

only rival as the boldest female artist in the firmament. Born in London but raised in Sri Lanka before returning to Britain, *Aim* is arguably less pugilistic and political than much of her work, although topics of movement and migration are never far away on songs such as the brilliant 'Borders', 'Visa' and the cavernously echoing 'Foreign Friend'. It's not a world music album as such, but, as with Björk, the global vision of MIA's work renders such a reductionist term quite meaningless. It's expansive music that tramples down boundaries, whether via the off-kilter Bollywood beats of 'Go Off', the wonderfully weird electronic syncopations of 'Bird Song', the global hip-hop of 'AMP (All My People)' or the lush R&B of 'Survivor', which has the same irresistible pop urge as the songs we heard in *Slumdog Millionaire*. If *Aim* really is her farewell, it's a spectacular way to say goodbye.

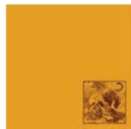
NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Bird Song*

## Padang Food Tigers & Sigbjørn Apeland Bumblin' Creed

Northern Spy Records (29 mins)

★★★★★  
*Ambient bumblin' can clearly be a real buzz*



Padang Food Tigers operate a craft industry in ambient sound-worlds. *Bumblin' Creed* is the third full album to emerge from the home studio of duo Stephen Lewis and Spencer Grady, and their latest record contains nine lullaby-like explorations in the space where sound design and music meet.

Each track includes elemental aspects. Some are ambient staples such as running water and birdsong, while others are more offbeat; 'Flåmsbana' features what sounds like a rusty gate swinging open, and 'Saroyan's Appeal' is characterised by nautical-sounding wooden creaking. The musical side of the dialogue is exquisite, whether in the weightless guitar lines or the shimmering harmonium of guest musician Sigbjørn Apeland. The elements of each track emerge without haste, like an image of a landscape slowly coming into focus.

*Bumblin' Creed* will certainly leave those in search of a groove stranded. However, listeners prepared to voyage with the Tigers will experience sublime soundscapes that bewitch and beguile.

LIAM LOO

**TRACK TO TRY** *Flåmsbana*

## Shama Rahman Truth be Told

The Gung Ho Down (77 mins)

★★★★★  
*Could hi-tech gloves be the future of world fusion albums?*



Shama Rahman's jazz flirts with trip-hop and acoustic music to such an extent that her French verses in the title-track might easily be the product of some Parisian indie artist were it not for the distinctly Indian *sitars*, *tablas* and spoken word. Rahman has used groundbreaking wearable-tech gloves to mix various sounds with the backing of a live band, recording this entire album as one live performance. The results are impressive. The opening 'Choto Meye (Little Girl)' has a fairytale vibe; 'Deshlai Kati (Matchstick)' is ingenious sitar-dub; 'Exalt (Interlude)' is based on a classical *raga* while 'City in the West' has a furious energy.

The album's loose thematic progression is apparently based on Rumi's principles of truth, kindness and necessity, though this is not that discernible. However, the sounds of raindrops, riverbeds and ocean tides that recur throughout give it a sense of continuity and cohesion; the album is best appreciated in its entirety, rather than by individual tracks. Rahman's mix of Bengali, English and French is initially disorientating, but soon begins to sound natural. More energetic and mature than her previous album, *Truth be Told* is the triumphant expression of a unique vision and inimitable sound.

AMAR DHILLON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Liquid Blue*

## Shapla Salique No Boundaries

Shapla Salique (64 mins)

★★★★★  
*London's Bengali singer mixes Baul folk song and jazz*



Two decades into her career, this is London-based Shapla Salique's third solo album – and her best yet. Her voice is perfectly suited to Bengali folk, with a rustic tint and power that, at its best, channels the energy of the Bauls, who penned much of her repertoire. Opener 'Shomoy Gele' is the perfect combination of jazz and folk, and is followed by a similarly enjoyable sequence of songs written chiefly by

the Bengali Baul saint Lalon Shah. An arresting beat and guitar part in 'Baram Khana' give the slow melody a catchy rhythm, with a light *bansuri* echo bringing out the track's minor notes to complement Salique's emotive tones. Indeed, the album as a whole would probably benefit from a freer use of the *bansuri*; 'Boli Ma' and 'Ami Ek Dinona', where it gets its chance to shine, are two of the album's best tracks.

