

with this exciting approach, and it works to perfection here. One of the best folk records this writer has heard in quite a while.

— Duck Baker (London, England)

BRIAN PETERS
Songs of Trial and Triumph
Pugwash PUGCD 007 (2008)

Brian Peters has long been one of the very best performers in the field of English traditional song and music. A singer, guitarist, and melodeon and concertina player, Peters is clearly very versatile, and his recordings have run the gamut from dance music played on squeezeboxes to classic traditional songs. On most of his albums over the years, he's included one or two of the Child ballads, those mysterious and compelling old narrative songs from English and Scottish tradition. On his latest recording, *Songs of Trial and Triumph*, he decided to go all-out and record, as he puts it, "nowt but Child ballads." Far from making this a monotonous or boring exercise, his decision has resulted in an all-around terrific CD that also happens to be one of the best ballad albums out there. Peters managed this task by carefully curating the recording, choosing his ballads with tender care and arranging them with attention to detail. The result will remind listeners of some of the best ballad-oriented records from English revival singers: those of Martin Carthy, Nic Jones, Tony Rose, and perhaps a few others.

Peters has thoroughly rewritten some of the ballads, such as "Six Nights Drunk," which in his version stars an unfaithful wife, a nerdy husband, and a Harley-riding bodybuilder! On others, such as "Green Broom," he has lovingly reproduced a single-source singer's version (in this case, Cyril Poacher's). For "Lord Randall," Peters sings one source singer's text to another's tune. But in most cases, he has made each ballad new and striking by listening to many traditional versions, incorporating his favorite features of each into a brand-new text, and choosing, adapting, or composing a tune to fit. Well-known songs like "The Banks of Green Willow" and "The Mermaid" sound new and strange in Peters' arrangements, while unusual ballads such as "Sir Aldingar" and "False Foudrage" shimmer with magic and murder. Finally (and this is what listeners will mostly hear), Peters sings and plays them with consummate skill, breathing life into them with his own lungs, the bellows of his boxes, and the strings of his guitars. A few friends help him on this part, adding fiddle, bass, banjo, guitar, and backing vocals. The album is mostly acoustic, but it ends with a folk-rock arrangement of "Three Ravens" that's worthy of Steeleye Span. Thus, Peters' Child ballads embody, as he says in the title, trial and triumph, but also tragedy, action, excitement, and humor, to say nothing of sex, drugs, and even rock 'n' roll. You couldn't ask for more.

— Steve Winick
(Silver Spring, MD)

TONI IORDACHE
Sounds From a Bygone Age Vol. 4
Asphalt Tango CD-ATR 1307 (2007)

The latest release in this outstanding series features a legendary figure in Romanian music, Toni Iordache, whose mastery of the tambul (a.k.a. cimbalom) sets the standard by which others are measured two decades after his passing. Iordache learned the instrument from his father as a child during the postwar years, and by the time

he was an adolescent, he was already inspiring awe among fellow musicians in Bucharest. He became quite a celebrity in his native land and even achieved some international recognition touring abroad during his relatively short life, though this unfortunately led to a jail term when he was caught in illegal possession of foreign currency.

Iordache was an astonishing technician and had the ability to play with a light touch even at breakneck speed. He draws the listener into the music so completely that it sometimes occurs to us almost as an afterthought that what he's doing seems almost impossible. He is heard here in various ensembles recorded in the 1960s and 70s. There are also some excellent singing and violin and accordion work, but unfortunately the other musicians are not identified. That is the only caveat here; the liner notes are informative and very readable, and the music itself is sublime.

— Duck Baker (London, England)

JUSTIN ADAMS & JULDEH CAMARA
Soul Science
World Village 46807 6 (2007)

The links between North African music and punk have never been more clear than on *Soul Science*, the noisy new collaboration between journeyman guitarist Justin Adams and Gambian multi-instrumentalist Judeh Camara. The first notes of Billy Fuller's heavily distorted, syncopated bass on the opening track, "Yourra Mama," set the mood for the wild ride that follows. Camara's amazingly fluid playing on the ritti (single-stringed fiddle) spars with Salah Dawson Miller's inventive and supple hand percussion. With "Ya Ta Kaaya," Adams' bristling electric guitar brings the late Bo Diddley's trademark beat back to its North African roots.

Camara handles all of the vocals in his native tongue, and much of



Salah Dawson Miller, Justin Adams, and Juldeh Camara - ritti Diddley riffs

Gavin Matheson

the material is modified from traditional material he learned over the years. Adams, who has worked with artists as diverse as Tinariwen, 3 Mustaphas 3, and Robert Plant (for whom he served as lead guitarist for a couple of years), is equally at home cranking out John Lee Hooker riffs on "Naafigi," sparring with Camara's vocals on acoustic slide guitar on "Ngamen," or playing the tahardant (an African lute) on "Blue Man Returns," which he also embellishes with a Captain Beefheart-style vocal. *Soul Science* is not one of those polite cross-cultural collaborations, but rather an exciting record of two master musicians using their whole arsenal of styles and techniques to create something entirely new.

— Michael Parrish (San Jose, CA)

CADILLAC SKY
Gravity's Our Enemy
Skaggs Family 6989020192 (2008)

Texas quintet Cadillac Sky's second album, *Gravity's Our Enemy*, was produced jointly by the band and mandolin player Mike Marshall and successfully showcases the group's powerful, radio-friendly brand of bluegrass. Conceived primarily as a vehicle for mandolin player Bryan Simpson's vivid songs, the group



Brian Peters - six nights of mermaid dance