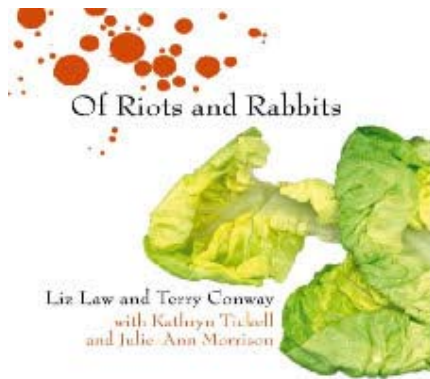


Liz Law & Terry Conway - OF RIOTS AND RABBITS (Stonehouse Music)



Northumberland-based Liz and Terry made their lovely CD Premier all of eight years ago, and it swiftly became one of the most treasured items on my shelf.

In the liner note to its too-long-awaited follow up, Liz now tells us that she and Terry had "only planned to make one CD"! But since Premier's main stated purpose was to protect Terry's own songs, and those few so far available on record only represent the very tip of the proverbial iceberg, it should have been only fair to Terry's muse that a second CD would be made (eventually!).

So here it is, although it presents a slightly altered emphasis in that this time round the selection of material is more representative of the totality of Terry's singing repertoire, with Terry's own thoughtful compositions (which themselves encompass a wide range of moods, emotions and approaches) comprising just eight out of the disc's 14 tracks.

These, however, turn out to be extremely well complemented by Terry's eminently persuasive renditions of traditional ballads. He tackles five of these here, of which two are Border ballads, supplementing excellent versions of *The Battle Of Alma* and *The Green Linnet*; the latter (like *The Death Of Parcy Reed*) Terry performs unaccompanied - and most compellingly too. Having said that, Terry's epic rendition of the rarely-heard *Hobie Noble* (Child 189) proves a disc highlight, even considering the top quality of his own songs.

Finally, for those compulsively totting up the track listing, the remaining selection is an affectionate take on *George Chatt's Bonny Tyneside*, which Terry originally learnt from his mother. Terry's great skill in interpreting traditional song notwithstanding, his own songs still provide the principal focus of this new disc, with examples representing all facets of his compositional expertise, from the gloriously evocative *The Curlew On The Moor* (which like *Fareweel Regality* sets present-day Northumberland alongside its sometimes violent history) to the charming *Saga Of Timothy Rabbit* and *Midsummer Blue* (a "fluff of a song" indeed!).

One of the undisputed standout tracks is a powerful and stirring account of *The Hexham Riot of 1761* which Terry was specially commissioned to write for a day

of related commemorative events (though it ended up being jointly penned with Liz!). This latter opus bears all the hallmarks of Terry's distinctive songwriting style: generous spirit, humanity, a warm and passionate sentiment married to a strong, rousing and quirkily contoured melody, a forthright and confident riff and a wonderfully catchy chorus (I hasten to add: the latter may be of A-level standard, but not a word is ever superfluous or ill-judged!...).

Terry also revisits two songs from the days of vinyl (as it were): I Do Not Want To Lose You (Harry Wharton, My Old Chum), last found on an old Pete Coe LP, and the magnificent anti-war, anti-nationalistic anthem The Walls Of Troy, which had been memorably covered by The House Band and is now restored to its original unexpurgated form.

The oddball (non-riot, non-rabbit) contingent in Terry's writing is represented by the gleefully over-the-top C&W number Cowboy Song (the parodic impact of which is further enhanced by the wayward wailing of album producer Dave Maughan's steel geetar!).

Which brings me to the quality of the recording: it's absolutely superb, unerringly capturing the unique nuances of Terry's singing - which (like some of the words) can sometimes get a little lost in live performance beneath Liz's gloriously sturdy dulcimer playing.

Also, Terry's guitar accompaniment, though immensely understated, is heard as an integral part of the texture too, while the balance with the very fine contributions of guest musicians Julie-Ann Morrison (harp) and Kathryn Tickell (Northumbrian pipes, fiddle) is ideal too, capturing just enough of their adept and thoroughly idiomatic musicianship. Even after 71 minutes,

I find I still can't get enough of Liz and Terry and their unmistakable musical voices. Now who was it waggishly suggested subtitling this disc Blood On The Lettuce-leaves...?

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