

Parson's knows

NIAMH PARSONS

Heart's Desire [Green Linnet]

It's a paradoxical thing, tobacco – so devastating in its long-term effects, and yet it has to be said that on certain human voices its influence is sublime. Niamh Parsons has one of those beautifully smoke-tinged instruments – rich, powerful, utterly precise, but with that mellow roughness around the edges which only cigarettes seem to impart. Makes me half wish I'd taken them up myself at a younger, less cautious age.

From the first few phrases of the opening a cappella number, the classic 'My Lagan Love', the authority of Parsons' singing announces itself. She's a solid, earth-rooted vocalist: the most complex ornamentations and grace notes still land confidently on their intended destination, and the subtle shifts in tempo and dynamics feel somehow imbued with rightness. The result is spine-chilling.

The CD was produced by guitarist Dennis Cahill, best known for his musical partnership with fiddler Martin Hayes, and he's

done a brilliant job – no heavy reverb or lush synthesiser washes here. It's a credit to Cahill that while the backing on the album varies considerably from track to track (and is sometimes dispensed with altogether, as on Sean Mone's recent composition 'New Holland Grove', the traditional 'Banks of the Clyde' and 'Brokenhearted I'll Wander', and of course the aforementioned opening number), the songs flow seamlessly from one to the next.

Young Dublin guitarist Graham Dunne has been working with Parsons for some time now, and in addition to his understated backing work he also contributes two fine instrumental tracks, with help from Cahill on nylon string guitar and mandolin. They fit in nicely to the overall atmosphere of the album, and a couple of jigs penned by Dunne himself mark him out as a gifted composer of new tunes in a traditional idiom.

Following on from her debut *Blackbirds And Thrushes*, and the aptly-titled *In My Prime*, *Heart's Desire* completes a hat-trick of excellence from one of our finest singers.

Sarah McQuaid 🍷

5/6/02

