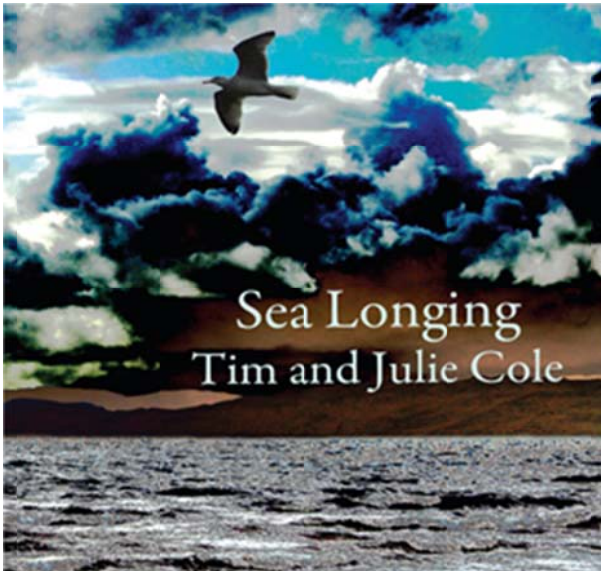


Tim & Julie Cole – Sea Longing (Own label, no catalogue number)



This accomplished husband-and-wife pairing has been working as a duo on the folk scene around Sheffield for quite a number of years, but this was the first time I'd come across their work on record.

Back in 2007, they collaborated with Keith Jafrate and Martin Archer in the maverick-/acid-folk outfit Army Of Briars, but here on *Sea Longing*, which (unbelievably) appears to be their first duo CD (I've just learnt that they put out a cassette around the mid-80s), they revert to the simplest of expressive modes and dazzle more quietly, not with radical experimentation but with clear-sighted interpretation and fine musicianship.

If anything, their performing style when in this mode is a touch understated; this is no doubt due to the specific musical properties of the individual elements contained within that style. Julie takes the singing role, and she's blessed with a clear, keening soprano voice that in its pure timbre and sense of controlled poise especially recalls that of Jacqui McShee, ringing out like the proverbial bell through the dankest fog.

Not that there's any fog to penetrate on this record, for Tim's sophisticated instrumental accompaniments are a model of empathy and intimate, gentle intricacy, with a keen aptitude for unobtrusive melodic embellishment. The recorded balance between the performers is near-ideal, even if perhaps this sometimes accentuates the "sonic distance" between the two parts, in terms of timbre separation rather than any lack of togetherness (this is more an observation of the duo's modus-operandi than any negative criticism of their artistry).

For the most part, Tim's delicate but confident guitar is the sole accompaniment, but he also supplies a cello arrangement for *Black Is The Colour* that's both fulsome and darkly magical in effect, and that instrument's mellow, brooding timbre adds interest as well as counterpoint to *Bonny At Morn* and the Mick Wilson composition *Sunrise*, which together form a satisfying close to the disc. Several of the CD's 13 tracks (including *Sunrise*, *The Cuckoo*, *Sovay Sovay* and an instrumental jig-medley) also feature the talents of guest musicians – Tim and Julie's daughter Helen on flute and their son Julian on violin.



The disc derives its title from a song that's credited as traditional but which I don't recall ever hearing previously (it transpires that it's a Hebridean song, but in Tim and Julie's rendition it has quite an uncanny early-*ISB* aura), while another disc standout for me is Julie's cool and well-judged acappella rendition of *My Lagan Love*. Good though these (and the other traditional

items) may be, I do feel that Tim and Julie have (I'm sure not entirely intentionally) played a little safe here, perhaps not realising quite how much water has flown under the bridge in the folk scene since they started out (for arguably too great a proportion of the tracklist consists of pretty well-known traditional songs, very efficiently managed but in the final analysis probably not adding much new to today's more exhaustive discography in terms of interpretive distinction); they will, for their next CD I'm sure, be able to return their skills to the cutting edge of folk interpretation (as exemplified in their gorgeous *Black Is The Colour*), not least by the selection of more unusual repertoire and including original writing. Even so, *Sea Longing* is still a refreshing, and simply conceived, album; boasting some stunning cover artwork and photography (by Julie herself) that scores extra points for really capturing the feel of the title song, it's a package that will give significant (if unassuming) pleasure to the discerning listener.

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