

MARILIS ORIONAA

La Destinada Armugalh/Darenlà 176405

Just as I was wondering what had happened to Béarnaise singer Marilis Orionaa, here's a new album, her first in nine years. And she's just as strikingly magnificent as before.

With her is still the same small loyal team I met when I went to Béarn, in south-west France, to interview her for a fRoots (then Folk Roots) cover feature in 1997 (fR 167), after the release of her first album: guitarist Olivier Kléber-Lavigne and percussionist Nicolas Martin-Sagarra, and producer-engineer Gérard Cauquil.

The songs, in her beloved Béarnais, the most prominent dialect of Gascon, are again all her own except for a couple co-written and an adaptation of a Victor Hugo poem with music by George Brassens.

Her singing, dramatic with a passionate quiver but without affectation, swoops between cherishing intimacy and wildness, her vocal sound up close or opened out into a wide space by Cauquil's bold and beautifully judged touches of floating repeat echo.

Kléber-Lavigne and Martin-Sagarra's accompaniments of flamenco-ish guitar and brittle percussion are stripped down but absolutely complete.

It's been a while, but it's a strong return.

www.marilisorionaa.com

Andrew Cronshaw