

project, *UNITE*, in 2010, but their role here is more about providing generic beats behind the musical wonders of their Albanian partners. It's not an equal musical marriage.

Fanfara Tirana could stun a badger at 50 paces. There's the fine texture of their interweaving brass lines, the otherworldly sound of pealing clarinets over flugelhorn, saxes and trumpets, and the strangeness of their rough, gruff harmony vocals. It works well thanks to Transglobal being unobtrusive, as on the snaking 'Three Beauties', resisting the urge to throw drum'n'bass samples over the sound. On the more laid-back, dubby rapping on 'Shtojzovalle', or the strange Balkan-reggae rhythms of 'Aferdita', with its flurries of drums against shimmering clarinet lines, *Kabatronics* is a winner. But it's Tirana who provide the real fuel.

🔊 **TRACK TO TRY:** *Aferdita*

Tim Cumming

Alex Heffes Face to Face

Opus 10 (48 mins)

★★★★

Film composer travels the globe



Film-composer and pianist Heffes, the man responsible for soundtracks such as *The Last King of Scotland* and

Touching the Void, assembled a bunch of his favourite musicians for this audacious project and asked them to collaborate with him on a series of totally improvised duets. Recorded in locations including a disused factory in the Bronx, the Tate Modern gallery and the famed Abbey Road studios, the results are both remarkably beautiful

and surprisingly cohesive, given the diverse and open-ended nature of the collaborations. Much of the cohesion comes from Heffes' own piano playing, which owes something to the Michael Nyman school: he creates minimalist and impressionistic soundbeds over which his various collaborators weave their magic. There's a meditative, classical quality to his improvisations with *kora* player Tunde Jegede. Yasmin Levy's emotional voice is swathed in dramatic melancholy by his rich chords. With cellist Matthew Barley he creates a triptych of cello and piano duets of unearthly beauty, and the improvisations with fellow pianist Ryuichi Sakamoto ebb and flow with endless invention. Two pieces recorded in Kampala with the Ugandan singer Kawesa are equally striking, with the haunting voice of the African singer juxtaposed thrillingly against Heffes' chromatic Western piano splashes. A bold and imaginative record that Nyman himself would have been proud to have made.

🔊 **TRACK TO TRY:** *Gyangweno*

Nigel Williamson

AJ Holmes & The Hackney Empire Wedding Me Ware Wo

Moringa Music (49 mins)

★★★★

Feisty fusions when East-meets-West (London, that is)



A five-piece London crew with a taste for ponchos, fringes and clashing African textiles, AJ Holmes & The Hackney Empire are currently doing very nicely at club nights and festival

stages programmed by Global Local and the indefatigable Chris Tofu. After support slots for the likes of David Byrne and collaborations with some of the capital's finest African musicians – from iconic palm-wine exponent Abdul Tee-Jay to Nigerian grime star Afrikan Boy – the creatively clad collective deliver their debut disc.

The single, 'Fraudian Slip' (sic), is a relentlessly joyful, gloriously unhinged slice of party fun with growly vocals by Kastro, MC of West London's Secousse Nights, and posh-boy witticisms from Mr Holmes that are part Mike Skinner, part Stewie from *Family Guy*. Sirens and other sound effects vie and blend over ringing guitar, pounding disco beats and all-together-now choruses as Holmes waxes on the benefits of immigration, and its role in this new musical milieu. Electro producer duo Radioclit (of MIA and Amadou & Mariam fame) were so impressed by the Barking-born Holmes that they invited his band to be residents at the Secousse Club, a nightclub where borders between countries, genders, sexualities and lifestyles were happily dissolved. Repeated gigging has tightened an act that might have been a flash in the pan: 'The Story of the New Electric Hi Life' sees Holmes spinning a yarn over music that takes in *merengue*, *chachacha*, *rumba* and palm-wine styles over chugging upbeat rhythms. 'Good Luck Always Follows You' is an electro-ballad that demonstrates that Holmes can actually sing. Much of this would sound equally at home on a dancefloor in Freetown or Accra as it might on Radio 1.

🔊 **TRACK TO TRY:** *Fraudian Slip*

Jane Cornwell

Saffron Dawning

Tames Records (51 mins)

★★★★

Mystic Persian poetry meets Iranian jazz



We all know the path of fusion is strewn with many pitfalls. What sounds good in theory often lacks coherence in practice. The bonding glue on this album is a love of the great 13th-century poet and mystic Rumi, revered as an almost Shakespearean figure in Iran and a cult figure in the US (where he was at one time the best-selling poet). These versions of Rumi's texts are performed by a disparate bunch made up of five members: Iranian vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi, Grammy-nominated *sitar* master Shujaat Khan, saxophonist Tim Ries (who has played with the Rolling Stones), Abhiman Kaushal on *tabla* and composer and jazz pianist Kevin Hays.

This diverse collective seems supremely at ease with one another, bringing different combinations to the fore on each of the long tracks. 'Tease' has a more Western sax-led melody which spins into some delirious improvisation, while the title-track is notable for the subtle interplay between groove-packed piano and masterful sitar. Putting classical Indian and Persian music alongside jazz elements is nothing new, but there can be few times it has been such a natural, organic mix. It works both as superior background music and for its working through of trancey rhythms with a myriad of subtle, evocative musical moments.

🔊 **TRACK TO TRY:** *Saffron*

Peter Culshaw

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Old World Tangos Vol 4: Istanbul Tango (1927-1953)

Oriente Musik (66 mins)

★★★★

Tango from Turkey – not as unlikely as it sounds



These fascinating *Old World Tango* collections explore various European and Oriental incarnations of the Argentinian

form that spread outwards from Paris in the first decades of the 20th century. The first two volumes included singers from Russia, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Algeria, the third was focussed on Poland and this one chronicles the 30 years when tango was popular in Turkey. The music on this disc is completely European – it's tango filtered through Paris and the Balkans. The first recordings date from the early years of the Turkish Republic, when Atatürk was keen on Europeanising the Turkish sound.

It was 1927 when the first Turkish tango was recorded, played on the piano by Muhlis Sabahattin Ezgi. The disc follows this with a largely chronological selection featuring some of the top vocalists – including the women Seyyan Hanım (one is tempted to call her the Turkish Édith Piaf), Birsan Alan and Hikmet Hanım and men, Ibrahim Özgür, Celal Ince and Şecaattin Tanyerli. The orchestrations feature swooping strings, often with an accordion or piano in the mix. The style is strongly influenced by the sound of 'silver age' operetta between the wars, but is particularly seductive when it is deliberately Oriental, as in Hikmet Hanım's 'Git Artık' and Birsan Alan's 'Zehra' and 'Cemile', the latter with a Gypsy-sounding clarinet sounding like an advert for Turkish delight.

🔊 **TRACK TO TRY:** *Cemile* by Birsan Alan

Simon Broughton



Natty dressers
AJ Holmes & The
Hackney Empire