

IRISH MUSIC MAGAZINE - Album Review

SYLVAIN BAROU

Own Label AR001

13 Tracks, 62 Minutes

www.sylvainbarou.com

A Breton flute phenomenon who first hit the Irish mainstream with the group Guidewires, Barou is joined by twenty musical compadres for a solo debut which has been more than six years in the making. Worth the wait, I'd say. While the material here is mainly traditional, it's drawn from a wider geography than usual: Brittany, Ireland obviously, but also Greece, Bulgaria, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The swirling Naga Jigs are from the Guidewires repertoire, powerful and driving. Like much of this recording, their traditional pedigree is clear but their treatment here is unapologetically contemporary. A bit of Jaques Pellen's jazz guitar, a strong backbeat, a very light touch on the percussion, and a couple of carefully chosen collaborators on the melody line make this a magical track. Sylvain follows up with a set of horos in the style of Andy Irvine's East Wind album, wonderful stirring stuff with exotic rhythms and outrageous flute virtuosity. This is mainly a flute album, but the master also moonlights on uilleann pipes and the small Breton pipes.

About one third of this recording is what I think of as Irish music – Bold Doherty, The Humours of Carrigaholt, The Squares of Crossmaglen and Charlie Lennon's Windy City. Sylvain Barou enlists the likes of Lunny, Carroll, Doyle and Rynne to provide a top-quality Irish core for these and other tunes. A further third is distinctively Breton, with Tons and Plinns and Ridees: for this, a whole P-Celtic crew chimes in, centred around the cittern of Ronan Pellen. Names like Youenn Le Bihan, Alain Genty and Giles Le Bigot bring out the best in Breton music here, from the gorgeous Margaretig to Barou's own funky Mare Nostrum. That leaves one third split between Arab music, Asturian alboradas, and a few other things. The flute flies from one form to the next – there are no clear boundaries, just breathtaking melodies.

Nothing on this CD is too exotic to appeal to Celtic music lovers, but some of it is certainly fresh enough to raise an eyebrow or two. I like it a lot, and I hope you can all get your hands on a copy.

Alex Monaghan

Dónal Lunny about Sylvain Barou (Jan 2012)

"In the course of my musical career - particularly in the earlier years, I have wandered in and out of many different genres of music. Looking back on the journey, it feels like just that; a meandering exploration which lacked a particular direction until one day I realised that I was more connected with Irish music than any other. From then on, the itinerary became simpler; a more direct route, but not without occasional diversions into other regions, which helped, and still help to replenish my passion for music generally. Extending the analogy of travel and exploration to Sylvain, I think of him as a mountaineer. Not only is he avidly interested in music from

every corner of the world, but he also seeks out challenges; peaks of musical achievement which can normally only be accessed by musicians who have been born into their particular culture, and who have served arduous apprenticeships in their chosen disciplines. Reaching these heights demands a degree of musicality one encounters only occasionally.

This album is an exotic collection of music by any standards. In the traditional tunes, the listening experience is all the more intense and exhilarating because of the depth to which Sylvain has penetrated the culture from which each piece originates. And in the treatment of the newly composed pieces, the buoyant dynamic power and fluidity of the playing is obvious.

The ongoing pursuit of musical knowledge and technique will continue to inform and improve Sylvain's playing in different ways; most importantly it will enable him to keep giving joy and pleasure to those who listen to his unique voice. I feel honoured to share this part of his great journey."

Dónal Lunny
Jan 2012

THE JOURNAL OF MUSIC- Ireland

Guidewires flautist, Sylvain Barou, has a new album, his first solo one, coming out later this month. Self-titled, it features a long list of guest musicians, some traditional Irish, some Breton and some from further afield; namely, Dónal Lunny, Jacques Pellen, Ronan Pellen, Julien Stevenin, Keyvan Chemirani, Prabhu Edouard, Gilles Le Bigot, Youenn Le Bihan, John Doyle, Liz Carroll, Ed Boyd, Stelios Petrakis, Hamid Reza Khabbazi, Florian Baron, Rubén Bada, Alain Genty, Pádraig Rynne, and Méabh O'Hare.

Based in Rennes in Brittany, Barou has spent a good bit of time in Ireland, and describes this album as being 'like a log book of the work of the last ten years', including Breton, Irish, Indian, Eastern European, Greek and Middle Eastern elements. With all the variety of influences, Barou explains that he didn't want the album to 'feel like you are changing CDs on every track', and so paid particular attention to 'keeping some homogeneity to the sound'.

About half of the tracks are traditional (including a good few Irish tunes, such as the jigs 'Grier's' and 'Bold Doherty', and the reels the 'Humours of Carrigaholt' and the 'Squares Of Crossmaglen'), mostly from old tapes and recordings Barou has been collecting over the years, but also some he has learned along the way from friends. The more exotic material includes a famous 7/8 traditional Afghan song, 'Shah Koko Jaan', adapted as a tune, and some Greek and Bulgarian pieces. The rest are compositions by Barou and by friends like Ronan Pellen, the cittern player, who happens to be a neighbour, and Keyvan Chemirani (the French-Iranian percussionist).

