

## LOS DE ABAJO

**Mariachi Beat** Wrasse WRASS323

Almost a decade and a half since they first popped onto the international music scene's radar, Mexico City's Los De Abajo show a continued verve on this new album (which I make to be their fifth). Their mix of socially-conscious lyrics, local roots (as suggested by the album's title) with rap, ska and rock may not have quite the same 'shock of the new' about it as it did when they first nailed it down on their second release, 2003's BBC Award for World Music-winning *Cybertropic Chilango Power* (Luaka Bop) but the ten-piece band still packs a punch all the same.

The opening *Turn Off* starts with a funky guitar intro before dropping into snaky cumbia and rap (the latter delivered by guest MC Dr Shena) while *Me Dejo* gallops along with acordeon, horns and Tania Melo's vocals. Some tracks start off trad and acoustic before heading off into all sorts of unexpected modern places (the exception being state-ly all-acoustic closer *Mujer Guerrera*).

There are times when too much gets thrown in the mix, but LDA have never been traditionalists and mostly their unlikely musical combinations gel together better than you'd expect. I doubt that this will make any new converts (especially among those who worship at the altar of that most spurious of concepts, 'musical purity'), however those of us who dug 'em from the get-go are likely to find much to dig here.

[www.facebook.com/losdeabajotheband](http://www.facebook.com/losdeabajotheband)

Jamie Renton

## CASCADA DE FLORES

**Radio Flor** Ita Music, no cat no

The San Francisco Bay Area's Cascada De Flores ('waterfall of flowers') was founded in 1999 by Mexico City native Jorge Liceaga (voice, guitar, tres, requinto, tumbadora) and Arwen Lawrence de Castellanos (voice, guitar, baritone guitar, jarana tercera, vihuela, cajón, zapateado). Rounding out the ensemble are Marco Díaz (trumpet, piano, chorus), Saúl Sierra-Alonso (double bass, leoncita, chorus), and Brian Rice (paila, güiro, bongó, tarola, udo, cajón, pandeiro, quijada de burro, chorus).

Cascada De Flores wholly inhabits a beguiling repertoire of Cuban guarachas, boleros, bambucos, canciones de trova, rancheras, clever original compositions (eg *Marla*, a comical Spanish-language double-entendre tour de force), and a danzón-style interpretation of the Rodgers & Hart chestnut *With A Song In My Heart*.

The group's eponymous self-published debut takes a nod to radio station XEW and the 'border blaster' era (c 1940-1972), when Mexican AM stations clustered on the northern border projected their potent signals far into the United States, often overpowering English-language broadcasts to the great annoyance of US audiences, station managers, and advertisers alike. The CD has some of that same puckish feel; its eighteen tracks include interspersed radio jingles that might have been heard during an era ruled by such artists as Mexico's Trio Los Panchos, Los Tres Ases, Toña La Negra, Agustín Lara, Las Tres Conchitas, and Cuba's Nico Saquito, Ernesto Duarte, and Ismael Mario Ruiz Suárez. The attractive illustrated digipack includes lyrics in Spanish. Top-shelf musicianship and lovely vocal harmonies showcasing Lawrence's exquisite soprano invoke a gone romantic era that is as alluring in the innovative hands of Cascada de Flores as it was in the music's original incarnation.

[cascadeflores.com](http://cascadeflores.com)

Michael Stone



Los De Abajo

## DAVID POWER

**The Eighteen Moloney** Own label DMP03

The title of David Power's third solo album derives from his receipt of a gift of an uilleann pipes chanter back in 2003. Made by the brothers Thomas and Andrew Moloney some time before the Great Famine of 1846-1851, and termed 'the eighteen Moloney' for unknown reasons, the chanter has passed through many hands, including, most notably, Willie Clancy who used it to famous effect on his Gael-Linn recordings of the 1960s.

Pitched somewhere between B and B-flat, and used here with a B set of Bourke pipes, in David's more than careful hands the chanter has a rich and sometimes swirling resonance, especially as exhibited on a rendition the air *Éamon a'Chnoic* (aka *Ned Of The Hill*) in which he intersperses the melody with hugely economical but very effective ornamentation.

Reels, hornpipes, slides and jigs are played with utter composure, but never with over-deliberation. Such subtlety is probably best discernible on a glorious set of jigs commencing with *The Cook In The Kitchen* and on the set dance *The Garden Of Daisies*.

If there is one criticism, and it is only minor in the face of such ability, it is that this sublime piper perhaps tends to use his instrument's drones to excess, but that is but a tiny quibble. Lovers of solo piping will thoroughly enjoy this recording.

[www.davidpowerup.com](http://www.davidpowerup.com)

Geoff Wallis

## THE WILLOWS

**Amidst Fiery Skies** Elk ELK013

Despite its flame reference title *The Willows'* first release is chiefly rooted and delicate, but that doesn't mean *Skies* doesn't pack a punch. Emotionally, the Cambridge quintet run the gamut, spectral visitation leading to suicide, enforced separation, family pride, rejection – thank god for an old-fashioned love song in *Roseville Fair*.

Another subtext might be journeys, personal and migratory, within and across national boundaries. They've come quite a way themselves from humblish beginnings to sessions for *Whispering Bob*, festival spot-lights and now, succeeding Stu Hanna, Sean Lakeman is the man in the producer's chair. He's crafted a light, airy sound which has shunted the Willows into a mainstream pack-

age, honing their dual love of British and American sources so that they dovetail neatly. He's also included Ben Nicholls on bass, which adds an understated funky element that you just might miss on a casual listen.

Their own writing is increasingly effective, reference the opening *Red Sands* a confident stab at emigrant sentiment delivered with longing in her voice by Jade Rhiannon. There's more muscle about *Roseville Fair*, which rocks out sweetly over slide, banjo and a brilliant counter-fiddle line. *Johnny Robson* shows they can handle folk ballads with supernatural overtones decently enough. Yet where all the elements knit together is with *Daughter* – independence is celebrated despite the severing of tightly woven emotions. The opposite of the Beatles' *She's Leaving Home*, it bowls along on the back of a jig in convincing fashion, whilst sounding just a little like Spriguns.

An album which explores possibilities and cannily hints at more to come.

[www.thewillowsband.com](http://www.thewillowsband.com)

Simon Jones.

## GREEN DIESEL

**Wayfarers All Talking Elephant** TECD260

Sometimes you're better off under the radar, and being there has certainly allowed Kent's Green Diesel time to curate and consider their rustic vibe and electric trad. *Wayfarers All* is certainly a gear higher than previous self-released offerings which could have been seen as too polite and lacking in clout. Clearly referencing the high days when it was de rigueur to dig around in your own backyard and apply rock hardware to whatever you found, Green Diesel step beyond that by mixing music with legend, doggerel and children's rhyme to produce material with more depth and relevance.

Opener *To Kill The King* is a rompalong rewrite about hunting wrens in deepest winter; they do a wonderful hop and skip round Peter Bellamy's *Oak, Ash & Thorn*; a Trees-meet-Spriguns confection *Let No Man Steal Your Thyme* has a cute, snaking guitar line improvised through the mid-section as well as dreamy, hazy vocal from Ellen Care, and *The Southcliffe Jig* packs an effective wallop for those who want to rock'n'reel round the kitchen. By signing with Talking Elephant, Green Diesel have joined a label which operates as companies used to, ie they care about their artists, keen to nurture and see an act grow in stature. Move-