



## Press Reviews: *Chaika* (2012)

Eastside Radio's Album of the Week is the self-titled album by Chaika. This Sydneyside quintet originally have their roots in Klezmer music and were previously known as 'Di Khupe Heybners'. However when they recently turned into 'Chaika' it also represented an expansion of their musical horizons, and whilst their Klezmer roots still remain, they have blended it with a whole heap of other influences including Eastern European rhythms, Celtic and Irish strings, jazz improvisations and a Caravan sway with melodious four-part vocal harmonies woven in between them all. Clarinet, accordion, violin and double bass all intertwine diversely and at times unpredictably giving *Chaika* a rich depth. With vocals sung in a variety of languages, adding further authenticity to the release, one of the most absorbing qualities of the album is its originality. Refreshingly, however, this originality is steeped in traditional music. *Chaika* is the debut release from the group, and the band have their album launch at 505 in Surry Hills next Wednesday 21st March. No doubt it will be a gig showcasing the depth and breadth of local Sydney music, most excitingly from such a young and talented group of musicians.

– 89.7 Eastside FM, March 2012

Chaika as a circumspect variation of Sydney veterans Mara! does not impugn the reputation of either band. Such a young and inexperienced act as the former could hardly be expected to match the firepower or authority of Australia's premier blender of Balkan music and jazz on its inaugural outing. Chaika's female frontline may deliver its fusion of eastern European folk music and other elements in a comparatively passive manner, but there's certainly no lack of expertise or charm in the group's low-key approach. Indeed, it is easy to be enchanted by the beauty of its four-part harmony vocals in traditional Bulgarian and Macedonian pieces such as the traditional Jovano Jovanke (a number in 7/4 time) or the solo vocals in the haunting Hebrew standard Lach Yerushalayim. Chaika's collective instrumental chops, not to mention its ability as arrangers and composers, are well exhibited in the gently swinging, Celtic-tinged section of Celtywood, which features an absorbing exchange between writer Susie Bishop's violin, Laura Altman's clarinet, Emily-Rose Šarkova's accordion and in a tail-end dialogue with Laura Bishop's double bass. Šarkova's Bridge in Budapest gains buoyancy as it gravitates towards a jazzy middle section and finale. The Balkan-flavoured co-write Farm Days gathers momentum after a similarly sombre start. With a little more animation and perhaps a little more focus, Chaika could have made an even more cogent start to its recording career. It was a smart move to ditch the former name Di Khupe Heybners (the Barn-raisers) for Chaika, which means life in Hebrew. There's no doubt which moniker radio presenters will find easier to pronounce. ★★☆☆

– Tony Hillier, The Australian, July 2012