

**Juana Luna**  
Canciones en  
Blanco y Negro

Folkalist Records



For those who have chosen to train their soul in such a way, folklore in Argentina is ever-present.

Whether in cities or the typical Pampas, there is a spiritual template in which we all – whether we know it or not – take part. On her latest album, Argentine singer Juana Luna, based in New York since 2013, channels and expands that heritage. With a clear, masterful voice, Luna delivers *zambas* disguised as tangos, classics from the traditional Latin songbook and adds delicate use of electric guitars and chord progressions to open up the genre. Preconceptions about ‘folklore’ are ruptured. It makes you feel like sharing the Pampas’ morning sun forever. Perhaps, just like Luna sings on closing track ‘Emilia’, ‘*the only map is the horizon.*’

JUAN JOSÉ RELMUCAO

TRACK TO TRY *Serenata del 900*

**Grupo Polo Montañez**  
Joyas del Guajiro

Lusafrica / Sony



The rural Cuban singer-songwriter Polo Montañez, who was killed in a road accident in 2002 only three years after his

meteoric rise to extraordinary success was a prolific composer, and left quite a number of songs unrecorded. After his death the group more or less disbanded, but later reformed and have recently recorded a number of these, the ‘Farmer’s Gems’ of the title. The songs are mellifluous, interestingly set, and accompanied by guitar (with some charming solos), bongo and percussion, plus a violin on a few numbers. It’s all quite romantic and low-key, and doesn’t exactly grab the attention – though the three singers harmonise superbly, albeit let down by the lead vocal being mixed uncomfortably low on songs like the otherwise delightful ‘La Suegra’. One must imagine Polo Montañez happy if he knew that his music would survive him so sweetly.

KIM BURTON

TRACK TO TRY *Que Sabes Tu*

**Dora Morelenbaum**  
Pique

Mr Bongo



Those familiar with the surname Morelenbaum or the Latin Grammy award-winning band Bala Desejo in the ▶

Kristen Drum

**ROOTS** US & CANADA

by Devon Léger



Justin Golden

Nashville carpenter **JP Harris** just might be the most interesting man in country music. He’s hopped freight trains, knows the hobo signs, has built handmade recording studios for the stars in music city, and used to be a shepherd for the Navajo. He’s also an acclaimed old-time banjo player, with a great album out a few years back with ex-Old Crow Medicine Show member Chance McCoy. His new album, **JP Harris is a Trash Fire** (Bloodshot Records \*\*\*\*), is out on the newly resurrected Bloodshot and it’s a slice of honky-tonk heaven. JP’s got a knack for country songwriting; the chorus for ‘To the Doves’, ‘*Forget I ever came / Forget you knew my name / And let’s leave the morning for the doves,*’ is a pitch-perfect look at lost love.

There’s a rich trad music scene tucked into the gorgeous islands and waterways of Western British Columbia and fiddler **Olivia Barrett** is one to watch. She puts up regular videos on social media of her playing devilishly complex Irish and Celtic fiddle tunes, but her new album, **Elsewhere** (Olivia Barrett \*\*\*\*), also brings in a lot of original tunes by her pen. Her tunes are quite complicated, but her playing is so beautiful that it’s hard not to get swept away. Produced by Adrian Dolan of Canadian folk heroes The Bills, the album also features ace BC trad guitarist Adam Dobres. Lovely work!

Speaking of Western BC, **Aerialists** are one of the best new-trad bands in Canada with deep roots in this region. Guitarist Adam Iredale-Gray and fiddler Elise Boeur have deep ties to the Gulf Islands out West of Vancouver, BC, and the band’s new album, **I Lost My Heart On Friday** (Aerialists \*\*\*\*), was recorded on Mayne Island. Along with Scottish harpist Màiri Chaimbeul (as well as her younger sister, smallpipes-player Brighde

Chaimbeul on one track) from the Isle of Skye, these young traditional musicians are at the vanguard of a new acoustic music blending Celtic, European and Scandinavian influences. Aerialists specialise in melding fluid fiddle lines with break-beat drums and complex rhythmic and harmonic arrangements, with sparkling harp lines flying overhead. It’s a tightwire act that they’re only getting better at.

Just a little bit further South, **Tinkham Road**’s new album, **Three Forks** (Tinkham Road \*\*\*), is roots music from the lost traditions of the Pacific Northwest. Tinged with elements of jazz and Woody Guthrie folk, and led by woodcarver, fiddler, songwriter and ersatz folklorist Bob Antone, the band look to the stories and folklore of Washington State for inspiration. ‘Wild Zebras’ is about a herd of the animals that escaped in their hometown of North Bend, and ‘Wild Boars’ is about a local bartender who claimed to have seen Bigfoot. Antone knows how to tap into the logger and railroad lore of the region, the old logging ballads and poetry especially, which don’t exist much anymore. It’s a slice of life from an area that folks might only know about from the surreality of the TV show *Twin Peaks*.

Richmond, Virginia blues/Americana singer **Justin Golden**’s last volume of *Golden Country* was a delight, a natural blend of country blues and early bluegrass. **Golden Country: Volume 2** (Vocal Rest Records \*\*\*\*), the follow-up, is out now and just as fun. Golden’s tapping into a time before the record industry in the US divided everything by race, back when Black and white musicians shared influences and inspired each other. Of course, it all sounds natural and great fun, because Golden gets how much bluegrass, old-time, country blues and juke joint jams have always had in common.