Lunny, who has been playing with Barou and Pádraig Rynne in a trio of late, has this to say of Barou: 'I think of him as a mountaineer. Not only is he avidly interested in music from every corner of the world, but he also seeks out challenges; peaks of musical achievement which can normally only be accessed

by musicians who have been born into their particular culture... Reaching these heights demands a degree of musicality one encounters only occasionally.'

Barou himself shared some interesting thoughts on the traditional music scene in Ireland with The Journal of Music:

'From the external view that I have here, it would seem that Ireland is more conservative than Scotland, for example. We see many examples of groundbreaking and extremely innovative traditional music coming from there lately, and the same goes for the new Breton music scene. But on the other hand, I heard some absolutely gorgeous 'pure drop' trad music played by really young Irish musicians recently which really impressed me, and which is fantastic too.

I think the music we are going to hear from Ireland in the coming years is going to be fascinating. Musicians and also the audiences are much more open-minded now than they used to be, even ten years ago. I feel that Irish musicians are protecting their tradition very well while also bringing it to new places thanks to some interesting crossover work that we can see happening more often.

I just hope that the public will continue to support Irish music. I was a bit shocked to realise that it's very hard even for some of the most famous Irish acts to sell out a venue. People don't go out to gigs as much as they used to. It's sad. Trad music needs to be supported more, by the population and by the policy makers.'

PAUL O'CONNOR - the Journal Of Music

WORLD MUSIC CENTRAL

"The windy breton"

Sylvain Barou (Aremorica, 2012)

Breton flutist Sylvain Barou is a hard working musician in the Celtic music arena. This is his latest solo project, where he showcases his talent as a flute player, composer and global music explorer.

Naturally, Celtic music plays a leading role in Sylvain Barou. Accompanied by a long list of Celtic music luminaries, Barou explores the contemporary side of current Celtic music, visiting with his tunes various regions and countries such as Brittany (France), Ireland and Galicia (Spain). But Sylvain Barou shows that he's also interested in other world cultures. His musical travels take him to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, India and various parts of the Mediterranean Sea.

In addition to traditional western flutes, Sylvain Barou plays other flutes and wind instruments. These include the Indian bansuri (flute), balaban (similar to the Armenian duduk), the Irish uilleann-pipes player and the biniou kozh, which is the traditional bagpipe of Brittany.

The list of musical guests is truly impressive: Donal Lunny on bouzouki; Jacques Pellen on cittern, cello, rabab; Ronan Pellen on 12 string guitar; Julien Stevenin on double bass;

Keyvan Chemirani on zarb, daff, udu; Prabhu Edouard on tabla; Gilles Le Bigot on guitar; Youenn Le Bihan on bombarde; John Doyle on guitar; Liz Carroll on fiddle; Ed Boyd on guitar; Stelios Petrakis on lyra; Hamid Reza Khabbazi on tar; Florian Baron on oud; Rubén Bada on bouzouki, Alain Genty on fretless bass, Paul MacSherry on guitar; Padraig Rynne on concertina; and Méabh O'Hare on fiddle.

Sylvain Barou is regarded as one of the best flute players of his generation. He plays primarily Irish and Breton traditional music. He has been involved in some of the most thrilling projects of the Celtic music genre. He has performed with Guidewires, Donal Lunny, Padraig Rynne, Comas, Sualtam, Guichen, Alain Genty, Denez Prigent, Jacques Pellen–Celtic Procession, Erik Marchand, Gildas & JB Boclé, Dan Ar Braz, Gilles Le Bigot, Soig Siberil, Yvan Cassar, Liz Carroll, John Doyle, Paddy Glackin, Seamie O'Dowd, Laoise Kelly, and Fred Morrisson.

He is currently a member of Irish group Guidewires and also has a new trio with legendary Irish musician Donal Lunny and Padraig Rynne. He is also involved in various other projects with Breton jazz guitarist Jacques Pellen, French–Iranian percussion maestro Keyvan Chemirani, Indian musicians Prabhu Edouard (tabla), Sandip Chatterjee (santoor), and Sukdhev Misra (violin) and Cretan genius Stelios Petrakis (lyra, saz, lauto) and also with Istanbul based oud player Smadj.

Sylvain Barou is still very involved in the Breton “fest-noz” scene (the famous dance nights of Brittany) especially with a duo with former–Ar Re Yaouank guitar player Jean–Charle Guichen.

The album Sylvain Barou is an impressive Celtic and world music album featuring a wide range of musical instruments led by the superb flute and wind instruments of Sylvain Barou.

Album available from <http://www.albumtrad.com/en/sylvain-barou/00579-sylvain-barou.xhtml>