

Black Roots
Son of Man

Soulbeats Records (50 mins)

★★★★★

Bristol's righteous roots warriors



Britain's roots reggae scenes tended to grow in places where large numbers of Jamaicans settled, as you might expect. Birmingham's Steel Pulse became champions of the 80s British roots era, while London group Aswad were picked to be support for Burning Spear on a UK tour. Bristol's roots scene was relatively small, but herein lies an irony; it was probably the city's hugely influential dub and trip-hop

innovations that have ended up overshadowing its conventional roots reggae bands like Black Roots. More than 30 years since their eponymous debut at the height of Thatcherism, Black Roots now see austerity-hit Britain as motivation to make a similarly politically inspired album

At least that's the premise. In reality, the slick horns and uplifting harmonies of *Son of Man* give off distinctly positive vibes. The heavy bass and drum sections on tracks like 'War Zone' and 'Guess Who' stick to a safe roots formula. Compare this album to one of the many British roots classics – Steel Pulse's *Handsworth Revolution*, for example – and *Son of Man* falls short in both grit and originality. It's a solid

offering nonetheless, and loyal fans will find this a worthwhile addition to Black Roots' discography.

CLYDE MACFARLANE

TRACK TO TRY *War Zone*

Bumper Jacksons
Too Big World

Bumper Jacksons (59 mins)

★★★★★

New Orleans jazz, gospel, blues, country... a real bumper crop



On *Too Big World*, their latest self-released album, the Bumper Jacksons run the gamut of rootsy American repertoire with easy assurance and heartfelt passion. From

high lonesome ballads and country waltzes to jazzy rags, gospel jubilees and bluegrass rambles, the Washington-based sextet covers a dizzying array of genres without losing touch with their inner New Orleans swing band foundation. The 16 tracks include stylishly arranged classics such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe's 'Trouble in Mind', Duke Ellington's 'Delta Bound', and Billie Holiday's 'Them There Eyes', as well as originals such as 'Coffee Mama' and 'Hell is Hot' by founders Jess Eliot Myhre (vocals, clarinet, washboard) and Chris Ousley (guitar, vocals). Aided by Alex Lacquement (upright bass), Dave Hadley (pedal steel guitar), Brian Priebe (trombone) and Dan Cohan (suitcase percussion), the Bumper Jacksons bring a sly, sophisticated slant to the multi-faceted neo-trad Americana scene.

DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *Pretty Mama Put a Spell on Me*

Michael Daves
Orchids and Violence

Nonesuch Records (2 CDs, 100 mins)

★★★★★

Buy the bluegrass album, get the grunge version free!



A talented young guitarist and immediately likeable singer, Michael Daves made one of the most enjoyable bluegrass albums of recent years, *Sleep With One Eye Open*. An explosive duo set with Chris Thile, it reminded you just how thrilling straight-up, spontaneous, live bluegrass can be. *Orchids and Violence* is another extremely welcome reminder. 'June Apple', the opener, explodes out of the gate, with perfectly judged banjo and mandolin solos courtesy of Noam Pikelny and Sarah Jarosz. On 'Darling Corey', Daves channels all the hyperventilating energy of the best 50s rockabilly stars.

What's even more impressive, is that, having delivered an excellent bluegrass album, Daves then gives us its grungy rock cousin: the same songs rearranged for rock band. While good on its own terms, it doesn't match the rollercoaster thrills and spills of the acoustic set. Nevertheless, there is a bar here that Michael Daves has effortlessly raised; anyone with any interest in American roots music or folk-rock should listen to this album.

MATT MILTON

TRACK TO TRY *Darling Corey*



Thomas Fretaur

Lakou Mizik
Wa Di Yo

Cumbancha (44 mins)

★★★★★

A Haitian carnival of an album, with a pinch of New Orleans



Grabbing you by the scruff of the neck from the get-go, this nine-strong collective pays homage to Haiti's varied traditions, and the indomitable spirit of Haitians. Brought to you by the management team behind Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, Lakou Mizik is a group of old hands and new talents, a sort of French-Caribbean Buena Vista Social Club formed in the wake of the 2010 earthquake that decimated Haiti and unleashed outbreaks of cholera, strife and chaos. The group have spent the past few years honing their live act, tightening their rousing mix of African, French, Caribbean and New Orleans influences, which they

deploy on guitars, drums, *rara* carnival horns and, now and then, accordion. Their debut shines as a result.

This is roots revival music at its most joyous and vital, all soaring harmonies, call-and-response vocals and deep, trancey voodoo rhythms that lollop and roll.

Haitian legend Boulo Valcourt brings his mellifluous tenor to the opening verses of 'Peze Kafé', a Haitian standard that tells of a wrongful arrest; his son Steeve (sic) Valcourt and singer Jonas Attis bring guitars, rap and added depth. A project at the vanguard of Haiti's reborn music industry; a Phoenix risen – propelled by hope and pride – from the ashes.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Peze Kafé*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 9

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