as anything wielded by the players. It's much the same crew as before, with Chris Eckman and Hugo Race working with Ben Zabo and his band, Samba Touré and singer Aminta Wassidje Traore. There are more guests, members of Tamikrest, the band Super 11, rapper MC Jazz and singer Ibrahim Douf, all of whom bring something important. This is an album of dark moods and strong textures, kicking off with the strong trance of *Stars Of Gao* – as hard as anything you'll find in Gnawa – before setting out on an aural trip. There are touches of dub colouring the production, but that's only part of the story. It can range from the dreamlike sonics of *Clouds Are Cover* to the nightmare shards of sound and voice that make up *Day The Grid Went Down*. Along the way shafts of daylight peek through in the more jaunty *Ballade De Ben Zabo*. It's a trip to hold the listener enthralled, down winding roads and the open desert, the *Red Dust* of Bamako and close with the sadness of *September 12*. Perhaps the most important thing about Dirtmusic – a loose name for a collection of musicians more than any fixed band – is that they're moving beyond any definition for the music they play, showing the different, shifting forms it can take.

[www.glitterbeat.com/glitterbeat\\_artist\\_dirtmusic.html](http://www.glitterbeat.com/glitterbeat_artist_dirtmusic.html)

Chris Nickson

## PATSY REID

**The Brightest Path** Classy Trad Records CTREC002



There are lots of wondrous fiddle players in Scotland – and indeed the rest of the British Isles. What perhaps sets Patsy Reid apart is musical hunger and her willingness to explore supposedly alien territories of technique, content and culture. This

inevitably contains no small element of risk but, as accomplished as she is, Patsy has not only earned the right to take the bow on a journey of discovery, she's gathered the know-how to get it right.

Already vastly experienced in a conglomeration of different techniques via her work with Breabach, VAMM, the Cecil Sharp Project and innumerable Celtic Connections collaborations, Patsy really extends herself (and sounds like she's having a lot of fun too) dabbling here and delving there with lively jaunts between hardcore tradition and contemporary experimentation. The album was conceived, workshopped and refined at the Crear arts retreat in Argyll, where she was joined by Mhairi Hall (piano), Ewan MacPherson (guitar, banjo, mandolin), Ben Nicholls (double bass, harmonium), Fraser Fifield (sax, whistle), Signy Jakobsdóttir (percussion) and Mattie Foulds – co-producer – on drums.

What emerges is a veritable jamboree of styles. It opens, for example, with her own *Hooray Henry*, a meandering jazz ensemble work that suddenly explodes with a startling volley of sax before being replaced by a sparse piano accompaniment ushering in the plaintive Reid fiddle on a gorgeous traditional tune, *Donside*. The contrast is striking yet somehow seamless, but before you know it she's singing Ewan MacPherson's heart-warming song *The River Princes* with confidence and panache.

Patsy also plays cello and viola amid the rapidly changing textures and while the issue may occasionally be clouded by a marginal overload of sound and finicky arrangements, it generally does all hang together remarkably well. Some may inevitably bleat about purity and wanting to

hear Patsy playing solo fiddle while others will be seduced by the sentimental song selection, but at the heart of it all there's a glorious musician playing with soul and integrity and that goes a long way.

You can hear a track on this issue's *fRoots* 48 compilation.

[www.patsyreid.com](http://www.patsyreid.com)

Colin Irwin

## STEIN URHEIM

**Stein Urheim** Hubro CD2529

From the Norwegian drone-band and jazz scene comes Bergen's Stein Urheim with an intriguing solo album, full of space and measure. Its five instrumental tracks are based mainly around slide guitar and slide tamboura, with the slide rattling against the frets and the neck, with appearances by the Chinese gu qin, the Norwegian langeliek zither and the odd banjo and mandolin, which take up melodies for a short space and then disappear again, adding to the air of shared noise. The Chinese, or rather Cantonese, influence is strong in the falling cadences of *Kosmoloda* and *Watch The View*, where they are repeated and built upon in a Philip Glass-like manner. *Beijing Blues* is a little gem of surprises, concluding in a soft, mutated blues with groaning harmonica as a backdrop, and *Great Distances* is constructed around aching, echoing minor-key slide, blending the desert blues of Tinawaren with John Fahey's experimental *The Great San Bernadino Birthday Party* and ending early enough to leave the listener wanting more. It's all assured, subtle and gently humorous. If Les Triaboliques twang your synapses, this one should be right up your street.

