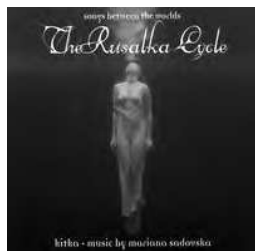


Stocking Stuffable Sounds

Giftworthy CDs from Oregon and beyond

Kitka: *The Rusalka Cycle: Songs Between the Worlds* (Diaphonica)

Overexposure to the usual sounds of this season — *Messiah*, *The Nutcracker*, the inescapable carols at the mall — has led me to associate the dark solstice with the music of this sublime Bay Area women's vocal ensemble, whose winter appearances at the WOW Hall and *Wintersongs* CD have enchanted so many of us. But this recording — a theatrical score featuring original music by Ukrainian performer/composer Mariana Sadoska — marks a major departure for the group, one that might appeal to pagans and postpunks as much as Kitka's usual base of world music (especially Balkan and other Eastern European) and choral fans. The group went to Ukraine to research the story's juxtaposition of ancient folk myth and Chernobyl's environmental disaster; the intensely dramatic, sometimes dissonant music suits the dark subject perfectly. You can see the full theatrical production on stage in San Francisco on January 4-6.



More beautiful and unusual women's vocal music. Last month's transcendent performance of these Norwegian carols and folk tunes in a Portland cathedral only confirmed my belief that these three Scandinavian chanteuses top the list of the world's greatest singers. Augmented by a splendid folk percussionist, this outing allows the singers more freedom (various whoops and calls) than their previous medieval and postclassical efforts, and their characteristic sumptuous blend and immaculate ECM production make this the finest recording of pure, rapturous singing you'll hear this year.

Trio Mediaeval: *Folk Songs* (ECM)

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Kim Kashkashian and Robert Levin: *Asturiana, Songs of Spain and Argentina* (ECM)

Oregon Bach Festival fans treasure scholar-pianist Levin for his engaging lectures and historically informed improvisatory approach to Mozart's piano music, so it's great to see another dimension of his artistry in these songs from Argentina and Spain by 20th century masters such as Manuel de Falla, Enrique Granados, Alberto Ginastera and less well known composers. The real star, though, is violinist Kashkashian, who infuses the music with alluring warmth and intimacy.

Shahram and Hafez Nazeri: *The Passion of Rumi* (QuarterTone)

This Iranian father and son duo celebrate the 800th birthday of one of the world's most popular poets. For three decades, the elder Nazeri, an amazing singer, has been adapting traditional song forms to fit Rumi's words. His son Hafez, a star in his own right who's studied in the U.S., has created a strong hybrid of Eastern and Western musical techniques, and his Rumi Ensemble (featuring traditional Persian strings and percussion, with Hafez on the setar lute) provides stirring accompaniment.



Midnight Serenaders: *Magnolia*

Fans of the Emerald City Jazz Kings and the Shedd's other early jazz offerings will enjoy this Portland sextet's ebullient debut recording of 1920s and '30s hot jazz and swing, featuring material from Bessie Smith to Jimmy Rodgers and even the Hawaiian steel guitar and ukulele instrumentals that were all the rage for a spell around that time. They especially excel on the clarinet and trumpet-fueled Harlem tunes that set the flappers flouncing.

Girl Circus: *In the Pink* (www.girlcircus.com)

This continuing project (familiar to Country Fairies) spearheaded by Eugene's reigning musical couple, composer/trumpeter/guitarist Dave Bender and singer/diva/lyricist Darcy Du Ruz, is gleeful fun without being twee or cutesy pie. This third release in the series, featuring a baker's dozen of Eugene's most accomplished musicians on sax and cello, maintains the effervescent energy, catchy tunes, clever lyrics and wildly varied musical influences (from Bulgarian to Caribbean to circus marches and everything in between) of its predecessors. Of course, hearing the music wrenched out of its hippie vaudeville context loses something, and sometimes the way-high soprano vocal harmonies can get a little grating and could use some variety, but for the most part, it's a delight.



Osvaldo Golijov: *Youth Without Youth* soundtrack (Deutsche Grammophon)

I haven't seen Francis Ford Coppola's long awaited new movie, but if it's as evocative as the noirish mood music created for it by today's most fascinating composer, it'll be worth catching.

Habib Koite and Bamada: *Afriki* (Cumbancha)

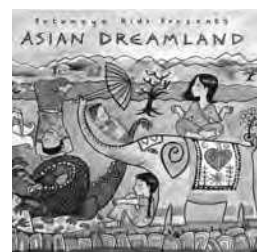
One of the finest world music albums of the year, this long awaited release from the great Malian troubador blends folksy acoustic guitars, occasional orchestration (including horns arranged by James Brown alum Pee Wee Ellis) and female chorus backup with pan-African and even Caribbean rhythms and instruments (balafon, Malian lute) into magnificent, state of the art global pop.

Matt Haimovitz: *VinylCello; After Reading Shakespeare* (Oxingale)

Frequent Eugene visitor Haimovitz may be the most important voice in classical music. Not only is the shaggy-haired cellist getting it out of the stuffy concert halls and into clubs and bars, he's also commissioning and performing terrific new music and issuing it on his own pioneering label. His Shakespeare project features probing, often somber, sometimes anguished new works by leading contemporary composers Ned Rorem, Paul Moravec and Lewis Spratlan. *VinylCello* records the first fruits of his Buck the Concerto project, featuring concertos for Haimovitz and big band, choir, DJ and live electronics. Such variety means that not everything will appeal to every listener, but all of it demands to be heard.

Various artists, Playground series (Putumayo)

Thanks to its smart packaging and marketing as well as wide-ranging contacts among musicians and producers worldwide, Putumayo has introduced millions of middle Americans to world music, bringing some of the world's finest musicians to Western ears.



Purists sometimes blanch at this pioneering label's pop-oriented world music offerings, but almost every release contains worthwhile music and reflects today's wonderfully mongrelized musical culture, even if it often winds up as background sound for parties. Among its many releases this year, I especially liked *Tango Around the World* and *Latin Jazz*. But any of the entries in the 15-year-old label's Playground series for kids (e.g. *Brazilian Playground*, *Asian Dreamland*) would make a nice, ear-broadening introduction to other musical cultures, and would fit comfortably in most stockings.

For more recommendable CDs of 2007, see Brett Campbell's 8/30 (world music) and 7/5 (Oregon music) columns at www.eugeneweekly.com

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