

Debra Cowan - FOND DESIRE FAREWELL
(Falling Mountain Music FM. 1054)



It's been quite a while since Boston-based Debra's last record, the excellent *Dad's Dinner Pail*, which presented songs from the Helen Hartness Flanders Collection.

In the main, Debra's been trawling quite different sources for her new CD, *Fond Desire Farewell*, although these still clearly represent the personal choice and artistic response of a lady of extreme good taste!

Key contemporary songwriters figure large: for instance, the disc features compositions by Steve Tilston, Richard Thompson, Nic Jones and Bill Caddick (and not "the usual selections", either!). And such is the acuity of Debra's interpretive powers that she makes every bit as great a fist of all of these in their variety and contrasts as she's already proved her adeptness many times over with purely traditional material.

Her bluesy rendition of RT's underappreciated *Jealous Words* and her beautifully moulded take on Steve T's *The Night Owl Homeward Turns* both prove especially masterly.

But I gotta say it: on the entire disc Debra's in tremendous voice (I'm sure I've never heard her sing better), and the disc's highlight for me is her keen adaptation of *Cruel Was My Father* (another taken from the Hartness collection incidentally, and employing the tune used by Sarah Makem for *In The Month Of January*), on which the expressive capabilities of her voice attain fullest exposure.

Elsewhere - and I know I've remarked the clarity, purity and focus of Debra's voice to similar qualities in that of Joan Baez - here more than ever there are times when I swear I hear Maddy Prior.

Although there's a greater use of additional instrumentation (and more multitracking too) than on Debra's earlier records, the overall feel is still refreshingly uncluttered. Much of the set is determined by a gentle but commanding, at times almost-folk-rock signature that's bound to be directly attributable to the guiding hand and all-round musicianly expertise of producer Dave Mattacks (who plays percussion and several other instruments on the

sessions). This time round, Debra's principal guitar (and mando) accompanist is the superb Duke Levine (best known perhaps as erstwhile sideman to Mary Chapin Carpenter), whereas Debra continues to keep her own not inconsiderable guitar skills hidden under the proverbial bushel, only bringing her guitar out of its case for three of the album's dozen tracks.

The contributions of Joyce Anderson (fiddle) and Marty Ballou (upright bass) are also not to be underestimated, notably on the jaunty-but-intense Chris Moore number Wall Of Stone and the glorious, lilting Stanley Brothers cover (The Darkest Hour Is Just Before The Dawn) that brings the disc to its (official) close (but hey, do leave the engine running for a spirited acappella alternate-take of The Rainbow, one of a handful of songs which bring in Mike Barry for backing-vocal duties). And guest clarinet and tuba players bring a sardonic Berliner-klezmer vibe to Ray Davies' Alcohol.

By the way, the album is a Fond Desire Farewell in the most poignant sense, in that it's a memorial to Debra's brother Michael, who died in 2007. But in order to realise your own fond desire, you need just to purchase a copy of this wholly treasurable disc, and then you needn't ever bid Debra farewell!

(Note too that Debra will be back in the UK again during July and August... -

see www.debracowan.com

<http://www.myspace.com/debracowan>