

Spiro

'Lightbox'

Release Date: 22 June 2009

Real World Records: CDRW172

"When I first listened to the music of Spiro, I thought it was really different. The sounds that hit you first are sounds that you are familiar with; they sound folksy, but once you start listening to the music and how it's composed you hear elements of systems music – people like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, dance music. All sorts of musical influences are woven into this very contemporary music. I think this is soulful music, passionate music and I love it."

Peter Gabriel

"Spiro's music defies categorization ... brilliantly played and arranged, lyrical yet groovy, traditional yet contemporary, raucous yet tender."

Max Richter, composer

Despite a slew of work for theatre, film and television, **Spiro** remain something of an enigma, a well-kept secret that's only now starting to spread. They might bear the tools of the folk musician and be partial to the odd traditional tune, but **Spiro** claim to have closer affinities to the worlds of contemporary classical and dance music than they do to the folk scene. **Spiro** are **Jon Hunt** on guitar, **Jason Sparkes** on Accordion, **Alex Vann** on mandolin and **Jane Harbour** on violin. This four-piece contemporary ensemble takes a meticulous approach to composition and performance, creating a sound much greater than their parts would suggest. Their music – as heard on **Lightbox**, their new album for **Peter Gabriel's Real World Records** – is sweeping, majestic and cinematic, marking them out as kindred spirits with Steve Reich, Michael Nyman and the Penguin Café Orchestra. It's a unified but never uniform sound, one made by four virtuosic musicians pulling in the same direction and keen to provoke an emotional response in anyone within earshot. "We're like a string quartet," they explain, "but the most driving and exciting string quartet that you could imagine."

One thing is certain – Spiro are their own people, commendably operating in their own sphere and at their own pace. This contemporary acoustic ensemble first came together through Bristol's folk sessions scene in 1993, trading under the name of The Famous Five. Now, a full 16 years later, they've only just got around to releasing their third album. Their first for Real World Records, **Lightbox** is an extraordinarily stirring record. Recorded over four days at Real World Studios in Box and largely produced by Simon Emmerson (the chief architect behind the Afro Celt Sound System and The Imagined Village projects), it showcases a highly imaginative and highly disciplined group with a sound that's unified but never uniform. All four members, all four instruments, pull in the same direction, creating music that's intricate yet full of momentum.

The arrangements are deeply complex and planned within an inch of their lives, with everything being meticulously picked apart, discarded, retrieved, reworked and often patched together in new sequences. It's a near-scientific approach. There's no showmanship either - there are no solos and no ornamentation to attract attention to one

particular instrument. The feeling is that each member of the band isn't just playing their own instrument, but that they're playing the whole thing. This is what **Spiro** refer to as "the mesh", the locked-in ensemble sound that is a relentless, wonderfully overpowering assault on the eardrums. Although there are plenty of moments of quieter contemplation on **Lightbox**, this unstoppable ensemble sound is in heavy evidence throughout the new record. It provides the fury on *Captain Say Catastrophe*, the momentum of *Darkling Plains*, the euphoria of *Shaft*. Think of it as an acoustic wall of sound.

"High-octane, mesmerizing music."

Pete Lawrence, former Artistic Director, The Big Chill

"Spiro are at the forefront of the new wave of inspirational English acoustic music – unique arrangements that transport you into gorgeous landscapes. Essentially English, beautifully brilliant with timeless melodies."

Karen Tweed

"Unsettling, exhilarating and highly impressive ... Fascinating and, I suspect, unique."

fRoots

Live dates:

30 May - Wychwood Festival, Cheltenham

21 June - The Big Session Festival, Leicester

27 June - Glastonbury Fields of Avalon

10 July - Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, Wales

25 July - WOMAD Charlton Park

1 Aug - Cambridge Folk Festival

30 Aug - Shambala

5 September – Festinho, Sudbury Hall, Suffolk

www.realworldrecords.com/spiro

Full biography available on request

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