

ITKU

Top of the World

Rating: ★★★★★

Author: Chris Wheatley

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Itku is the third studio album from Okra Playground, a Finnish six-piece who, since their 2015 debut, *Turmio*, have rightfully garnered praise for their organic blending of traditional folk with elements of electronica and contemporary music. Voice, fiddle, bowed harp and *kantele* nestle alongside electric bass, accordion, synth and percussion on *Itku*, and it all works very well indeed. The opener and title-track is a striking affair – urgent, thudding drums, racing strings and wordless vocals stir themselves up into an invigorating frenzy, driven by a pulsing, primordial bassline. Follower 'Ukkonen' rattles and rolls with an admirably epic, wide-open sound.

It's straightforward to understand why Okra Playground have attracted such a large following in their 12 years together. Okra Playground bring a slick, cinematic feel to their music. While a few may shy away from such perceived 'commercial' elements, *Itku* follows no easy paths, and sits about as far away from 'easy listening' as you could imagine. Traditional folk music lies at the heart of this album, and it is impossible not to get swept along by the band's grand sonic adventures. Witness the heavy, gritty, 'Veri', which manages to be both powerful and subtle. Another wonderful album from this singular ensemble.



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