

## Acoustica - THE OBAN SESSIONS (Organic Soup Records)



I was favourably impressed by this bright Newcastle duo's first CD *Welcome To...* (2005), which concentrated on studio recordings of ten original songs penned jointly by Andy and Cath Higgins themselves.

In contrast, *The Oban Sessions* is an attempt to present the duo's live sound and represent more accurately the balance of material featured in their live sets. This time, therefore, just four of the album's eleven tracks are original compositions: uniformly attractive, accessible and with a natural lyrical flow that carries the listener along.

Just occasionally I feel the accompanimental chordings are "over-strummy", but the melodies are invariably interesting and Cath's voice carries the argument with assurance.

The remaining seven tracks comprise cover versions, of a reasonably wide repertoire that spans Steve Earle, Neil Young, Dougie MacLean, Steve Knightley, Bob Dylan, Gallagher & Lyle, Lennon & McCartney and Elvis Presley... (the latter's an instrumental version of *Heartbreak Hotel* capped by Sean Keane's adaptation of *Cliffs Of Moher*, while Neil Young's *Don't Let It Bring You Down* is combined with what sounds like a Scottish strathspey). Not as inconsistent as it might sound, this selection works well here when replicating the context of a typical Acoustica club set - you wouldn't walk out of the gig disappointed!

The duo's renditions reflect their love of the material, and mostly fall into the "straightforward, confident, pleasing and highly competent" category though without necessarily having anything radical or new to say about the songs (I must emphasise that in my opinion this is a plus rather than a minus in an age where so many folk-club cover versions are just pale and uninvolved workthroughs by artists who perform songs because they feel they should rather than because they really respond to them).

The one inconsistency of *The Oban Sessions* is that, for all the duo's deliberate aim to stay close to their live sound, there's a modicum of multitracking and producer Tony Patterson is co-opted to play "additional instruments" here and

there - albeit fairly unobtrusively. And I must admit the track sequence doesn't entirely convince me. But on a purely musical basis, the album does its job admirably in showcasing Acoustica as a persuasive live act.

The CD is available from the website

[www.myspace.com/itsacoustica](http://www.myspace.com/itsacoustica)

[www.itsacoustica.com](http://www.itsacoustica.com)

or from Newcastle retail outlets JGWindows and Roots2music.