

## Asia REVIEWS

### Dalai Lama Inner World

Khandro (42 mins)



Music for peace in trying times



One can imagine Bono's wrap-around shades turning green with envy when he heard that the New Zealand duo Junelle and Abraham Kunin had persuaded the Dalai Lama to make an album with them. The U2 duet with his Holiness will have to wait and Bono will no doubt deplore the lack of bombast on this elegant album on which the 85-year-old spiritual leader recites mantras and Buddhist teachings over a sympathetically ambient soundbed. "Music can help people in a way that I can't," he admits and hopes that these 11 tracks will take his vision of world peace and spiritual harmony to a new audience.

On 'Compassion' you can chant 'om mani padme hum' along with the great man over meditative strings and flute, or elsewhere you can simply sit back and absorb his words of wisdom over the chiming new age soundtrack that is 'Humanity'. Anoushka Shankar adds some spine-tingling *sitar* on the lovely 'Ama La' and if you've ever wondered what a Tibetan Buddhist piano ballad sounds like, then try 'Purification'. In places the Kunins' arrangements sound a little too like out-takes from an Enya album, but overall this is a respectful and dignified insight into an inner world of timeless spirituality.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Ama La*

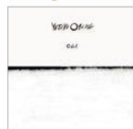
### Yutaka Oyama

Obi

Sony Music (56 mins)



A shamisen master for the next generation



Yutaka Oyama is a master of the *Tsugaru shamisen* school in Japan, having learned at the foot of his grandfather, the master of the Oyama school. Throughout his career he has expanded his range beyond traditional Japanese shamisen repertoire, collaborating with jazz and pop musicians, and even recording the soundtrack to video games. His two recent albums with trumpeter Yusuke Shima are a particular highlight in Japanese folk-jazz collaborations. His new release, *Obi*, carries on that wide



Françoise Lamy

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OF THE  
WORLD



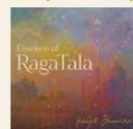
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### Kuljit Bhamra Essence of Raga Tala

ARC Music (78 mins)



A rhythmic exploration of raga



Here *tabla* maestro Kuljit Bhamra has put together a rather eclectic but very enjoyable

selection of tracks, many which he has written himself, to give us a broad selection of *ragas*. Although the disc runs to a generous 78 minutes, each track is relatively short and so the differences between each of the *ragas* can easily be heard, something I thought was a nice touch.

The star of the show is the 'multi-tabla set,' which he created to enable the playing of all the notes of a *raga*. This turns out to be no mere novelty, but is hauntingly beautiful and heard to great advantage on 'Dhun in Raga Patdeep – Sitar & Tabla' and also on the two 'Tabla Modale' tracks.

The other excellent musicians who contribute to the disc should also be given their due. Among others, the violinist Rohan Roy deserves particular praise for his rendition of 'Raga Mishra Nat Bahirav – Violin', a delicate solo performance that holds your attention all the way to the end, and I was also very impressed by guitarist Siddhart Singh on 'Dhun in Raga Vrindavani Sarang – Acoustic Guitar & Tabla'. I was, perhaps, less convinced by the sound of the analog Yamaha CS01 on 'Raga Sindhu Bhairavi - Synthesizer' as it seemed to lack the finesse of the playing elsewhere, but it does add an element of nostalgia for those who can remember experimenting with the instrument back in the 1980s.

MARIA LORD

TRACK TO TRY *Dhun in Raga Patdeep – Sitar & Tabla*

vision with a range of collaborators on piano, trumpet, guitar and cello. Oyama's embrace of different musical traditions comes together wonderfully on 'Tsugaru-Santeria-Bushi', featuring *batá* drums alongside the *shamisen* and traditional Japanese folk vocals. It's an evocative, enticing performance.

The two piano-led tracks, however, tend to drag on a bit, lacking the drive of the other tunes and to these ears at least, that particular combination of instruments don't blend very well together. Overall though this is another good release from a musician that more Japanese music fans should be aware of. He has managed to drag the stifling, conservative world of traditional Japanese instruments into the 'world music' environment of the 21st century.

JAMES CATCHPOLE

TRACK TO TRY *Tsugaru-Santeria-Bushi*

### Harry Roesli Titik Api

La Munai Records (61 mins) VINYL & DIGITAL ONLY



Gamelan-tinged prog



Harry Roesli was a political and social activist and prominent member of the *tradisi baru* (new tradition)

Indonesian artists who emerged in the 1970s. *Titik Api* (Hot Spot) blends traditional Sundanese (West Javanese) *gamelan* with progressive rock and funky hypnotic grooves and was originally released in 1975.

The album gets off to a flying start with a thrilling mix of *gamelan*, squiggly synth and fuzzy rock riffs on 'Sekar Jepun' (allegedly based on a Balinese *gong kebyar* piece), which also features *angklung* (rattles). 'Merak' is funky and infectious, with Indonesian vocals. 'Jangga Wareng' features an unexpected *rebab* (Sundanese fiddle) solo. The record is an engaging patchwork of moods and musical styles, often in the same piece, for example the epic journey of 'Kebo Jiro' builds from a slow ballad to a full-blown prog wig-out. The energy is not sustained throughout, however, with some slower ballads in the second half. The sonorous chiming of 'Prolog' gradually builds before spilling over into a *gamelan*/synth groove that really cooks. 'Lembe Lembe' (an arrangement of a traditional Maluku song) fuses *gamelan* funk, flute and bells to fantastic effect. One for fans of prog with a *gamelan* flavour.

ANDY CHANNING

TRACK TO TRY *Sekar Jepun*