

slide guitar and Woody Guthrie. It speaks volumes for Daniels' talent that the closing song – a cover of Stevie Wonder's *Don't You Worry About A Thing*, could be one of his own.

The CD comes in an attractively illustrated children's book-style package with lyric booklet. lukedanielsmusic.com

Steve Hunt

BKO

Mali Foli Coura Buda 6705737

BKO – Let's deal with the group's enigmatic name first. It is the three-letter code for Bamako's Modibo Keita International Airport and rather appropriate in that the five members of the band have been in and out of there many times over the years in their frequent flights to and from Mali and France. Even before this quintet came together these musicians have been amongst Mali's touring musicians, touring, variously, with the likes of Oumou Sangare, Tiken Jah Kafoly and Salif Keita.

One of several dilemmas about this album is that all five have impeccable lineage in leading jali families and that here they are playing exclusively traditional African instruments and much of their material is derived from ethnic, rural, often ritual sources, so surely this album reflects Mali's older traditions? Only partly true! These are sophisticated experienced professional musicians who are making informed choices about the way they present their music and they are doing this in a delightful way. The lead singing is shared by Adama Coulibaly and Fassary Sacko and they are both from the top drawers of that country's greats. We expect the highest quality of percussion from West African albums and we get it here from Ibrahima Sarr on djembe and Aymeric Krol playing "hybrid drum set". Then there are n'gonis.....

Reviewing West African records one gets used to distinguishing the jeli n'goni (wooden pole through a skin-covered calabash – strings fingered to change pitch) and the donso n'goni, 'hunter's harp' or 'young man's harp'. Here (for the first time played in a band together?) we have both. Some work was needed on this as the instruments come from different traditions in terms of repertoire and role. In additions adjustments needed to be made to tunings and pitch to make them compatible. Hearing them together is a sign of just how successful they have been.

www.budamusique.com

Vic Smith

DECLAN O'ROURKE

The Chronicles Of The Great Irish Famine Warner Brothers/Maista Music MM112

Declan O'Rourke's star has shone brightly in Ireland for a long time, establishing a loyal and committed audience and commendable reputation as among the most literate and accomplished of singer-songwriters. Praise for him travels far, even to Paul Weller acclaiming his *Galileo* among the greatest songs of the last 30 years and Josh Groban recording it.

O'Rourke's lyrical gift includes inserting traditional motifs into contemporary songs without sounding hackneyed and penning modern day story ballads that recall events in Irish history that sound fresh and vital, avoiding the perils of revisionist history. His commemorative ballad *The Children Of 16* casts the shadow of the Rising into modern life and a similar ballad narrative infuses *The Chronicles Of The Irish Famine*. Taking probably the most tragic and poignant event in native history and penning a series of songs concerning its perils Declan O'Rourke delivers a song cycle that is both immersed in detail yet devoid of sentimentality.



Photo: David Angel

Kate Rusby

This project – fifteen years in the making – is an epic song cycle presenting a series of extraordinary yet true tales from O'Rourke's family past as well as historical records from the Famine period itself. The thirteen songs flow in a narrative rush that is both cinematic and aurally engaging. From the opening *Clogman's Glen* and *Along the Western Seaboard* the listener is engulfed in the emotional depth of the narratives. The elegiac *Poor Boy's Shoes* and *Mary Kate* display O'Rourke's gift of storytelling while the dramatic *Indian Meal* and the barely controlled anger of *Laissez Faire* add a rollicking counterpart to the pensive reactions elsewhere. *Johnny And The Lantern* and *The Connaught Orphan* recall the ethnic identity of traditionally-based ballads yet devoid of parody.

These are poignant stories delivered in O'Rourke's distinctive soulful brogue accompanied by his nylon-strung guitar. It's not a solo effort either as a big cast, including heavyweights like Mike McGoldrick, John Sheahan, Dermot Byrne and Floriane Blancke, add considerable musical light and shade, as do John Spillane's and Fiachna O'Braonain's vocal and spoken-word contributions.

The Chronicles Of The Great Irish Famine is a milestone in Declan O'Rourke's career and one of the most powerful and emotionally gripping collections of new songs in years.

declanorourke.com/

John O'Regan

KATE RUSBY

Angels And Men Pure Records PRCD44

Angels And Men is the fourth incarnation of that now-well-established seasonal institution, the Kate Rusby Christmas Album. And – pace the inevitable nay-sayers and Scrooges – Kate always finds plenty of new songs with which to celebrate her favourite time of year.

It wouldn't be a Rusby Christmas without some of her local South Yorkshire carols, so here are suitably spruced-up takes on *Hark Hark* and *Sweet Chiming Bells* (that's one of the myriad *While Shepherds Watched* settings), together with a rather magnificently doomy (and surprisingly proggy) take on *Down In The Forest* (here titled *Paradise*). Another carol, *Rolling Downward*, is less regionally-focused, but is nicely done too in a fairly stripped-back setting featuring album producer (husband) Damien O'Kane and Nick Cooke's diatonic accordion. Elsewhere too, the album's bright, glistening sound-world (which sometimes embraces gentle Moog and electric guitar touches and some deft percussion) is

obviously down to Damien's creative hand on the tiller, with some guest contributions from Ron Block (notably on the kids' song *Santa Never Brings Me A Banjo!*) and, of course, the five-piece Yorkshire brass choir that forms a now-traditional part of the Rusby entourage.

The disc's high point arguably comes with Kate's quite beautiful, gently poised account of the Richard Thompson evergreen *We'll Sing Hallelujah* (currently enjoying something of a revival – it was O'Hooley & Tidow last month!), while Kate reserves her own compositions for the album's closing stages, with turn-of-the-year anthem *Let The Bells Ring* and a second helping of the adventures of her Barnsley super-hero *Big Brave Bill*. There's folkie fun with Chris Sugden's kipperly aromatic *The Ivy And The Holly*, while *Deck The Halls* (with its bouncy programmed beats) and the standard *Let It Snow* provide forgivable seasonal jollities. All, of course, featuring Kate in suitably 'angelic' voice – and with costumed cover photos to match, courtesy of a certain David Angel (couldn't resist pointing that out!).

So there you have it – another guaranteed best-seller for the seasonal market, neatly coinciding with Kate's 2017 Xmas Tour.

www.katerusby.com

David Kidman

DOBRANOTCH

Makhorka CPL-Music CPL019

The irresistible combined pump-thump of tuba and bass drum, the brass squelchiness increased by punching, slithering trombone and sax, given extra edge by banjo and the occasional cymbal tish, topped with nifty clarinet, fiddle and accordion, with exuberant, declamatory bearded vocals.

Many klezmerish bands attempt a wacky-fun image, but this deservedly well-known Russian band, now onto its seventh album and with a new line-up, does it just right. Actually their material is only partly klezmer, and from whatever traditions they've picked it up it emerges as absolutely and full-bloodedly their own.

Formed in 1998 in France, they've returned to St Petersburg, via lots of other places, having soaked up a lot of songs and styles, including Russian brass band songs, New Orleans brass, Balkan yearning, even a pulsing live closer that resembles a sort of brass *Autobahn*.

www.cpl-music.de

Andrew Cronshaw