

Vincent Black Lightning, a wistful version as of youth recalled in old age. *Campfires* is acoustic folk-pop in the tradition of The Corrs, and *Princess Rosanna* is a contemporary ballad (by Findlay Napier) with close-harmony singing and a country/Americana touch.

My favourite song here is the late great Leonard Cohen's *Everybody Knows*, a song that is even truer now than when Cohen first published it in 1988. The song expresses deep anger at the capitalist world's wealth-worshipping, narcissistic, 'because I'm worth it' culture that has given up on social justice and human rights. The rich are getting richer and the poor poorer.

Thank you, Top Floor Taivers: not least for reminding us all what a wonderful genius Leonard Cohen was.

www.topfloortailleurs.com

Paul Matheson

DÁLAVA

The Book Of Transfigurations Songlines SGL2408-2



On the opening and closing tracks of this intriguingly-titled disc, sound literally crosses time, with recordings of Dálava's singer Julia Uhela's grandfather, Jura, singing before the pieces morph into the band's more amorphous take on the same pieces. The remainder of the tracks, though, come from the book of Moravian folk songs that her great-grandfather, Vladimir, collected in his home village. A book that transfigured her musical life. The re-imagining of those songs here, forged in New York City and recorded in Canada, runs from the raw, fractured delicacy of *Pásl Jano Koně* or *Studená Rosenka* to the ectoplasmic blast along *Dyž Sem Já Šel Pres Hory*, where instruments explode in noise over an insistent (and irresistible) reggaeton beat; the old world collides with the new.

It's an album that manages to be thoroughly rooted in its Moravian past while still pushing ahead into the 21st Century, a complete, radical reinvention of Moravian music. Uhela is the linchpin, with a voice that can seduce like Lorelei on the rocks one moment, then turn strident and martial; passionate and sinuous, while guitarist Aram Bajakian, whose credits include working with John Zorn, offers an instrumental counterpoint. The rest of the six-piece band deserve equal billing, not just for their playing, but also for their invention. These are songs to disturb and to lull, of past and family. Mysterious, yes, but also filled with a curious beauty. You heard a track on *fRoots 64*.

www.dalavamusic.com

Chris Nickson

JOHN LEE HOOKER

The Modern, Chess & Veejay Singles Collection 1949-62 Acrobat ACQCD7103

BUKKA WHITE

High Fever Blues Soul Jam 600899

CLIFTON CHENIER

Louisiana Swamp Hoodoo Records 263566

No one modernised the blues, post-second world war, quite like John Lee Hooker as this ferociously good four-CD set so amply demonstrates. Enigmatic and unique, Hooker was both primitive and futuristic; his music intricate and rhythmically intense, his stream-of-consciousness lyrics echoing Beat poetry while also being a precursor of rap. More



Dálava

Photo: Farhad Ghaderi

often than not the last word of any given verse doesn't rhyme with what's previously been sung... you might think you know the word that's coming, but Hooker will always catch you off guard, and John Lee's voice is simply one of the most resonant voices ever to come out of Mississippi. His rich tone and forceful delivery grab you and hold you riveted. Hooker was a record-a-holic, often making several sessions during a year, preferring to take a recording fee rather than wait and gamble on royalties. The 101 tracks collected here represent only the singles released on three of the many labels that issued Hooker's recordings between 1949 and 1962. There are a number of his classic songs included and it's fascinating to hear his first recorded versions of titles like *I'm In The Mood* (1951), *Dimples* (1956), or *Boom Boom* (1962), songs that he would re-record at later dates and in different settings. These original recordings, along with every other track presented here, have an abrasive earthy directness that, coupled with Hooker's propulsive rhythmic drive and never ending creativity, no other blues singer could really match. www.acrobatmusic.com

Rhythmic drive is also a feature of the music of both Clifton Chenier and Bukka White. A slide guitar specialist (although not exclusively) Bukka White also possessed a rough, vibrant voice. He recorded a number of classic sides like *The Panama Limited* (1930), *Shake 'Em On Down* (1937), *Fixin' To Die Blues* (1940), all included here among the 20 tracks on this collection representing White's complete 1930-1940 recorded legacy. Like Hooker, Bukka White didn't need a rhythm section or a band to create his own special brand of blues but on his 1940 two-day session in Chicago, which produced a total of twelve excellent titles, he gets extra drive and support from the brilliant washboard playing of Washboard Sam (Robert Brown), a recording star in his own right. The musical empathy between these two men is quite remarkable. Some other tracks feature a second guitar providing an extra layer of rhythm for Bukka to work with. Bukka's younger cousin BB King never mastered the art of singing and playing the guitar at the same time, something that Bukka never had a problem with - his voice and guitar are always completely meshed together, creating an amazingly full sound that is always instantly recognisable. souljamrecords.com

Clifton Chenier created his own sound to such a degree that his accordion playing and singing became synonymous with the modernised strand of Louisiana Cajun music

known as zydeco. None of the performers who came after Chenier, as good as they might be, played zydeco music with the same fundamental power as the master. Primarily dance music, zydeco relies on heavy rhythm as a base component. Chenier, a master of rhythm, utilises his additional musicians as an extension of himself and the musical effect is pure rhythmic dynamite as is heard throughout *Louisiana Stomp*, a 29-track compilation of recordings Chenier made between 1954 and 1960. In later years, when he was making albums for Arhoolie, Sonet and Alligator, Chenier's sound was somewhat smoothed out but, back in the '50s when he was recording singles for labels like Elko, Post, Specialty, Checker and Zynn, he was as raw as you can get. All the clammy heat, sweat, grit and grime of a hot bayou night is so deeply embedded in this music that listening to any track on this CD you can smell, taste and savour the atmosphere of a Chenier gig. One of my most enduring musical memories is catching an all-night show of Clifton Chenier And His Red Hot Louisiana Band way down in Louisiana back in 1977. *Louisiana Stomp* takes me right back to that wonderful night.

www.hoodoo-records.com

Dave Peabody

SALTFISHFORTY

Bere Saltfishforty CRSFF0517

Saltfishforty are a duo from the Orkney Islands and this is their fifth album in fifteen years. Douglas Montgomery (fiddle/viola) and Brian Cromarty (vocal/guitar/mandola) are prominent figures in the current revival of Orkney's traditional music scene, and are something of an institution in Orkney! They combine Scottish traditional music and original compositions with influences from Americana, rock, jazz, swing and blues.

On this album, the instrumental reel set *Whisky* provides fast-paced fiddle and finger-picking guitar with an Americana flavour. *Eileen's* is a gentle hornpipe composed for Brian's wife and performed in bluegrass style. The *Picky* set showcases Brian's mellifluous mandolin on a set of Irish jigs. And there's a sweet and gentle old-timey set of waltzes too.

The songs here are also good. *The Odin Stone* is a contemporary song about Orkney's standing songs, performed with full-on bluesy fiddle and guitar. The song's title may be Nordic, but the music owes more to Nashville! *Tender Is The Night* is a contempo-