

Niamh Parsons & Graham Dunne Live At Fylde (Gramsham Records)

Here's an album reflecting in every way the sheer presence of, and unadorned gentle perfection of the totally exemplary performance given by, the gorgeous singer Niamh and guitarist Graham, her touring partner (I hesitate to use the word "accompanist", for so integral - and integrated - is his contribution to the musical experience). Although neither Niamh nor Graham wastes a single note or nuance in their matchless renditions of predominantly traditional songs, there's never a feeling of perfunctory auto-pilot readthrough about their performances, instead we get a quality of stillness, a measured calm that in its very poise builds around it the space for the interpretations to breathe and grow (even the brisk tempo of Blackbirds And Thrushes enables a suitably breezy take on the song's carefree view of love without seeming unduly rushed). But words just cannot describe the rapturous effect on this listener of the definite highlights of this 50-minute set (which was recorded live at Fylde Folk Festival last year by Alistair Russell) - like One Morning In May, An Páistín Fionn, The Kilnamartyra Exile, Ron Kavana's The Men That God Made Mad (this one benefiting from a beautifully controlled instrumental coda, L'Intrada De L'Angestura) and Tom Waits' The Briar And The Rose (with some sublime extra vocal harmonies by guest Tony Gibbons). What matter if Niamh has recorded much of this material before, for the extra intensity of these live readings is palpable, not least in the expression of the fathomlessly deep musical and yes, spiritual bond between Niamh and Graham. I'm convinced that rarely if ever has such unassuming talent and musicianship - in just the one musician! - been so mesmerisingly at the service of a singer in this

repertoire - and yet just take a listen to Graham's deftly virtuosic set of solo jigs literally stopping the show halfway through the album! Actually, I'm not entirely sure that the sequence presented on this album preserves the correct set-list running order (I'm willing to stand corrected on this however), but even if that's so then it's an extremely miniscule reservation on what is in every respect one of those hen's-teeth "would've given all to be there" live records (you can tell that by the ultra-enthusiastic reception Niamh and Graham get from the audience).

David Kidman