

Heather Woodhead - BIRDS (No label, no catalogue number)

Heather's a Leeds-based singer who made quite an impact when she appeared at *Acoustic Rotherham 2* back in January 09.

She has a pleasing and individual style of presentation, accompanying herself on guitar on two-thirds of the dozen songs on this, her debut CD; on the remaining four she takes the brave decision to perform acappella.

Heather's been performing these songs (and many more) live around Yorkshire's folk clubs for a few years now, and has enthralled audiences into silent, rapt attention with her distinctive, soft-toned (and actually quite beautiful) singing voice and her considered interpretations of songs to which she clearly responds.

Heather's careful in her choice of material, for she's aware that her particular singing style and timbre (clear, pure, high-register, predominantly head-voice) doesn't necessarily suit every kind of song (she does a particularly nice job on Karine Polwart covers, but there aren't any on this disc!).

To some listeners, Heather's delivery may sometimes on first acquaintance appear a touch detached - removed from, or drained of, the relevant emotion when a more dramatic approach might be called for, but the good news is that there aren't any disasters here, and she "gets away with it" on darker pieces such as *The Three Ravens* (an ethereal reading, with a suitably "antique" atmosphere conjured by Tim Knight's piano accompaniment) and *Cuchullan's Lament*, while *The Unquiet Grave* is one of three tracks that benefit further from Alison Battye's accomplished and cultured flute accompaniment.

The acappella tracks, always a challenge for a singer to record, are better than respectable, although Heather would be the first to admit she betrays a touch of nervousness at times; of these, *The Bonny Bonny Boy* is probably the best, although her version of *Black Is The Colour* is refreshingly different from the one we usually hear.

As for the remainder of the menu, Heather entices us almost innocently on *Come My Little Roving Sailor* and *The Bird Song*, but *I Know Where I'm Going* and *Where My Caravan Has Rested* (though idiomatically sung) will probably be too redolent of the parlour-room for some tastes.

All in all, Heather has produced a modest, attractive, well-thought-out and persuasive calling-card.

www.myspace.com/heatherwoodheadmusic.

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