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## Album reviews: Tom Waits | Magazine | Classical | Jazz | Folk | World

Published on **Monday 24 October 2011 03:43****Our team of reviewers give you their take on the newest albums to be released...**

POP

**Tom Waits: Bad As Me****Epitaph, £12.99**

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THE newly anointed Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee's first album of new material in seven years is about as accessible as it gets in Tom Waits' idiosyncratic musical universe. Guest players including Keith Richards, with whom he duets on the soused lament Last Leaf, Los Lobos guitarist David Hidalgo and harmonica ace Charlie Musselwhite join him for this very satisfying rummage around the old junkyard.

From the urgent, chaotic blues of Chicago and and preacher strut of Raised Right Men with its menacing organ stabs and clang of percussion, through to the gruff but tender bar-room balladry of Pay Me and Kiss Me Like A Stranger, Bad As Me unleashes a visceral world of sound – just open your ears to the rock'n'roll rattle and rumble of Let's Get Lost, or the twang, shuffle and tinkle of Everybody's Talking, on which Waits makes like a brooding blues diva.

**Magazine: No Thyself****Wire-Sound, £11.99**

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WITH The Specials on tour, PiL back in the studio and this new album from Magazine, these are fertile times for old punks. The 30 years since they last released an album melt away on contact with Howard Devoto's instantly recognisable diction and his erudite, witty lyrics, Dave Formula's gargantuan retro-futuristic keyboards which sound like an aggressive distillation of the entire BBC Radiophonic Workshop library and new guitarist Noko adopting a "what would John McGeoch do?" approach to his blistering contributions. Taking the dynamic journey through new-wave rockers Do The Meaning and Other Thematic Material, doomy death march The Worst of Progress... and the post-punk torch song Physics feels like greeting an old friend – and realising that they still bite.

**Stevie Jackson: (I Can't Get No) Stevie Jackson****Banchory, DOWNLOAD ONLY**

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BELLE & Sebastian's guitarist has made regular songwriting contributions to the group over the years but his debut solo album is an opportunity to revel uninterrupted in his fluent melodic abilities, impeccable influences (Bob Dylan and Mike Nesmith, for starters), playful humour and love of pop culture references (I Can't Get No) Stevie Jackson sports not one but two tracks inspired by film directors, for all you movie mavens, while other wee gems on this uplifting, infectious collection include a delicate acoustic ballad about the failure of a brave new housing project, a Wreckless Eric-style lo-fi punk ruckus, un très charmant Franglais frolic and a stealthy funk track with pithy rhyming couplets and the briefest flash of disco strings. Satisfaction assured.

**Fiona Shepherd**

CLASSICAL

**Stravinsky: L'Oiseau de Feu****Les Siecles Live, £13.99**

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THIS is no ordinary recording of a well-worn Stravinsky masterpiece. For this is Francois-Xavier Roth's period instrument orchestra Les siècles, which brings its bare-faced charisma to a recreation of the Ballets Russes programme of 1910 that unleashed the young Stravinsky's Firebird on the world. The playing is electrifying and visceral, capturing the steely brilliance of the score – flashes of colour and an energy that had me sitting excitedly on the edge of my seat. The sheer magnetism of the Stravinsky is partnered by the concoction of works (by Glazounov, Sinding, Arensky and Grieg) that appeared together on the same billing under the title "Les Orientales".

**Kenneth Walton**

JAZZ

**Stan Tracey Quartet: A Child's Christmas Jazz Suite****ReSteamed Records, £12.99**

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PIANIST Stan Tracey has turned to the writings of Dylan Thomas before, and if this suite inspired by the evocative short story A Child's Christmas in Wales is not as striking as his classic Under Milk Wood, it is a very enjoyable piece. Unlike its predecessor, this recording includes the story, split into seven segments read by the pianist's grandson, Ben Tracey. I doubt listeners will want to hear the narration every time, but each is indexed, and the music can be programmed separately. Tracey's imaginative, rhythmically charged music is a vivid complement to the rhythms and language of Thomas's prose, and stands equally well aside from it. The old master is in fine form alongside saxophonist Simon Allen, with the usual rhythm section of Andy Cleynert and Clark Tracey lending able support. Several cuts above the standard Christmas record.

**Kenny Mathieson**

FOLK

**The Nordic Fiddlers' Bloc****Etnisk Musikklub, £13.99**

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AN INSPIRED North Sea fiddle triumvirate combines Shetlander Kevin Henderson of Fiddlers' Bid, the Boys of the Lough and Session A9, Anders Hall from Sweden and Norwegian Hardanger fiddler Olav Luksengård Mjelva.

These muscular, culturally tripartite harmonies ring out splendidly on Scandinavian tunes such as the exuberant reinlender which opens the album, or a high-stepping Halling from Trondheim, but there are also moments when an unnamed Shetland reel suddenly takes irresistible flight, or other well known Shetland melodies, such as Da Greenland Man's Tune or Da New Rigged Ship, emerge in slightly unfamiliar but instantly recognisable and wonderfully lyrical harmonies.

Likewise, two well seasoned American tunes ring out naturally, the lovely Midnight on the Mountain, and Bonaparte's Retreat, while the beautifully stealthy Norwegian composition Mountain Bird sings out over pizzicato strings, and the closing Swedish waltz brings everything to a beautiful stillness.

**Jim Gilchrist**

WORLD

**France-Mayotte: Debaa - The Singing of Sufi Women****Radio France, £11.99**

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THE women's voices have an uninhibited child-like quality, the call-and-response is structured but spontaneous, and you can almost smell the sea air – this is an absolutely entrancing record. It was made on Mayotte in the Comoros, a cluster of Creole islands in the western Indian Ocean. The people of Mayotte have Bantu origins. They opted for integration with France in 1841, and chose to remain essentially French after independence in 1976, though there is a Muslim culture that still pervades their music. Their proximity to Madagascar has led to much musical interchange, both in instruments and rhythms and in the use of the human voice.

Debaa was the family name of a 15th-century Yemeni historian whose religious poems and accounts of the Prophet's life made him celebrated in the Indian Ocean – hence his name being given to the mystical song and dance based on his epic poems. The Sufi songs on this CD are above all a glorification of Allah and his saints, but their poetry is rooted in the morality of daily life. "I sucked the most juicy fruit," begins one song. "I was served the best part / I was my people's chosen one, granted the right to intercede for sinners / But I bring death to the unrepentant / And I will extinguish the fires of hell."

Another song has a wonderfully epic sweep: "The wild beasts, the very trees bowed down before him / He travelled by night, he passed the stars and the kingdoms..." Ramadan and days of celebration are when these songs are sung, and the exaltation is contagious.

**Michael Church**

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