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# Album review: Basel Rajoub Trio | Chas & Dave



THE reason we don't have the marketing details for this CD lie in the plight of its musicians who, like most others in the Syrian diaspora, are denied the normal facilities.

[Basel Rajoub Trio: Asia](#)

Free to download

**Rating: \* \* \* \* \***

As a self-produced CD, it has been put up online, so fans can stream it free. And it is outstanding: accompanied by qanun-player Feras Sharstan and percussionist Khaled Yassine, saxophonist and composer Basel Rajoub leads a series of improvisations in which Middle-Eastern styles marry elements of jazz and flamenco.

Free download: <https://soundcloud.com/basel-rajoub> (<https://soundcloud.com/basel-rajoub>)

## MICHAEL CHURCH

### CHAS & DAVE: THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS

WARNER MUSIC, £13.99

**Rating: \* \* \***

Everyone's favourite rock'n'roll session players-turned-novelty knees-up pub rockers celebrate their 50th anniversary in music by going back to pre-rock'n'roll roots with a mix of the CBGBs – country, bluegrass and blues. Their first new studio album in 27 years, recorded at Abbey Road with respected producer Joe Henry, features guests including Albert Lee and Jools Holland and ghosts including Buddy Holly and Lead Belly.

In addition to reasonably subtle renditions of trad-roots numbers which tone down the rabbit and turn up the musicianship, they revisit their best song, Ain't No Pleasing You, as a southern blues gumbo and make explicit the connection between their rapid-fire joanna jabber and old-time mountain music on a new acoustic version of Lonnie D.

### HOWE GELB: THE COINCIDENTALIST

NEW WEST RECORDS, £11.99

Rating: \* \* \*

Veteran of some 40 or 50 albums – he has lost count – Howe Gelb operates out of the splendid isolation of the Arizona desert. Not alone, you understand – Gelb has many musical friends and a number of them contribute to The Coincidentalist, including Bonnie Prince Billy, M Ward and KT Tunstall, whose current album was produced by Gelb. She returns the favour with a guest vocal on The 3 Deaths Of Lucky which morphs from [country blues](#) to supper-club jazz. That is Gelb's boundary-busting style. Add his hangdog baritone and you have – save the retro bubblegum bounce of Unforgivable – a mellow collection of droll and downbeat sentiments.

## FIONA SHEPHERD

### BACH: Goldberg variations

Nonesuch, £13.99

Rating: \* \* \* \* \*

American Jeremy Denk is a thinker as well as a pianist, but that doesn't stop him producing performances that unfold with musicality and natural, unforced energy. This is a stunningly fluid performance, a flowing narrative that engages perfectly with the soul of each variation, and which fills every moment with stylistic panache and supreme tonal control. Denk's crisp ornamentation, and the accompanying DVD liner notes, are the icing on a delicious cake.

## KEN WALTON

### JOHN ESCREET: SABOTAGE & CELEBRATION

WHIRLWIND RECORDINGS, £13.99

**Rating: \* \* \* \* \***

The English pianist has based himself in New York since 2006, and has made very productive use of the musical and inspirational resources of the city. The presence of saxophonists Chris Potter and David Binney on this impressive set testify to the fact that he is moving in elite circles in his adopted home. A fine quintet is completed by bassist Matt Brewer and drummer Jim Black, and their fiery, inventive soloing is augmented by a string section plus snippets of brass, guitar and voices on selected tracks, adding further colour and texture to the ever-shifting soundscape of his compositions. The music was written in the throes of the post-Hurricane Sandy shutdown in New York and the re-election of President Obama last November, both of which events are signalled in the album's title and in the alternating moods of the music.

## KENNY MATHIESON

### BRAEBACH: ÙRLAR BRAEBACH

BRAEBACH RECORDS, £14.99

**Rating: \* \* \* \* \***

The piping of Calum MacCrimmon and James Duncan Mackenzie and Megan Henderson’s fiddling sees Breabach continue to cut a stylish dash on the Highland music scene. The quintet’s introductory track is auspiciously fiery with the all-out pipe crackle of the jig, Braes of Mellinish, while the closer is a stomping pairing of waulking song and energetically-paced hornpipe.

An ùrlar is the basic theme of a piobaireachd, and the band takes such a theme, I Am Proud to Play a Pipe, and puts it through a driving series of variations which, while unlikely to please sticklers for convention, generates excitement as the theme is taken up by flute and pipes before Henderson sings it as canntaireachd, the old oral method of transmitting pipe music. There is drama, too, in guitarist Ewan Robertson’s singing of The Seven Men of Knoydart, setting Hamish Henderson’s lyrics, excoriating Lord Brocket and celebrating the post-war land grab, to an accompaniment providing excitement and outrage.

**JIM GILCHRIST**

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