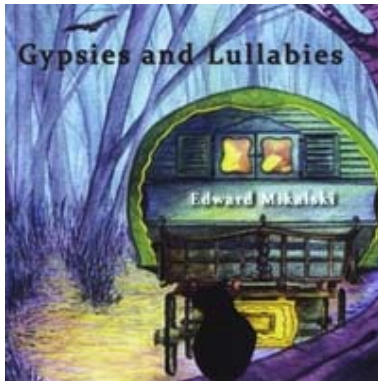


Edward Mikalski - GYPSIES AND LULLABIES (Own Label GR. 001)



Singer-songwriter Edward Bernthal Mikalski, best known to everyone as Teddy, was born in Kent but now lives in Denmark; like all true creative souls, he always has a story to tell.

Having charmed all and sundry with his recent solo set at Acoustic Rotherham 3, he's now unleashed this CD on the unsuspecting world.

Teddy's led a difficult but rewarding life, and the (as far as I can tell) suitably representative collection of his songs chosen for this CD portrays the roller coaster of emotions and events that have formed his character.

At its best, Teddy's writing brings these to life with an immediacy and directness of emotional impact that strikes and nurtures a ready rapport with the listener. Teddy's a true eccentric in the best of traditions, and his music - like his personality - is seriously endearing: a quality which can (perhaps perversely?) also be its principal attraction, evoking generous quantities of sympathy, empathy and compassion (albeit depending on your mood and predilections I suspect).

Nearly all of the songs are heard to describe a particular individual episode from Teddy's life, from childhood dreams to adolescent fantasies to adult realisations; each one makes its point with simple but memorable imagery. And Teddy's unshakable belief in his own creativity is clearly informed by his discovery, early in life, that "anything could be put right with a song". This credo might be seen as impractically naïve, although it generates its own genially independent, playfully-DIY vibe as a bonus.

Also in this context, for much of the time I'm reminded of Donovan (one of Teddy's key inspirations, it turns out), in his "flower" period, as characterised by a charming and often absorbing quality of observation that allies a closeness to nature with a gentle tolerance and understanding of the world, its people and its creatures (though not always quite managing to escape the charge of tweeness that dogged his mentor).

Teddy's creations range from the beautiful, peaceful and contemplative (Lady, Moon Song and Summer Farewell) to the jaunty, childishly euphoric Pushbike Song (memorably covered by our very own Mashers, who sure know a good song when they hear it!) and the uplifting Campari Girl, via the social-conscience commentary of

Butterflies And Swallows, the folky-philosophical Dunes Of Time and the affectionate lullaby Child Of Spring. There are also three contrasting character-sketches: Tanith (an alluring portrait of a gypsy, incidentally the first song Teddy wrote), Quentin (ie. Quentin Crisp, and incorporating samples of his speech) and Hang-Glide Bill (who mildly overstays his welcome I find).

But I find I really can't help liking nearly all of Teddy's songs a lot, for they get into the blood and stay in the consciousness. OK, so Teddy's singing style could be considered somewhat idiosyncratic (even at times unnervingly so), but I find it's easy to warm to (once you plug into his internal rhythms and get used to his tendency to slur and slide phrases along a melodic line).

Which brings me to the other important aspect of this CD which not everyone will readily embrace: its production. For while it does still largely succeed in communicating the essence of Teddy the man, there are moments when other distractions get in the way of my appreciation of Teddy's personal vision of life and its glories and tribulations.

Shave The Monkey's Bryan Causton, whom Teddy has engaged to realise his vision, has performed his task with sympathy and integrity, contributing some nice mandolin embellishments and understated keyboard work, also bringing in Carolyn Sheppard for some lovely vocal harmonies.

Just occasionally, however, some of the extra production touches jar on the ear (eg the sound samples can be either genuinely atmospheric or obtrusive and more than slightly annoying).

Those small reservations apart, however, I'm sure you'll find much enchantment in this disc, for it proves really hard not to fall under Teddy's spell.

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