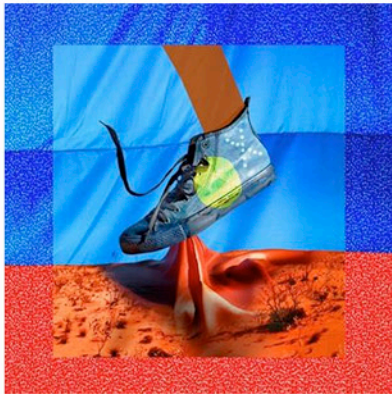


CD REVIEWS



MARLIYA SPINIFEX GUM

My Shore Productions
EXPERIMENTAL/INDIGENOUS

Spinifex Gum is one of the most powerful artistic expressions ever made by Australian artists about their country.

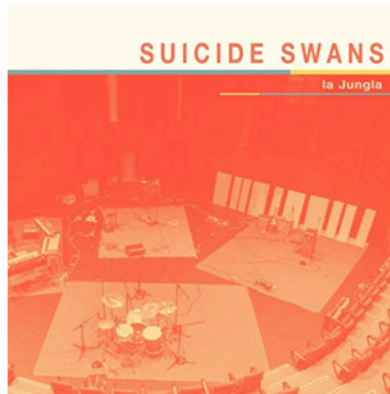
Invited by noted children's choir director Lyn Williams to compose a suite of music, Felix Riebl embedded himself into north-West Australia's Pilbara region, a place he'd never visited, knew little about. He observed the compromised lives of its indigenous people, and the impact made by others who had come there for their own profiteering purposes.

Riebl collaborated with Cat Empire colleague Ollie McGill to record local sounds that they electronically processed for the songs' accompaniment. The 20-strong Marliya - "bush honey" - group formed from Lyn Williams' north Queensland Gondwana youth choir give voice to Riebl's evocative lyrics that deal with issues including young deaths in custody, mining and dams, and suicide rates among fly in-fly out workers.

Explosive contributions by Peter Garrett, Briggs and soul diva Emma Donovan are in counterpoint to the gloriously soaring harmonies - and impeccable diction - of the vibrant young singers.

If you don't like electronica or rap, or, if for that matter, you don't like choral music - leave your prejudices behind you. *Spinifex Gum* belongs in every Australian record collection.

DAVID JOHNSTON



SUICIDE SWANS LA JUNGLA

Near Enough Records
ALT-COUNTRY

Suicide Swans are seemingly a band on a mission. The dust has barely settled on the release cycle for their excellent *Augusta* album of last year and they're already releasing it's follow-up - the sprawling, psych, rock and cosmic country double album that is *La Jungla*.

Recorded live in one day in an amphitheatre, the band hit the ground running with some of the songs played for the first time on the day they recorded them. That tension and lack of preconceived form and over-rehearsed perfection makes this set of songs a wonderfully dynamic and immersive listening experience. From the surging, rousing three and half minutes of 'See You In the Mountains' to the glorious slow reveal of 'Here On Out, Turn Off The Lights' which recalls the evocative terrain of Dirty Three sound tracking an epic western tale, they run headlong into all corners of rock 'n' roll. Singer and songwriter Kyle Jenkins has the perfect voice for the music that Suicide Swans conjure up. It's gnarled and parched, slightly broken and weary, with the right balance of beauty and trauma. On the dirty jerk and stomp of 'Willow' he sings of lightning and thunder, hollering gleefully over the distorted blues racket.

Suicide Swans clearly put few restrictions on their creativity and and it serves both them and the listener well. With a creative itch pushing them to stretch out, they've got the balance between chaos and clarity near perfect on this ambitious album.

CHRIS FAMILTON



TAILOR BIRDS STILTS ON THE WATER

Independent/MGM
AVANT-FOLK/AMBIENT

Designed as something of a gentle 'interlude' between past and future releases, *Stilts on The Water* is part sound poem, part lullaby, part meditation from Melbourne singer, songwriter and electronic violinist Sophie Kinston. Recorded, once again, for the most part in the Netherlands with pianist d'Ouders, Sophie also called into a studio in London to record Paya Lehane's flutes before finishing things off up in Tewantin in Queensland with a little percussion, courtesy Rodger Bradshaw. Sweeping dreamscapes gradually evolve into vocal sections that tease around traditional lullaby 'Hush Little Baby' before a gently rhythmic interlude brings the listener to the core - only - song, 'White Feather' sees Sophie pondering the banalities of daily family life - making breakfasts, lunches, dinners - images shattered by darker thoughts - a mother lacing up her children's eyes, a brother choking as he eats his oats - Celtic pipes dancing through it all with a beguiling gaiety. A murder lullaby? Certainly Enya with a Nick Cave sensibility, beautiful and disconcerting by turns. Altogether a mesmerising experience.

MICHAEL SMITH