

Altai Khangai Ongod

Buda Musique (59 mins)

★★★★★

Mongolian throat singing and horse head fiddles



Mongolian *khöömei* (overtone) singer Ganzorig Nergui and *morin huur* (horse head fiddle)

player Ganbold Muukhai are the two remaining members of Altai Khangai who released a splendid album *Naariits Biilye* on Pan in 1999. On *Ongod* they are joined by Garavkhuu Badmaabazar on Mongolian zither and dulcimer. 'Ikh Mongol,' a contemporary piece, demonstrates Ganzorig Nergui's various styles of throat singing, from the chesty, resonant sub-harmonic *kharkhiraa* style through the highly compressed *shakhalt-khailkah* style – in which it's the words that dominate – to the melodic, overtone-based *khöömei* method. It is interesting to hear Nergui trying to sing an overtone melody in a minor scale; traditionally a major pentatonic scale is sung in the overtone series. His *khöömei* is sometimes heavily influenced by the Tuvan style, particularly on 'Nuuts Tovchoo.' The unique sound of the two-string horse head fiddle is heard on every track, with 'Mongol Boukh' (Mongolian Bull) being the most traditional, a song that tells the tale of a bull that escaped from China back to its homeland in Mongolia.

MICHAEL ORMISTON

▶▶ TRACK TO TRY *Bidnii Eej*

Katayoun Goudarzi & Shujaat Husain Khan Spring

Katayoun Goudarzi & Shujaat Husain Khan (2 CDs, 99 mins)

★★★★★

Ecstatic music from Iran and India



The joy in making music within the mystic branch of Islam known as Sufism, and the verses of the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi, are celebrated throughout these ten tracks, performed by the Iranian-born vocalist and poet Katayoun Goudarzi and *sitar* virtuoso Shujaat Husain Khan, whose North Indian classical pedigree dates back seven generations. The musical and cultural ties between their two regions date back to Rumi's era, but Goudarzi and Khan are emphatic that this album is a spontaneous



Iranian-born vocalist and poet Katayoun Goudarzi

Arshady/Shirazy

interaction between two contemporary artists, and that their music here is not defined by the strictures of any tradition, or classifiable within a secular genre. Instead, we hear the results of Goudarzi having explored some of her favourite texts with Khan, who generated a remarkable variety of melodies to elicit the themes voiced by Goudarzi (in Farsi), treating love in both sacred and sensual forms. Although the music may inevitably evoke the intricate art of *raga* or the exaltation of *ghazal* at times, the listener is brought in on a different and exciting experiment, heralded by the seductively sensuous alto speaking voice of Goudarzi. At times she's plaintive, at times pleading, but always tonally luscious, and thus well-matched with Khan's playing and with his own mellow low-tenor singing voice. The pair are nicely supported by the blissfulness of Ajay Prasanna's *bansuri* flute and the burbling pulse of Abhiman Kaushal's *tabla*. Even if you don't understand Farsi, you'll find Rumi reaching you.

JEFF KALISS

▶▶ TRACK TO TRY *Dast-Zanân*

Padik Music from Balochistan

Etnisk Musikkklub (54 mins)

★★★★★

Balochi benju and fjords; what more could you want?



The picture on the inside of this CD features the band Padik in front of a mountain valley that looks

like the Hindu Kush. But it was taken outside the recording studio in Laerdal, western Norway. Padik is a Scandinavian-based quartet dedicated to the music of Balochistan, featuring Iranian-born singer Rostam Mirlashari, Balochi *benju* zither player Abdulrahman Surizehi, Hardanger fiddler Anne Hytta and Pakistani *tabla* player Nafees Irfan.

Balochistan is a wild, mountainous area divided between western Pakistan and south-eastern Iran with its own distinctive and beautiful music. The typical instruments of Balochi music are the delicately plucked *benju*, with Surizehi being the most famous contemporary player, and the *sorud*

fiddle. Listening to Anne Hytta, a pupil of Surizehi, you would hardly guess she was in fact playing a Hardanger fiddle. Both instruments have sympathetic strings and Hytta plays with the ethereal, other-worldly tone that the *sorud* brings to this music. The nine songs, both traditional and modern, are lyrical and attractive, although no translations are included in the liner notes.

SIMON BROUGHTON

▶▶ TRACK TO TRY *Jee Makoran*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Longing for the Past: The 78 rpm Era in Southeast Asia

Dust-to-Digital (4 CDs, 270 mins)

★★★★★

A never-ending banquet of South-East Asian sounds



Dust-to-Digital's latest release, a four-CD compilation of some of the earliest recorded

music in South-East Asia, is a treasure trove of rare music from Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. The nostalgia mentioned in the title refers to *vong co*, a song style from Vietnam that compiler David Murray says made listeners pine for a world that had disappeared (a bit like *saudade* in Portuguese music). You really can hear it in these antique tracks. Here you'll find the first recorded example of Laotian music, classical and court music, travelling troubadours, village romps, courtship duets, early blends of local and Western styles, and even brass band music (the first Western style of music to arrive in the region).

The social context of the music is explained in detail in essays on the region's recording industry, with explanations of how pioneers like Fred Gaisberg and George Dillnutt faced challenges of language barriers, cultural practices, dysentery and the like in order to meet the demand for recorded music that the phonogram era created. Each of the 90 tracks is contextualised by expert musicologists, giving you an insight into the performers and the style of music they created. Beautifully illustrated with over 250 photographs, this is a release you will want to linger long over.

JOHN CLEWLEY

▶▶ TRACK TO TRY *Lam Khaen* by Phloen Phromdaen