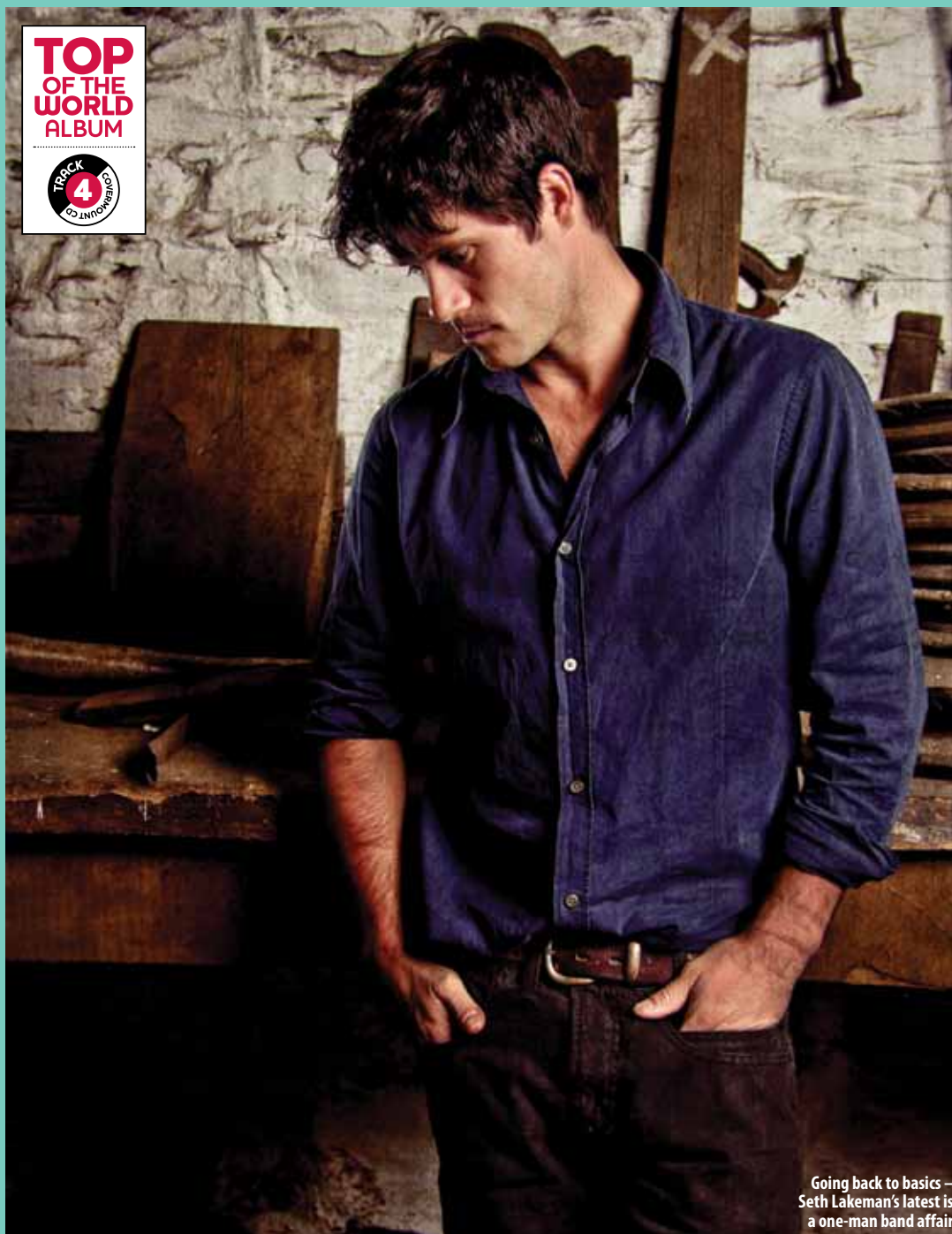


TOP
OF THE
WORLD
ALBUM

Going back to basics – Seth Lakeman's latest is a one-man band affair

Seth Lakeman Tales from the Barrel House

45 mins

Honour Oak Records

★★★★

Stripped-back Seth



Morwellham, on Devon's side of the Tamar river, is a treasure-trove of industrial archaeology, a World Heritage site that contains a restored 19th century village and farm, complete with all the workings of the docks and quays, including mighty water wheels, and the George and Charlotte copper mine, opened in the 18th century. It is here that Dartmoor's folk-music star Seth Lakeman came to record his sixth album. The opening track, 'More Than Money', was recorded in the copper mine, though I prefer the natural, ringing echo in those driving violin riffs recorded in the barrelhouses above ground.

