

Boyle, Tyrrall, Boyle - at The New Variety Club, Keighley; Sunday 28th June 2009



A uniquely mouth-watering combination of musical talents, and one not to be missed! Of course, the two Boyles - wondrous singer Maggie and equally wondrous guitarist Gary (no relation) - have already been teamed for a year or two in the intriguing trio Sketch (along with bass player Dave Bowie - who's now joined up with

Steve Tilston... hey, d'you feel a family tree coming on?!).



But the Maggie-Gary combination in Sketch has hitherto produced some spellbinding music that fluidly roved around the folk-jazz axis, so was too good an experiment to "take off the boyle" (sorry, couldn't resist!) or jettison completely. Now, reconstituting a trio complement with the addition of the mighty Gordon Tyrrall to the team, there's a

chance for an even more folky mix of talents, ideas and personalities, with the very best of all potential worlds - or so it seemed at this convivial gig, which I was surprised to learn formed this particular lineup's debut live public appearance.



It was evident that rather a lot of careful rehearsal and planning had already gone into the musical programme they were presenting, and the easy interaction and high standard of musicianship totally belied any sense of a tentative or nerve-wracked first-performance.

The set-list was well balanced and intelligently planned, to give a thoroughly professional contrast and good variety between successive items. I think it's fair to say that in general the material more or less alternated between Maggie-driven and Gordon-driven items (at least in terms of lead-voice or principal input), but this is a perfectly sensible gambit from which to start out, and satisfies followers of both camps (as it were) while not alienating either faction. Notable features throughout? Naturally, Maggie's superb singing - respectful of sean-nos and tradition, while refreshingly unafraid to utilise other expressive nuances to telling effect, especially when responding to and inspiring the other musicians.

Then there was the magical way in which the two guitarists interacted and traded ideas, motifs and melodic lines. And those perennially deeply satisfying embellishments and jewel-like solos that Gary worked (seemingly effortlessly) into the arrangements at strategic points, yet without ever any sense of contrivance or misplaced loyalty. And Gordon's flair and drive, no matter what role he was playing within the trio dynamic, knowing just when to hold back and refusing to dominate even when his voice or guitar was required to be placed forward in the mix (as it were).

The first set opened purposefully with a forthright, and typically adventurous, treatment of the traditional Jolly Ploughboy, before the two flautists embarked on the first of the evening's dazzling instrumental sets. Shortly after which, in direct contrast, we were treated to one of Gordon's beautiful Shakespeare sonnet settings (the second-set counterpart - sonnet 91 - was arguably even finer). The first set concluded with a brace of contemporary songs, complementing the preceding (predominantly traditional) items: Mike Silver's Not A Matter Of Pride (lovingly phrased by Maggie) and Michael Marra's enigmatic, distinctly quirky Constable Le Clock. After the interval, a pleasing Rocks Of Bawn was followed by Gordon's retelling of the Matterhorn tale, composed in the style of a traditional ballad, and after a further scintillating set of reels came a trio of second-set highlights: a matchless performance by Maggie of Erin The Green, a lovely fluted rendition of the air Lord Mayo (deftly paired off with a hornpipe) and the aforementioned Shakespeare-Tyrrall collaboration! Peter Case's Hidden Love provided the set's (official) finale, after which came riotous applause and (inevitably) an encore, this being the typically Tyrrallian Lennon-McCartney medley of A World Without Love and I've Just Seen A Face (the latter complete with deliberate fluff!!!). Sure, there were some rough edges, and some slightly awkward transitions, but these were for the most part only really noticeable (and then momentarily) by the cognoscenti, and the whole gig was a vastly more than credible debut for BTB (or whatever they decide to be called henceforth!).

Finally, just a few words re The Gin Jammers, whose brilliant 45-minute support set opened the evening. Pete & Hazel seem to take their basic cue from Gillian Welch & David Rawlings - right down to a comparable approach to their respective stage roles (Hazel mostly singing the lead) and guitar apportionment (Pete taking on the intricacies and embellishments of the lead part while Hazel provides the flatpicked rhythm part), not to mention enjoying a similar mix of repertoire (choice covers, including some Gillian W and Dylan, alongside approved old time classics, with some of their own material in there too). If the foregoing description makes the Gin Jammers sound derivative, then that would indeed be a harsh - and unfair - judgement. For they've got so much going for

them as performers in their own right, both being strong singers and skilled instrumentalists and possessing a fresh, easygoing presence, which all adds up to an exuberant, infectious and winning presentation. (And in any case, I gather it's relatively early days yet for them too.)

What mattered most on 28th June was that The Gin Jammers and BTB together made for a satisfying and inspirational evening's music-making: one that was clearly warmly appreciated by the capacity crowd.

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