

SONGLINES

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The Silk Road Ensemble Off The Map

World Village 468095

Full Price (63 mins)

★★★

Virtuosi mix'n'match instruments and inspirations



The Silk Road Ensemble has an impressive musical pedigree, founded by the cellist Yo-Yo Ma and boasting musicians such as Wu Man. On this album the musicians have decided to view the idea of the Silk Road as a device for borderless, global music making, bringing in elements of South and Central American, Japanese and Mediterranean musics.

The first work presented, 'Ritmos Anchinos', is by the Peruvian-American composer Gabriela Lena Frank. It starts off rather like a Piazzolla tango, a long way from Central Asia, but the extensive use of the *pipa* (Chinese lute) draws a link between China and the sounds of Andean plucked lutes. The next work, 'Empty Mountain, Spirit Rain' by Angel Lam, is a contemplative piece drawing on the *shakuhachi* playing of Kojiro Umezaki, while 'Dialogue: Sulvasutra' by Evan Ziporyn is a somewhat minimalist take on the *tabla* traditions of North India, played here by Sandeep Das. The album ends with 'Air to Air' by the Argentinian-American Osvaldo Golijov. Here the klezmer-meets-tango framework provides the background for some excellent Galician bagpipe playing by Christina Pato. Whether all this fusion is completely satisfactory is hard to say.

This is certainly deeply thought-out and intelligent music-making and brings to the fore some fascinating sonorities and juxtapositions of traditions. The playing throughout is, needless to say, very impressive indeed. However, at times you suspect some of these eclectic sources are just added colour to what might otherwise be heard in another context as commonplace contemporary Western art music.

Maria Lord