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## TOM MOORE & ARCHIE CHURCHILL-MOSS

Laguna Hotel Recordings HOTELREC002



Produced with the aid of a Creative Bursary from the English Folk Dance & Song Society, *Laguna* is a self-produced duo album by two-thirds of the winners of the 2011 BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Award, who describe it as an album of "new compositions and devised improvisations with their roots in local folk tune traditions".

It's a creative approach that's more familiar from Scandinavian artists, and the influence can be clearly felt in *Universeum* – titled after a science education centre in Gothenburg, and the recalled Norwegian melody *Nina's Tune*. However, it's the pair's grounding in English traditional forms that gives this music much of its distinctive appeal – most overtly in *West Park* and *Crooked Man* (a Schottische and waltz, respectively) but a discernible presence throughout – imbuing their compositions with an accessible melodic sensibility less commonly found in much minimalist, experimental and new-improvised music.

Moore's sonorous and expressive viola playing and Churchill-Moss's fleet-fingered melodeon are variously presented both unadorned and layered with overdubs and electronic processing to exhilarating effect. Fans of Leveret and The Rheingans Sisters will doubtless admire the spacious instrumental harmonies, and, like fellow English experimentalists Three Cane Whale, Moore and Churchill-Moss know the effectiveness of brevity – as evinced by the short, improvised-to-a-live-delay pieces *Laguna I & II*. Nothing is overplayed or conveys any sense of being done merely 'because we can'. But, as they thrillingly prove with *Hayley & Henry's* (an exploration of the melodic common ground between Paramore's *My Heart* and Henry Purcell's *Neptune's Masque*) these two chaps can do pretty much anything.

This music is about perfect balance – not just in the exchanges between the two musicians, but in the exchanges between the impulses of adventure and restraint. A timely, compelling and hugely enjoyable album that may also reveal something about the existing notions of folk music and art, and even England and Europe.

[duomooreoss.bandcamp.com](http://duomooreoss.bandcamp.com)

Steve Hunt

## NAOMI BEDFORD & PAUL SIMMONDS

**Songs My Ruiner Gave To Me** Dusty Willow DWR004

'Tis a thankless, odious business reviewing music. Whack on a CD when you're high on life, it gives you a big smile and a warm hug and you think it's the best thing since sliced meringues and hail it as genius. Put it on again a week or so later and you realise it's utter tosh. It works the other way, too, as you dismiss albums of no obvious merit, only for their subtle charms to grab you when it's too late.

No such probs here. This sounded great on first hearing and, as a regular accompaniment to stressful car journeys, impenetrable tax forms and flu in the weeks since, its appeal has never wavered. It still sounds great.

Subtitled "Concerning love, madness and obsession", its contents contain all that and more and you wonder why Bedford, with such an appealingly vulnerable vocal style and songs of such colourful grit, is not far more famous than she is. A Man They Couldn't Hang, Simmonds is an admirable foil with his evocative guitar and occasional vocals, while contributing the album's best track, *Ballad Of A Self-Made Man*, written in classic narrative country style, as well as a lovely hoedown on *Ramshackle House*. It may be that the idea of two English musicians specialising in music with clear American roots – and therefore qualifying for the dreaded genre 'Americana' – isn't culturally acceptable to many, but this is to deny both the quality of songwriting and the sensitivity of the execution.

Besides, they also apply freshness and urgency to the English tradition on *The Cruel Mother*, while the sainted Justin Currie makes an appearance, in addition to duetting beautifully with Bedford on *Little Stranger*, a song of deceptive depths. And Bedford herself lets rip, pulling no punches on *I Hate You* ("You're some vile imposter and snake/Charlatan, cheat, betrayer and fake...") Say what you mean, Naomi.

Plenty of bouncy choruses are there to offer lightness and get you singing along through any traffic jam.

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

Colin Irwin

## EFFRA

**Below Ground** Effra Source130717



Effra's second album finds the London-based trio intrepidly venturing into the very bowels of the earth, seeking inspiration in the subterranean tunnels beneath Box Freestone Mine and trekking to the source of the underground

Effra river. The group is violinist Tom Newell (Sam Lee, Ceilidh Liberation Front), guitarist Alex Bishop and accordionist Aidan Shepherd – who's also credited with piano, synthesiser and bicycle (the last an instrument most closely associated with Frank Zappa – search for it on YouTube!).

