

REVIEWS

Aga Khan Initiative's work teaching children and promoting concerts, and the second follows the members of Tengir-Too. Their lives are very varied but all are totally committed to music as an integral part of life, be it playing a jaws harp on a hillside above a yurt, transferring music into a computer in a high-rise flat, teaching, performing, or engaging in necessary spiritual preparations. An inspiration!

Available from high street record shops or Amazon
www.viakaboul.com/artist_page.php?artist_id=6
www.akdn.org/Music/Kyrgyz%20bkt_final.pdf



AFRO-MANDINKA SOUL

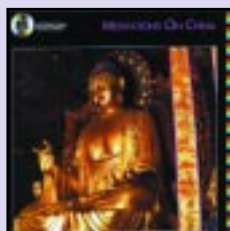
Seckou Keita Quartet
Arc Music EUCD 2028
CD: (Full Price) Length: 56.46 mins.
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Seckou Keita is a UK-based, Senegalese kora player playing traditional based music with his band - the other members of the quartet - who are an Egyptian violinist, an Italian double bassist, and a Gambian percussionist. They are joined by vocalists and a *riti* (one-string Senegalese fiddle) player. The music is delicate and has, despite the other non-Senegalese musicians, a very traditional feeling, as Seckou is very much the leader of the quartet.

Seckou has been a member of Baka Beyond, and appeared on a couple of their albums. We featured Baka Beyond's musical collaborative work with the Baka people of Africa in Sacred Hoop a few years ago.

The album is laid-back and restful, and the kora playing and other instruments are a delight to listen to. I am always a bit wary of world music fusion albums, there seemed to have been a lot of dreadful 'sitar and saxophone' and 'didgeridoo and dulcimer' albums released when the world discovered 'world music' a few years ago. Happily we seem to have mostly moved beyond those, and the fact that a double bass and a violin are on this album doesn't matter a fig, as the music sounds authentic from start to finish - this album is real, not the result of some bright spark saying 'hey, I've had a great idea for a CD...' A delicious mesmeric album, and I bet they are wonderful to experience live.

Available from high street record shops or Amazon etc.
www.arcmusic.co.uk
www.seckoukeita.com



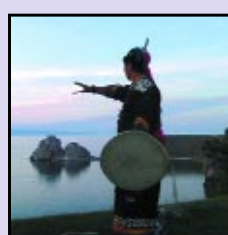
MEDITATIONS ON CHINA

Various Artists
Cooking Vinyl Music - Gumbo CD 033
CD: (Budget Price). Length: 65.10 mins.
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

It may have escaped your notice, but China is a big place, with a long history and has music too. Now, I have to say I am not very knowledgeable about Chinese music, my musical knowledge gets about as far East as Tuva and then stops, so this seemed a great CD with which to start an exploration. There are no notes on the cover other than the track titles, so there's not much help there, but it sounds Chinese -

or at least what I imagine Chinese to sound like. And that maybe is the problem, I can't help feeling it's a bit cleaned up, a bit packaged, a bit like 'Abba Sings Britain's Greatest Folk Songs of Death and Disaster'. I can't help thinking the real stuff is rawer than this, but then I don't know much about Chinese music so maybe it isn't. It's a nice enough album, and it makes a change from the music I normally play, but even though it is played on authentic instruments it's a bit Hollywood, all sweet and no sour.

Available from high street record shops or Amazon etc.
www.cookingvinyl.com



IN PURSUIT OF THE SIBERIAN SHAMAN

A film by Anya Bernstein
DVD (region 0) Length: 73 mins.
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is an extraordinary film, an up-close and personal documentary about a Buryat shaman called Valentin Khagdaev who lives on the sacred Olkhan Island in Lake Baikal, Russia. The film starts with footage taken in 1928 of a shaman performing just before Soviet persecution all but destroyed Siberian shamanic culture. Then it moves to modern-day footage of Lake Baikal with the sound of two phone messages, one telling Anya to 'forget the film idea as there are no real shamans left, only showmen', the other saying 'forget the film idea because the shamans are real and the magic dangerous'.

And that's the theme of the film - shaman or showman? Anya follows Valentin as he works in his smallholding, as he entertains the many tourists who come to Lake Baikal wanting to see a 'real shaman' at work, and who are treated to storytelling in a *ger* and a bit of a 'dance and chanting session' near to the famous 'shaman's rock'... They got Valentin the showman. And then, interspersed with those sections, is Valentin the shaman, working with local people, helping them honour the spirits. In the film we see him performing a blessing ceremony for the crew of a fishing trawler on the lake and travelling around to large *serge*, *oboo*-type spirit houses - making offerings and keeping the traditions alive.

At one point he has to perform a ceremony at a sacred rock by the lakeside where campers have pitched their gear, and has to ask them to remove all their possessions while he does it. This clash of the sacred ways and the tourists is ever present, and to rub it in even more, Valentin shows us his collection of press cuttings, all the magazines that have done articles on him, making me - as a magazine editor - shudder with the crassness of it all.

Anya's film style is simple and to the point, one girl, one camera, shadowing the shaman, and this direct uncluttered approach makes the film even more poignant. We are allowed to witness all aspects of his life in the community, as healer, keeper of traditions, elder and tour operator.

I deeply enjoyed watching the film of the ceremonies and hearing Valentin talking about them. So, shaman or showman - yes both, and the tourists and the locals both get what they need!

For dates and venues of showings visit
www.cinetrance.com To buy a copy of the DVD,
contact Anya directly: cinetrancefilms@gmail.com

