

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### The Rough Guide To The Music Of Palestine World Music Network RGNET1314

What a pertinent release. With the Israel / Gaza conflict experiencing a particularly bloody recapitulation, the World Music Network continue their fantastic series of *Rough Guides* with the *Rough Guide To The Music Of Palestine*, focusing on the often overlooked culture of the troubled region.

One might expect this album to be chock-full of Palestine's particular brand of Levantine classical music and Egyptian-inspired orchestral works that are seemingly ever-present in the Arabic world, but, while some great examples of these are included, they sit amongst a diverse line-up that includes hip-hop, punk, pop, reggae and a fair amount of jazz. Full credit should be given to compilers Nili Belkind and Nadeem Karkabi for managing to squeeze in so many styles without any sounding out of place or the album feeling too muddled. With such a range of genres, it's quite difficult to choose particular highlights, although Sanaa Mousa's indie-acoustic tribute to Ottoman-period Palestinian songsters on *Wea'younha* and the driving modern jazz of Michel Sajrawy's *Tojann* stand out in particular.

As with most *Rough Guide* releases, *The Music Of Palestine* comes with a bonus album – *Reflections Of Palestine* by buzuk player Ramzi Aburedwan. Mixing Arabic classical music with jazz, tango and French elements, this bonus is an appropriate and complimentary addition to the *Rough Guide*.

The collection's attention to the less 'traditional' side of Palestine's musical spectrum can be seen as a positive, humanising tool at a time where most images we see of Palestine are of the ruined buildings and wounded civilians of Gaza. It also serves as a reminder of some of the great culture that may well be disappearing before our eyes. Even disregarding the timeliness of such a release, however, it's still a brilliant and varied compilation from a country that is not necessarily famous for its musical output.

[www.worldmusic.net](http://www.worldmusic.net)

Jim Hickson

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### 1970's Algerian Folk and Pop Sublime Frequencies SF 088CD

This well-researched compilation brings together a range of styles and artists to shed a light on the vibrant music scene of 1970s Algeria. Across twelve tracks we are treated to everything from haunting folk duets to eastern-influenced rock riffs that remind of Led Zeppelin.

Highlights include Rachid and Fethi's *Habit En Ich*, a psychedelic rollercoaster driven by FX-heavy guitars and rhythm, which is incredibly well-produced and an insight into the diversity of 1970s Algerian music. As with many of the other tracks on this record *Habit En Ich* has a fascinating backstory which includes the birth of Rai and the tragic murder of Rachid Baba.

Likewise Idir's stunning *A Vava Inouva*, an international hit when released, sets traditional poetry to delicate folk guitar to rapturous effect. Elsewhere Les Djinns call upon rhythms that might be familiar to Tuareg rock and somehow combine them with Can-like riffs while Smail Chaoui swoons his way through *N'Sani N'Sani*.

This disc is a mixed bag with a real breadth of music which makes for interesting and sometimes stirring listening.

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

Liam Thompson



Photo: Judith Burrows

The Elizabethan Nancy Kerr

## THE ELIZABETHAN SESSION

### The Elizabethan Session Quercus QRCD001

Reject those images of twee musos in doublet and hose jamming on lutes and viols! Instead this is another 'folk celebrity challenge' in the manner of the Cecil Sharp and Darwin Projects. For *The Elizabethan Session*, eight leading folk artists spent five days in March this year at a Herefordshire farmhouse creating, to a commission from Folk By The Oak and the EFDSS, new music inspired by facets of the Elizabethan age. The whole exercise was completed in just under a week, and the music was premièred immediately thereafter at a concert at Hatfield Old Palace. The roll-call comprised Martin Simpson, Nancy Kerr, Bella Hardy, Jim Moray, John Smith, Hannah James, Rachel Newton and Emily Askew – most of whom are no strangers to artistic collaboration. Showing true imagination in conception and execution, they readily absorbed the spirit of the era in their new compositions, with the emphasis on presenting fresh insights into events and situations from the Elizabethan age, often by telling the personal stories of characters from that era.

Each musician inevitably gets a turn in the spotlight, yet every track brings a distinctive air of white-heat creativity to the stage with its strong collaborative ambience. At risk of cherry-picking nonetheless, I'd cite Kerr's *Broadside*, which magically interweaves a hybrid of ballad and shanty around and out of unfathomably tricky guitar licks from Simpson and Smith, who next (on *Elizabeth Spells Death*) convey, with a brooding, menacing grunge, Elizabeth's inner turmoil when signing Mary Queen Of Scots' death warrant. *London* is wild-card, Smith's powerful reflection on life as a commoner in Elizabethan England.

Kerr's other principal contributions are also standouts: *The Shores Of Hispaniola* views Gloriana's slave trade through the eyes of an African female, while *The Oak Casts His Shadow* explores timeless symbolism within the English countryside and *Suspicious Mind* (a co-write with Smith), posits that Liz was a country singer at heart! Simpson's telling portrait of *Christopher Marlowe* exposes the writer's dark side, whereas Newton's chiming, beautifully poised *Come Live With Me* brilliantly conjoins Marlowe's own verses with Raleigh's poetic response. Even the most

overtly 'Elizabethan'-inflected pieces (Askew's lively medley of pavane and ground bass and Hardy's lament for Shakespeare's Hermia) easily transcend any potential charges of pastiche.

Finally, as regards final presentation, track-by-track personnel credits are the only significant omission from the splendid, attractively designed package bestowed on this satisfying creative endeavour.

[www.efdss.org](http://www.efdss.org)

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

David Kidman

## STONE BREATH

### Children Of Hum Hand/Eye H/E 060

Stone Breath have existed for the best part of two decades, steadily amassing a devoted (oc)cult following for their uniquely eldritch psych-folk. Now a duo of Timothy and Prydwyn, this all-acoustic, hand-made music, with two voices, Celtic harp, flute, guitar, bouzouki and whistles, demonstrates a clear (and acknowledged) debt to The Incredible String Band. Don't, however, expect to find any traces of a funny little hedgehogs or painting boxes here, but rather plenty of stuff about 'the eyes of the dead', 'dark veils', a 'scarecrow's wake', and 'the wound from which you bleed'.

The six tracks that comprise *Children Of Hum* are bolstered by a generously equal number of bonus tracks, including a none more black version of the traditional *Famous Flower Of Serving Men*. *Brother Blood*, *Sister Moon* and *Song For The Folding Leaves*, with its sitar drones and the familiar line: "first there is a mountain, then it's gone", are pure Mogadonovan, while *Just Like The River* shares its title with a Robin Williamson song from 2008.

There is much to admire here, from the intricately picked melodies to the darkly-crafted poetry and the band's laudable refusal to countenance anything approaching MOR or 'twee-folk', but the monotone vocals – permanently at a default setting of 'unremittingly dark foreboding,' can eventually become wearisome. It's low, low down in the gloom...

[www.stonebreath.org](http://www.stonebreath.org)

Steve Hunt