The arrangements, which combine the intricacy of their classical training with the inventiveness of jazz and dynamics of rock, are dense, powerful and sometimes claustrophobic – as befits the circumstances of these compositions. Lighter moods are invoked by the likes of *Impatient For Nostalgia* – a one-and-a-half minute mood piece of rippling solo (and uncredited) banjo, worthy of Sandy Bull or George Stavis, and the gorgeous, flamenco-style guitar that graces the cinematic *Contra*. Traditional influences manifest in tunes like *Molly*, which Shepherd performs with the rhythmic 'oomph', of a Cotswold morris tune.

Things move above ground in *Cadman's Rest* – a descriptive piece commemorating an 18th Century steeplejack who plummeted to his death from a church spire in Shrewsbury, the melody of which ascends slowly and (guess what?) descends rapidly.

Their most ambitious and (for me) satisfying track is the closing *The Source*, which begins with a field recording of the flowing waters of the river Effra before spatial synths open out into a stately violin march before returning to the water. It's an effective conclusion to a bold album that carries the promise of plenty more to come.

[efframusic.com](http://efframusic.com)

Steve Hunt

## NICK HART

**Eight English Folk Songs** Roebuck RRCD001

Here is the debut album from singer/guitarist who offers a selection of fairly well-known traditional songs. It has a lot going for it.

It features a sure, likeable voice singing in a fairly straightforward way with a good sense of pulse and timing with unfussy accompaniments that don't intrude in the main business of projecting the songs.

Apart from Nick, the only other accompaniment heard is by the album's producer who offers some spare contributions on an interesting, rather sombre-toned octave fiddle. Tom Wright is to be congratulated on the album's clear crisp sound. In fact, the album's uncomplicated approach gives it a freshness which is a large part of its appeal.

Comparisons with the recorded sources of most of the songs – two Smiths, Phoebe and Jasper, Louie Fuller, Emily Sparkes and, particularly, Sam Larner seem to suggest a lack of that total sense of involvement with

Effra



the song that these tradition-bearers bring to their performances. Strangely enough, the same cannot be said of the way he engages the album's one modern song, a really fine song about London called *By The River*, made to stand out by his interpretation.

The only contact provided – [nickhartmusic.co.uk](http://nickhartmusic.co.uk) – is a Wordpress template site from 2016 but with no information entered. A pity because on this evidence, folk club organisers will want to get hold of him.

Vic Smith

## PICAPICA

**Spring & Shade** Rough Trade Records RTRADCD875



PicaPica (the Latin name for the common magpie, ornitholofans) are a new group fronted by singers Josienne Clarke of the celebrated Josienne Clarke & Ben Walker and Samantha Whates – solo artist and col-

laborator with MG Boulter and Blue Rose Code. This, at first glance, appears to be a full-length, ten-track album as the songs are listed with different titles under *Spring* or *Shade*. But like the singers' voices and songwriting styles, it's a case of 'two become one' (as the Spice Girls taught us) when performed in unity.

Right from the opening wordless, a cappella harmonies of this five-song EP's title track, it's clear that something extraordinary is happening. Clarke and Whates are both extremely smart and funny, are both distinctive songwriters and their none-more-English-and-Scots inflected voices instinctively blend in a way that is manifestly exquisite.

Instrumental accompaniment is provided by bassist and producer Sonny Johns (Fatoumata Diawara, Ali Farka Touré, Oumou Sangare) and guitarist Adam Beattie whose playing glistens with vintage reverb on the eye-moisteningly lovely *Small Time/ Secret*.

The delightfully audacious pairing of *Little April Shower* (from the Disney film *Bambi*) with Paul Simon's *April Come She Will* provides a memorable closer to this calling card EP from a group who (at the risk of sounding like social media clickbait) really do have to be heard to be believed. Hear and believe here...

[picapicamusic.com](http://picapicamusic.com)

Steve Hunt