

Truth & Lies



3'AIN 'SEA OF STORIES' (CHOUX DE BRUXELLES) -A REVIEW

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Words by Justin Turford

Fusion can be the worst of descriptions in terms of music writing. It can suggest ill thought out collaborations between disparate artists, cultures or musical styles but sometimes, perfection can arise out of the stirring together of contrasting genres and *'Sea Of Stories'* by the Syrian/Belgian trio **3'Ain** is one such success.

Based in the harbour town of Ostend, the trio consists of Syrian trumpeter **Yamen Martini**, accordionist **Piet Maris** (from the European Roots band **Jaune Toujours**) and bass player **Otto Kint**. Their name is based on the Arabic letter ξ (which is often typed in Arabic SMS conversation as 3, and in transliteration as 'ain') - roughly translating to *'As Three'*, 3'Ain seems the perfect term for a band in such musical harmony with each other.

Their sound is a gentle and sensitive marrying of Middle Eastern (or MENA region), Argentine tango and global jazz, every piece is evocative, sultry and atmospheric; a soundtrack to the watery gateway that they live in and to the wider world. Tracks like the opening *'Schuimkop'* ooze concentrated emotion.

Stately in tempo, the slow glide that the three players perform is spellbinding, every blown, plucked or squeezed note is placed as thoughtfully as a dancer's foot or hand. Space is as important as the sound, and what a sound it is.

Yamen's trumpet positively sings the Levantine blues on *'[Lacht]'*, the accordion's drone and the wandering double bass of Otto leaving and returning to the main riff (which I feel I know somehow), the lack of drums really making sense to me now, the elasticity of the playing is freer, more from the upper body as opposed to the feet. Still, a great dancer would find acres of expressive movement within this music.

The single *'Scrambled Ensor'* is a tango and contains all the rhythmic drama that would suggest. Piet's accordion is a wonderful mix of tempo and expressive bursts, the trumpet a melancholic sob, Otto's bass the heartbeat, his solo part a song in itself. Folkloric in ambience, one could imagine a lone voice full of experience soaring over this.

'Meeting Issues' opens with a brooding bass line before the trumpet moans its way into view, the accordion adding stark tension. Dramatic and full of purpose, the song has that late night, dark room wine bar edge. Subtly electrifying, the issues are definitely being met.



A more full throated tango this time for *'Tango Soleil du Nord'* - chests are thrust, movement is sharp. The grey skies of Belgium's coast change the hue of the tango from its Argentine roots, and Yamen's Syrian melodic understanding give it a mournful, reflective vibe, though the main hook is a straight up, foot-stomping tango. Wonderful.

'Mayaaze' begins with Yamen. A stunning and poetic solo intro that expands into a deliciously sad ballad, smoky, romantic and funereal in the best of ways, the trio assuredly play as a single entity here.

Apart from a few interludes of ambient field recordings (the sea, the docks, birds), the final track on the album is *'Perron O'* - a gently swinging groove full of moments of humour and melodic playfulness. Tonally more experimental, a tad more improvised (sounding) and therefore, quietly wilder - there's a dancing fire at its centre and is a flawless closer to a sublime record.

An eloquent record that reveals a harmonic dialogue between Northern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean can be captured by just three people sensitively playing musical instruments together. Superb. 9.5/10