

100 invited guests and the acoustics certainly aid the overall sound and power of the songs.

Personally I would have kept *We Will Not Forget* for the finale, as it's a very English sing-along list of great socialists, social reformers and bloody good blokes and has had me shouting out the lyrics whilst driving in the car—alone, I hasten to add. Thankfully, the artist knows best because *Don't Despair* is a song which is exactly what it says on the tin—a simple, but beautiful song of hope for us all.

GREEDY MAGICIANS isn't your average 'protest album' as Matt Hill's voice is soft and sweet as a wine gum, and he is supported by some amazing musicians that include an accordionist and a small string section, creating an intrinsically English folk feel throughout, and will appeal to fans of Richard Thompson, Billy Bragg and John Martyn around the world.

Alan Harrison

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Bella Hardy BATTLEPLAN

Noe Records: NOE06

★★★★★

A winning stratagem from the folk princess



Is there anything not to like on the prolific Bella Hardy's latest studio album? Maybe *You Might* owes more to Billie Holiday than to the folk tradition that's central to Hardy's songwriting, but she performs it with the same flair as all her ten other songs. Unusually for a young artist, Hardy's work is becoming more personal and subjective, rather than the reverse. After recent releases devoted to the Christmas season and her native Derbyshire, *BATTLEPLAN* is a multi-faceted sequel to *SONGS LOST AND STOLEN*; Hardy drumming up fresh tunes and sometimes fresh words for time-honoured subjects.

Female folkies have long had a licence to adapt male sentiments to their own outlook. Inspired by *The Raggle Taggle Gypsies*, Hardy's opening lyric allows a soldier's sweetheart to articulate her thoughts. *The Seventh Girl*—surely one of the album's stand-out pieces—is a version of *The Outlandish Knight* in which Hardy revises traditional words, as well as composing the music. Turning from ballad to fairy-tale, *Sleeping Beauty* provides

some of the album's most startling imagery. The lyrics are printed in the accompanying booklet.

Battles, says Hardy in her *Sleeping Beauty*, never go to plan. Musically the idea could be seen as a metaphor for form and improvisation. The ways Hardy harnesses the two as a writer and performer are crucial to her success. *BATTLEPLAN* also reflects an increasingly subtle vocal technique, allied to the sympathetic skills of Hardy's band *The Midnight Watch*. Her fiddle is featured in *Through Lonesome Woods*; Angus Lyon conjures atmosphere on keyboards and accordion. Anna Massie (guitar, banjo), James Lindsay (bass) and Mattie Foulds (drums) complete the strongly supportive unit. Peter Palmer

www.bellahardy.com

Peter Ostroushko THE MANDO CHRONICLES

Red House Records

★★★★☆

On three discs, crossing numerous borders, Ostroushko traces the musical history of the mandolin



THE MANDO CHRONICLES is a historically sourced, three-disc set by Peter Ostroushko; a first generation Ukrainian-American. Peter first held a mandolin—his father's old bowl backed model—at the age of three, a mere 56 years ago. His debut recording session was Dylan's *BLOOD ON THE TRACKS* (1975), and this Minneapolis-born and bred musician—he's also a violin virtuoso—launched his recording career a decade later. Apart from his solo performing and writing career, Peter has toured with fellow *Prairie Home Companion* regulars Robin and Linda Williams, as well as friend and collaborator Norman Blake and the late Chet Atkins. Emmylou Harris, Willie Nelson, Johnny Gimble, Greg Brown, the late John Hartford and New Orleans-based rock-blues band *The Radiators* have all benefitted from Ostroushko's musical expertise.

The 17 selection Disc 1 bears the subtitle *AMERICANA*. With an aim to 'boost contemporary artists working with traditional forms,' in 1989 A&M Records created the short-lived subsidiary label *Americana*. It was a laudable intention,

tradition (being) the watchword. The 1980s had given birth to the off-the-radar acoustic music term *new country*, which mutated into *alt.country* the following decade. In recent years we've been, quite frankly, plagued by the term *Americana*—an excuse for carpetbaggers of dubious musical background to jump on the bandwagon, as well as being an utterly meaningless marketing term that any self-respecting, knowledgeable acoustic music listener should see straight through, nay detest. Question: should only musicians based in the Americas be allowed to use the term? That's not what has happened. Is it still *Americana*, when it doesn't draw on tradition? Look around; some patently don't. Furthermore, the term does not define whether such music employs folk, blues, country (including bluegrass), or even jazz, sources. As definitions, those basic terms work.

Aided mainly by stringed instruments, with input from Messrs Blake and Gimble, pursuing tradition Ostroushko's *THE MANDO CHRONICLES* journeys from 17th century Italy to the present day by way of 'the Ukrainian folk music of [his] parents to American jazz and everything in between, in [his] effort for expression and excellence, wherever the mandolin has gone in the world.' Based on the foregoing this, instrumental only, collection succeeds in spades, from slow and gentle to rhythmically energetic. Evolved from the lute, mandolins were first built in Italy circa the 17th and 18th centuries. *AMERICANA* merges tunes sourced from the American/European tradition with Ostroushko penned originals and works by Scott Joplin, Bill Monroe and Duke Ellington. On Disc 2, *OLD WORLD*, Peter journeys from his ancestral Ukraine, through Sweden, Italy, France and that land of eternal tradition—Ireland—tipping his cap to times gone by. He even exercises his voice on one selection. Disc 3, *CLASSICAL & SOUTH AMERICANA* does precisely what it says on the tin, with the rendition of works by Vivaldi, Bach and Beethoven, before crossing to the new world for Ostroushko's achingly poignant (*Laid To Rest*) *Beneath Oklahoma Soil*, then turning south to close with a selection of choros. Choro means 'little lament,' and in Brazil they're been a tradition since the 1800s.

Arthur Wood

www.peterostroushko.com