It's clear that *No Boundaries* is a fusion project, but it is far tamer than it could have been, and Salique would benefit hugely from being more experimental. That said, it remains a thoroughly enjoyable album.

AMAR DHILLON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Allah Bolo*

## Daryl Shawn On Time

Dimed (42 mins)

★★★★★  
*Meet the man who can make his guitar sound like anything*



Funded by a Kickstarter campaign, the fourth album by Daryl Shawn, a maestro of the nylon-string guitar who comes from Amish farm country in rural Pennsylvania, is an unexpected delight. It spans the globe in its inspiration and influences, as Shawn uses his six strings to recreate the sound of several exotic instruments. On 'Mali Blues' he recreates the sound of the *ngoni* (lute) – achieved, apparently, by wedging a dollar bill between the strings of his guitar to create the earthy buzz of the West African instrument. It would be intriguing to hear him duet with the South African guitarist and *Songlines* favourite Derek Gripper, who plays his instrument like a surrogate *kora*. On 'Path to Hua Shan', Shawn conjures an Eastern sound by adding a wooden bridge of the kind found on a Japanese *koto* or a Chinese *zheng*. 'Berimbau del Bosque' is an homage to the boinging, twangy Brazilian stringed instrument. Elsewhere, Shawn's furious strumming channels the spirit of, variously, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Joni Mitchell (a hugely inventive and underrated acoustic guitarist) and Bill Frisell. The absence of vocals and lack of ensemble arrangements limits the album's ability to sustain interest over its entirety, but it's impressive and inventive enough in its way.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**TRACK TO TRY** *Mali Blues*

## Snow Owl The Blue Road

Inner Circle Music (41 mins)

★★★★★  
*A guest lives up some jazz fusion*



World music fusion comes in many shapes and forms but, in the case of Colombian bassist Juan

Garcia-Herreros (aka Snow Owl), it is a puzzling *mélange*. *The Blue Road* – the first in a set of three CDs – is a strange combination of virtuosos, straight-ahead jazz fusion, à la Chick Corea, and slight vocal ballads from guest singers, who include Mamadou Diabaté. You struggle to get a sense of flow, consistency, or even mood; a staccato, breezy number such as 'Bach to the Future' is enveloped by the languid 'She Became a Thousand Birds' and the plaintive 'Goodnight Resurrection'. There are strong moments, such as when Diabaté sweeps in on 'Ne Togo Ye Sadjouma', and Stoyan Yankulov's resounding Bulgarian *tupan* (a double-headed drum played with mallets) on 'Bu(ho)ñuelitos'. But they are, sadly, few and far between. The longest track, 'Water Giggles' is a pleasant enough meditative journey but it feels like a collection of ideas not given full shape.

Garcia-Herreros, who is based in Bogotá, is clearly immersed in the sounds of now and wants to contribute to an ever-expanding sonic revolution. Perhaps the next offering from his Snow Owl moniker will present some more mature and integrated work.

CHARLES DE LEDESMA

**TRACK TO TRY** *Ne Togo Ye Sadjouma*

## Lee Thompson Ska Orchestra Bite the Bullet

Ave Attack Records (40 mins)

★★★★★  
*This is good-time ska from Madness saxophonist*



Of all the retro bands out there, from Tokyo to New York, the nutty London boys of Madness probably did more than anyone to popularise ska. Their saxophonist, Lee Thompson, formed a 12-piece behemoth to further the music that he describes as being 'in me genes and me make-up.'

After their tribute to the graduates of Kingston's Alpha Boys' School in *The Benevolence of Sister Mary Ignatius*, their second release draws more ▶