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Belgium: a surprisingly rich seam of folk music from a country with relatively little unique culture, being heavily influenced by France, Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands which share a language and many other things with the region of Flanders. Elanor, a Ghent quintet, take all these ingredients and produce a surprisingly refreshing and easily digested album: hurdy-gurdy and bagpipes for a distinctly French sound at times, accordion for an English mood on the sweet waltz *Pour Elle*, Irish pipes with their distinctive soulfulness, flute and guitar for a touch of exotic Balkan or Moorish music, all underpinned by electric bass and percussion giving a modern dance-band feel to many tracks.

*A Clear Look* takes a little getting used to, with its electro-acoustic liberties and its blend of old traditions with new ideas. Every track is a creation of these five musicians, yet there is a kinship with northern European traditions which is unmistakable. At times powerful, at others bland, this CD is surprisingly satisfying. It actually reminds me of Gentse Waterzooi, the famous Ghent soup-stew of the day's catch with potatoes, vegetables, and whatever spices come to hand. Every recipe is different, but there's a common thread, a basic template, which unifies all the various versions. The same is true of the tracks on this album: each is unique, none is the quintessence of Elanor, but all together build a picture of this diverse and dynamic band.

Talking of pictures, there's a fascinating one on the album cover, not truly deceptive but intriguing nonetheless. What at first appears to be a girl's face is actually cleverly overlaid with Elanor's various instruments, soundholes round the eyes, pipe drones providing a ponytail, and an accordion for a hat. You can admire the detail as you listen to the virtuosity of *Voyage* or the mysterious *Masque*. By the time you reach *Shvesta* you won't be surprised by the hints of Blowzabella, nor by the Gong-like *Northern Village*. The final two tracks range even further afield: *Vellareels* draws on North Sea fiddle traditions and Irish influences, while *0808* looks a long way east from Flemish shores. Whether you lean towards celtic, Scandinavian, or southern European music, *A Clear Look* has plenty to get your teeth into, always with its own Belgian flavour.

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