

LISSA SCHNECKENBURGER Song

Footprint Records FR2008

Lissa Schneckenburger

Britain doesn't have the exclusive on a new generation of fiddle singers and this album by New England based Schneckenburger is pure joy. Her fiddle playing is attractively fluid, her singing gently persuasive, the arrangements thoughtful and intelligently presented and the choice of material, in particular, is arresting. The first of two linked albums designed to reintroduce largely forgotten New England music into our lives (*Dances* is due out next year), it goes far beyond academic exercise.

There's a bright and breezy *Fair Maid By The Sea Shore* for openers, an intimate telling of *Young Charlotte*, an effectively brooding treatment of *The Old Beggar Men*, a seriously moving string arrangement of *The Drowsy Sleeper* (including Natalie Haas on cello) and a frisky Americanised version of one of the greatest ballads of them all, *Little Musgrove And Lady Barnswell*, which climaxes in a thrilling blitz of fiddle, banjo (Dave Cory) and accordeon (Sharon Shannon). Litter it with a bunch of lively tunes played by an array of classy musicians – Shannon has a key role throughout – and you have a cracking album with the rare distinction of proudly displaying discernible roots in the American tradition on a bunch of songs of primarily British origin, but which still sounds thoroughly contemporary.

The way she plucks the strings on the slightly spooky *Lovely Jamie* creates an uncanny parallel with Lisa Knapp's already distinctively sparse style of delivery and is a powerful solo diversion to the band tracks. The only real question mark hangs over *Harmony*, an 18th century Isaac Watts hymn. She sings it beautifully with some delicate backing vocals, and the unusual tune and arrangement might work if not dragged down by some heavy-handed drums, which make it sound more like an invitation to war than a call of religious unity. That apart, it's a blinder.

www.lissafiddle.com

Colin Irwin

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