

RE NILIU

In A Cosmic Ear Alfa Music AFMCD173

Thirty years ago, the first band who opened our English ears to the notion that the south



of Italy had some utterly wonderful music were Calabria's Re Niliu. Formed in 1979 and rooted in a lot of deep research into local traditional music, by the time they reached the UK in the late '80s they were beginning to head in an invigorating

electric direction. They'd made a number of increasingly adventurous albums through which it became obvious that their region, right out in the middle of the Mediterranean and closer to North Africa and Greece than the main European continent, had been an historic receptor to many cultures and influences which were reflected in the music.

Their 1994 CD *Pucambù*, on which everything seemed to come together, remains a classic,

but after that they effectively vanished, with leader Ettore Castagna not entering our vision again until 2005 in Nistanimera. This was another fantastic band specialising in songs in the local *Greco* (ancient Greek) dialect and introducing us to another force of nature, the amazing Anna Cinzia Vilani from neighbouring Puglia.

So you don't need much imagination to picture the glee when I opened a jiffy bag recently and out came the first Re Niliu album in two decades. And even more to discover that the unfortunately-titled *In A Cosmic Ear* (it's really nothing like Gong meets Donovan, honest!) is a logical follow-on to *Pucambù*. Three of the musicians from then still remain in the current six-piece – Castagna, Salvatore Megna, Mimmo Mellace – and a wealth of local traditional instruments like zampugna, lira, chitarra battente and tambureddu sit perfectly in a bed of 'conventional' bass / kit drums rhythm section, electric guitar and accordion. And it swings like crazy: this is as far from folk-rock plod as you can get. The exhilarating drive and relentless pulse of tracks like *Setta Pianeti* or *Mara Tundu* (heard on this issue's *fRoots 53* compilation) is as great as anything that Congo or Kenya (or the neighbours in Puglia) can put up. Sounds like they'd be a fantastic festival band, with all their roots in the right place.

So a big welcome back to one of the world's great bands, and yet more proof that – if Charlie Gillett's wiggly theory that at different times in history there's a spaceship hovering over somewhere, beaming down musical creativity – the south of Europe has it sewn up right now. Cosmic, man!

www.reniliu.it

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