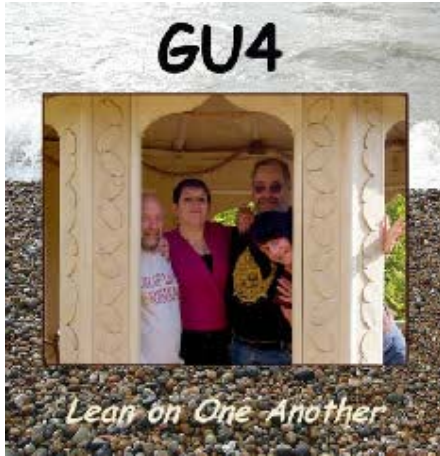


## GU4 - LEAN ON ONE ANOTHER (Own Label GUF. 103)



GU4 (pronounced "guffaw") are - no, not a comedy group, but a quartet of excellent singers from the Leicestershire folk scene, notably the Grand Union Folk Club at Barrow on Soar.

Comprising Pete Burnham, Miggy Campbell, Karen Harris and Bill Wilkes, GU4 got together in 2006 through friendship and a shared passion for traditional-style folk music and acappella harmony singing.

Although, admirably, they regard singing as essentially a "live" activity, the production of a CD has proved both inevitable and welcome, and the material thereon has been extremely well chosen to reflect the singers' tastes, abilities and personalities - a combination which is less often observed on a recording than you might expect or like! GU4's passionate, completely involved and involving style of performance lends itself well to genuinely intelligent, adventurous and well-thought-through harmonic progressions, and the foursome's unerring sense of internal balance invariably enables individual lines and strands to be followed and savoured without losing (aural) sight of the melody: a keenly judged and sympathetic recording clearly helps in this regard.

Four voices need not overwhelm the listener by producing a shattering wall of sound and, although there's a touch of the Swan Arcade in GU4, that observation applies more to their direct passion than any sheer volume of their performance.

The thoughtful essence of GU4's approach is well conveyed, with contrasts in dynamics and texture or register being well focussed and blended and the character of each individual voice well highlighted and utilised to best effect within the framework and context of the songs.

Unlike surprisingly many other acappella ensembles, GU4 really are blessed with four very distinctive singers with a full and impressive total range of registers, and a very impressive command of different kinds of song. In particular, I'd single out Karen's sublimely pure, solid tone and supremely confident sense of direction (exemplified in her classic treatment of *Bushes And Briars*), and Bill's massive, rich and idiomatic bass (leading off a cracking *Roll Down To Rio*) - but

Pete and Miggy are no less accomplished, whether essaying lyrical or pensive songs like Richard Grainger's Evergreen and Miggy's own brilliant childhood memoir-cum-inspirational philosophical treatise Sussex, or tripping deceptively lightly through high-speed fun ditties like Benny Graham's Have A Game For The Crack. GU4 can be just as persuasive on emotionally charged songs like Peter Bellamy's Transports classic The Leaves In The Woodland as on a full-pelt-ahead hunting song (of which there are two fine examples here).

Only the opening White Cockade might be thought a touch deliberate. Completing the set are two gleefully roguish songs from the pen of the group's friend George Thomas, contrasting with beautiful renditions of Life Of A Man and Rani Arbo's Tennyson setting Crossing The Bar; the disc closes, most fittingly, with the group's farewell song Say No Goodbyes, another from Miggy's keen pen.

Only very occasionally, on one or two (certainly not all) of the more full-bodied selections, there's a very minor loss of total unbridled presence, but that's a price you pay on a recorded artefact and for the most part the recording (masterminded by Roger Wilson) has definitely triumphed in communicating the very special nature (and oomph) of the ensemble's individual and combined voices and their musicality and 150% commitment.

Magnificent voices, inspirational singing, excellent and canny choice of material. This is everything that acappella should be. Absolutely superb.

(Contact: 0116- 291 5720

email [peter.burnham@gmail.com](mailto:peter.burnham@gmail.com).

<http://gu4.org.uk>

<http://www.myspace.com/gu4guffaw>