[www.hubromusic.com](http://www.hubromusic.com)

Ian Kearey

## ALASDAIR FRASER & NATALIE HAAS

**Abundance** Culburnie CUL124

More than ten years in and only the fourth album from this remarkable duo, who still sound as fresh and inventive as they did back at the beginning. Fraser's fiddling is always a joy to behold, and Haas' cello – sometimes almost a percussion instrument, sometimes a wall of sound, sometimes taking the lead lyrically – go together like a horse and carriage. As with the last album, the duo make judicious use of some extra musicians (including Donald Shaw, James MacIntosh and even a Nashville brass section) but they're always subservient to the soaring fiddle melodies.

Patsy Reid



The music comes both from the Scottish Fiddle tradition and Fraser himself. His *Howard Booster's Style* is just a drop-dead gorgeous tune; the five pieces in the commissioned *Connie Suite* are all inspired by dances (the Django-influenced *Hot Club d'Écosse* lets Fraser do Grapelli impressions while *Ougadougou Boogie* coaxes unusual rhythms from the Haas' cello), while the chirpy *The Referendum* commemorates Alex Salmond's visit to the fiddle course at Sabhal Mor Ostaig (the Gaelic college on Skye). This duo always go down a storm live, but rarely tour accessibly, so this album is a hugely welcome substitute – an abundance of riches indeed.

[www.culburnie.com](http://www.culburnie.com)

Bob Walton

## FELA KUTI

**Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense; Original Suffer Head; Live In Amsterdam; Army Arrangement; Beasts Of No Nation; Underground System** Knitting Factory KFR 1022 – 1027

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

**Red Hot + Fela** Knitting Factory KFR1121-2

Completing the latest reissue of the complete Fela Kuti canon, the last six CDs. What hasn't been said about Fela's musical achievement, his war against injustice, exploitation and the suffering he paid for it? Savage beatings, phoney charges, jail, broken health, early death – this music was born out of struggle and is live, bristling and powerful. But you know that.

The *Red Hot+Fela* compilation is a selection of Fela's pieces reworked by modern musicians, not following the Afrobeat route too closely. We have rock, hip hop and Americana, contributors including Angelique Kidjo, My Morning Jacket, the Kronos Quartet – get about, don't they? – and Tony Allen. A good and often surprising CD. Red Hot is an AIDS awareness organisation.

[www.knittingfactoryrecords.com/](http://www.knittingfactoryrecords.com/)

Rick Sanders

## EDDI READER

**Vagabond** Reveal Records REVEAL022CDX

## FIONA HUNTER

**Rusty Squash** Horn Records RSH004CD

Always a great live performer, Eddi Reader has travelled far and wide both geographically and musically, skirting the areas that might fall under the category of acoustic pop, folk, folk rock, jazz or original songwriting. Five years after her last studio album, and following a personally turbulent few years, she has returned to her roots, with many of the songs relating to her past and her wanderings; the album was partly recorded at her home. Most of the writing credits go to Eddi, in conjunction with her partner John Douglas and long-time collaborator Boo Hewerdine, while Michael Marra, Declan O'Rourke, and a couple of traditional songs round things off.

Her usual touring band are augmented by the cream of the British folk scene, here producing a lush, relaxed, smoky, occasionally jazzy French café feel that's a perfect foil for Eddi's downright glorious singing. (Frankly, she could sing the telephone directory and make it sound wonderful.) From the opening Gus Kahn standard *I'll Never Be The Same* to the perfect closing gem of Hewerdine's *It's A Beautiful Night* there's nary a duff track. After publicly slagging off her singing of Burns' songs in the House of Lords, I can't see Lord Steel going for *Vagabond*, but that's just fine. It really is a lovely laid-back album: light