



## Press Reviews: *I Monti* (2014)

The parallel between Chaika and another much longer established Sydney ensemble, Mara! & Martenitsa choir – promoted by a selected of Balkan inspired folk-jazz and choral pieces on the younger band's eponymous 2012 debut release – is consolidated on their new album by the inclusion of two Italian poems set to music by the group's Laura Bishop, who has a close association with Martenitsa Choir. Coincidentally 'I Monti' and 'Elegia', both based on the writing of the late human rights lawyer Edoardo di Giovanni, which formed the basis of Mara!'s last album (*Tra Parole e Silenzio*), are among the stand out tracks – especially the latter, a spine tingling a capella study involving all six members. The sublime harmony vocals of Chaika's four female members are also in evidence on Russian text/poetry set to music by band leader Emily-Rose Šarkova and a piece by Laura Bishop based on a Bulgarian poem. Chaika's not inconsiderable collective instrumental chops, which allow piano, accordion, violin, clarinet, guitar, double bass and percussion to adroitly intertwine, is well exhibited on a Moldovian tune and an animated band original informed by Balkan-jazz.

– Tony Hillier, Rhythms Magazine, July 2014

At first glance the recently-released CD "I Monti" or The Mountains by the group Chaika is a foreign import from Eastern Europe with exotically named tracks such as *Vreme Senvič*, *Maika i Sin* and *Opa Tsupa*. Nothing could be further from the truth. The group Chaika – it means seagull in Bulgarian – is made up of six young Australians, four girls, two boys, who between them play accordion, violin, guitar, clarinet, double bass and percussion. And they all sing – beautifully and in a variety of languages ranging from Bulgarian through Russian to Hebrew. The result is a unique collection of songs based on the work of established poets but with the music written by one or other member of the group. To say that these guys are talented would be an understatement. There are 11 tracks on the CD, my favourite being No 2, a Russian poem which translates as In My Garden at Night. Pianist Emily-Rose Šarkova has written the music to accompany the Russian lyric poet Alexander Blok's words – "In the night in my garden, a weeping willow weeps". The track begins with a throbbing double bass followed by a wailing clarinet and then vocalist Susie Bishop sings. It's a haunting melody, but just as the pathos reaches its height, the work bursts into life, before sinking back into melancholy again as a tender girl named Dawn wipes away the tears of the weeping willow. The whole effect is mesmerising, as is much of the rest of this extraordinary CD. ★★★★★

– Michael Morton-Evans, Fine Music 102.5 FM, August 2014