Lakeman plays all the instruments – violin, viola, guitar, bouzouki, banjo, Salvation Army drum, and tool-shed percussion. In the layering of string parts, with what he calls his 'dirty viola,' Lakeman tears the fabric of some strong and stirring tunes to make a music that's rowdier and rootsier than usual. Is it a coincidence that he's no longer with a major label? Though I've sometimes found Lakeman's voice a little beige, the rough edge to his singing here, caught on a single microphone amid the age-of-steam acoustics of Morwellham's old industrial interiors, makes for a much stronger vocal character. The latter songs especially, such as the traditional 'Brother of Penryn' and the closing 'The Artisan', encapsulate the album's focus on the labourers, craftsmen and carpenters of Morwellham, and possess a strong poetry of place. There's some great instrumental interplay conjured up by Lakeman's back-to-basics, deeply rooted one-man band approach.

Tim Cumming

benefits of this are threefold. Firstly, it is a beautiful venue with warm, embraceable acoustics, well-suited to high-definition sound and vision; and secondly, there's nothing quite like seeing Norma Waterson's theatrical and richly expressive performance of a song – the emotions and dramas seem to be conducted as much through her arms as her voice. And finally, this is a valuable record of a truly intimate gathering of family, friends and fans – the true 'first family of folk.'

The *One Night for Norma* set comes from the Sage, Gateshead, home of Folkworks. It was recorded on June 1 last year, when Waterson was very ill, and featuring Newcastle's folk degree alumni such as Nancy Portman, Bella Hardy and Sandra Kerr. Linda Thompson is your MC, Andy May is stunning on a Northumbrian pipe melody, while the many highlights include Margaret and Andy Watchorn's tunes on Northumbrian smallpipes, and Alistair Anderson's two stunning solo performances on the English concertina. Jez Lowe lets it all out on 'London Danny', a bad penny if there ever was one, and veteran singer Vin Garbutt delivers fine guitar and vocals on the surging 'England My England'.

Tim Cumming

The London Bulgarian Choir Goro le Goro

www.londonbulgarianchoir.co.uk

48 mins

★★★★

Le mystère des voix Anglaises



It's little wonder that the phenomenon of Bulgarian folk-based choirs, with their stirring, romantic and otherworldly sound, have captured imaginations worldwide. Nor that it has inspired people all over the world to form their own choirs. The London Bulgarian Choir, under the direction of Dessislava Stefanova, is one of the most mature, and crucially, has had the opportunity to work closely with an immensely capable composer and arranger, Kiril Todorov, who has contributed eight works to this CD.

It is evident from the first notes of the dramatic 'Muri Yano' that the choir, unusual but effective in its use of male voices alongside female ones, has effectively captured the hard-edged, precisely focused sound, sudden dynamic shifts, and massively swelling sonic waves vital to this music. Equally at home with the stirring revolutionary ballad 'Goro le Goro', playful squibs like 'Sednalo e Jore', and the moving lament 'Razbolyal se e Mlad Stuyan', the choir's greatest achievement is that it does not aspire to being a simple carbon copy of a Bulgarian original, but has instead forged its own sound. It's a London choir as much as a Bulgarian one: if instead of the light, heat and sharply etched shadows

of the Thracian sun, these performances sometimes conjure wide windy skies and the *chiaroscuro* of clustered evening streets, so much the better.

Kim Burton

David Gibb & Elly Lucas Old Chairs to Mend

Hairpin Records

37 mins

★★★

Bright, perky and effervescent young folk from Derbyshire



David Gibb's second solo album, *There Are Birds in My Garden* [reviewed in #79] revealed the adventurous musical mind of yet another product of the healthily crowded Derbyshire folk scene. While deeply rooted in the folk canon and drawing on traditional arrangements, he was brave enough to bring a pop sensibility to his music that took old songs in a new direction. Less than a year later, this busy musician has now released his debut full-length album paired with fiddle and viola player Elly Lucas. The duo has a history, having played together in the band David Gibb & the Pony Club and on the Derbyshire folk circuit. Their youthful voices harmonise well together, particularly on the sweet, simple 'Uncle Joe.' Whether reinterpreting traditional numbers such as 'Jerusalem Cuckoo' or 'Sam Hall', or on self-penned tracks, the intricate guitar and fiddle lines are precise and unindulgent. A highlight is their reworking of 'Blacksmith', Gibb bringing out a soulful quality in his guitar playing against Lucas' beautifully intoned vocal. A nostalgia for bygone times emerges though the album on horse-themed tracks like 'Man on the Road' and 'Goodbye to the Plough Horse', and old games like 'Leapfrog.' Their ambition and energy is infectious. It would be nice to hear them push their sound even further, but doubtless their assurance will only increase the further they develop in their music.

