

## BANDA

**Telegrafy** Pavian PM 0116-2

Formed in Bratislava, Slovakia, in 2003, the band (with not the most original name, it has to be said) is a sextet with male and female vocals and a range of instruments including fiddles, frets, cimbalom, harmonica, keyboard, bass and drums. This third album gains a lot from guests, but they're used with great effectiveness and the rest of the band rise to meet them.

In the energetic opener, guest vocal group Ženy Z Muzičky from the village of Kojšov make the characteristic loud edgy female Slovak mountains sound, joined by fellow guest Juraj Dufek's Slovak bagpipe chanter. In *Cumaky*, about the hard and in this case fatal job of an ox-cart driver on the long salt run to Crimea, the magnificent voice of another guest, the very popular young folk singer Štefan Štec, soars over Alžbeta Lukáčová's chiming cimbalom and a beefy accompaniment including Eva Brunovská on Hammond-type keyboards, fiddles, mandolin, double bass and Igor Ajdži Sabo's well-judged drumming. A slithery Roman song about a need for mustard on a station-bought hot dog is led by Samo Smetana's suitably Roma-crooning voice and his dazzling fiddling. Keyboardist Lukáčová's vocal duetting in a village lullaby tops and tails another lullaby over piano and Peter Obuch's pulsing bass.

The material is all essentially traditional, but Banda's treatments take it in new directions without losing the meaning or lyrics. *Sunicko*, which Smetana's mother apparently used in vain attempts to wake him for school, is given an appropriately mellifluous sunbeam of an arrangement. The title track (its name spelt in morse code on the cover) is a song from Telgárt that shows the effect of the arrival of the railway telegraph on a love affair with a girl from a neighbouring village who doesn't send a message.

Eva uses the lovely strident across-the-hills vocal sound in the first of a pair of songs from nearby Ukraine; the second is a tramping-paced duet with Štec, with breaks for Smetana and Ivan Hanula's rousing fiddle and viola. There's guest *fujara* and shepherd's whistle in *Tu Som*, in which a mother asks where her son is, be it Germany, Scandinavia, Britain, America or Australia, with a chorus that has a distinctly African feel, set against the rough scraping of almost *riti*-like Tatra folk fiddle and skipping bass. A song from Nitra, asking for the farmer to pay the harvesters, gets a bouncy 1950s poppish makeover, with a brass band coda.

The most impressive album that Banda have made.

[banda.sk](http://banda.sk)

Andrew Cronshaw

## ARROWSMITH : ROBB TRIO

**All The Salt** Fallen Angle Music FAM11

Sheffield's Jess and Richard Arrowsmith (Melrose Quartet and Crucible) and ex-pat Ian Robb (Finest Kind), having met at festivals over the years, embarked on this partnership, rehearsing through email, with no real clue as to how it would work out beyond their enjoyment of each other's music. And, as barely a minute of *All The Salt* will suffice to demonstrate, they sure had a blast singing and playing together.

I've resorted to paraphrasing the liner notes thus, simply because there's unlikely to be a better introduction to this CD. The title track, described by its writer Jess as a "non-religious spiritual", serves as a brilliant introduction to the quality of the trio's a cappella

singing, a blend of truly complementary voices. It's so winning a combination of attack and presence and dynamic shading, both in the chosen lead voice and the supporting harmonies, that it's something of a surprise to hear only two of the album's fourteen tracks done a cappella. But each member of the trio is also an accomplished instrumentalist – Richard on melodeon, Jess on fiddle and Ian on English concertina – so expertise and sensitivity are guaranteed, both in the rich palette of the assured song accompaniments and on the disc's two purely instrumental tracks.

Highlights include a strong account of Mike Harding's potent protest song *On A Sunday*, Ian's memorably Bellamy-esque setting of Housman's poem *The New Mistress*, Alec Thompson's catchy seasonal opus *Bright New Year* and Ian Bell's stirring naval yarn *The Mermaid And The Swallow*. The trio also breathes new life into familiar repertoire (*Trees They Do Grow High*).

No question, *All The Salt* is a characterful and exceedingly cherishable release.

[artrio.co.uk](http://artrio.co.uk)

David Kidman

## RACHEL CROFT

**Hours Awake** B119001

Celtic-influenced melodies, lush instrumentation and pure yet ever-so-sensual vocals serve to make *Hours Awake* a highly attractive debut album from the York-based singer-songwriter. The album collects together songs that Croft created over a three-year period between 2014, when she first started writing, and 2017.

*Only Dreams*, which was also released as Croft's debut single back in 2017, is one of the standout tracks on the album. Beautifully atmospheric instrumentation combines with powerful lyrics and captivating vocals in a Sandy-Denny-meets-Kate-Bush sort of way and showcases Croft's considerable vocal range. Opening track, the moody and haunting *Old Climbing Tree* is another stunner. In addition to Croft herself on acoustic guitar, a group of talented musicians contribute to making this album something special. The playing of Emlyn Vaughan on double bass, Rachel Brown on cello and Emily Lawler is particularly noteworthy.

Nicely packaged and beautifully illustrated, the inside cover art features some of Croft's own striking black-and-white pen and ink work.

The album is not quite perfect. Some slightly weird production mars the second

Rachel Croft



track *Hear Me* somewhat and the final track, *Can't Replace Your Perfect*, a big, soulful, gospel-tinged number stands up perfectly well on its own and certainly helps demonstrate the vocalist's versatility but seems a little out of place here. Nonetheless, *Hours Awake* is a beautifully impressive debut from a talented vocalist, musician and songwriter.

Darren Johnson

## JOSHUA BURNELL

**The Road To Horn Fair** Misted Valley 19A

Having earlier dealt a full hand of assorted elves, trolls and the greenwood via Tolkien-esque prog, what could possibly be next for a minstrel Burnell? Josh vs Folk Rock! A feat achieved through a prism directed at 1972 and the purchase of *All Around My Hat* from a charity shop. Not everyone's epiphany but to each his own. Matters could have gone pear shaped quite easily and JB might well have jiggered himself into a time warp had it not been for the fact that amongst all the tongue-in-cheek imagery and a cover featuring a full castle as well as rabbits blowing bagpipes, there is much that deserves hearing. True, the material is as familiar as your old slippers but Burnell's band are a canny crew and the arrangements give enough variety, moving from Span played as garage rock to truly wigged-out, acid-drenched Horslips via snatched moments of Amazing Blondel fol de rol. Checking through all the details, and there are many, reveals the use of a cheesy-sounding Hammond which underpins and dominates most proceedings; the guitars, spiked and handily loud, provide some truly OTT solos and drums clobber along at a rare old lick.

Chief among examples of Burnellery is *The Berkshire Tragedy*, a merry tale of death by drowning which finishes with a flourish and a hanging, its up-front calamity heightened by his band in full cry and a pace which hardly lets up. *Cam Ye O'er Frae' France* is all very Span until it butts against a psychedelia-drenched *Musical Priest*. The ragged way in which they attack trad tunes does sound like O'Connor, Fean, Carr, Lockhart and Devlin in freak mode; these aren't tidy reels in the slightest, evidenced by *Drowsy Maggie* (far from drowsy) and *Rakish Paddy* (very rakish.) Low point *Cold, Haily, Windy Night* misses the target somewhat but overall you have to rather admire the Burnellianchutzpah and the way he dreams yesterday was today. Josh 2: Folk Rock 2, honours even.

[joshuaburnell.co.uk](http://joshuaburnell.co.uk)

Simon Jones