Nathaniel Handy

The London Lucumi Choir A Single Tree Does Not a Forest Make

London Lucumi Choir Records

43 mins

★★★★

Divine interventions



Until ten years ago a new recording of Afro-Cuban *Santería* songs inevitably came from the US, as precious few such recordings come from the island itself. Today the Cuban diaspora reaches much wider, due to the island having opened up in the 90s, which has led to freer movement of Cubans around the world and many more non-Cubans travelling there: some for the sun, others for a more in-depth view of life there. This is a dynamic set of eight stirring songs for the Afro-Cuban *orisha* deities of the *Santería* religion, sung by striking vocalists answered by a rousing, textured chorus, all accompanied by the *batá* percussion that believers vouchsafe speaks directly to the Gods. The choir made it to the finals of the BBC Choir competition, and they would not exist if it were not for Daniela Rosselson [see Home Grown, #82]. With seasoned years as leader of Salsa y Aché, London's first all-female salsa combo, Rosselson latterly became an initiate into the *Santería* religion, her interest developing since graduate research in Cuba in the 80s. Growing up with music (she's the daughter of respected British folk singer Leon Rosselson) Rosselson's incisive arrangements are glorious, exhibiting her deep musicality. With a refreshing live feel and high production values this disc communicates natural energy, vitality and joy with no weak moments. The rapport between the *rumba* musicians of Gerardo, aided by *batá* master Javier Campos and the numerous singers is tangible. *Santería* is about serenading the Gods and thereby inviting them down to join the party and bless with their wisdom. That certainly seems to be happening here.

Jan Fairley

Bruce MacGregor, Christine Hanson & Friends Kissin' is the Best of A'

Brechin All Records

41 mins

★★★★

A chamber-Hootenanny of Scots fiddle tunes



It's been ten years since fiddler MacGregor and cellist Hanson collaborated on *101 Reasons to do Nothing* and *Kissin' is the Best of A'* is a mature yet infectious follow-up. Featuring Brian McAlpine on piano and Tim Edey on guitar and percussion, this collection of traditional and contemporary Scottish fiddle tunes illustrates the very best musicianship. As a pupil of Donald Riddell, founder of Blazin' Fiddles and, more recently, the new presenter of BBC Radio Scotland's long established 'Travelling Folk' series, MacGregor has a long pedigree in traditional music. Combine this with Hanson's classical background and extensive experience of playing in the Outer Hebrides and you have an irresistible partnership.

Recorded over three days, as MacGregor notes, the album is 'nothing more or less than a collection of tunes that we enjoy playing' and the warmth and intimate spontaneity of a group session is well evident throughout. 'Perthshire Hunt/Kissin' is the Best of A' provides a fiery start whilst the pensive 'Gin Ye Kiss My Wife I'll Tell The Minister' and the slow strathspey 'Mr AG Wilken's Favourite' are particular highlights. A second JS Skinner tune is included in the masterful *piobaireachd* 'Dargai'. MacGregor's own composition, 'Lament for Captain Simon Fraser', completes proceedings with a sensitively brooding conclusion. There is a real sense of camaraderie throughout this album, one only found in the very best of collaborations: it's a sheer joy to listen to.

Billy Rough

Mae & the Midnight Fairground Black Horses

Mae Karthaus

52 mins

★★

Dancing on the highwire, without a safety net



The Midnight Fairground is the magical conceptual world of singer, Mae Karthaus. Hailing from the sleepy banks of the Dart in south Devon, there is something of a grungy, avant-garde, Celtic mishmash about her sound. She's flanked in her circus by clarinettist Tim Heming, bassist Rick Taylor and percussionist JD Dalton, who help give the music a raggle-taggle New Age quality, mixed with >>



The London Lucumi Choir commune with the *orishas*

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