4¾D A DAY – Mike Weston (Own Label, no catalogue number)

I reviewed Mike's previous CD (Of Donkeys And Forgotten Heroes) in Folk Roundabout Issue 157, and found it a promising disc that showcased Mike's talents as a songmaker in the approved tradition (taking existing tunes as the musical settings for his local-historical narratives and his wry and justifiably angry observations of the ills of society).

I had some reservations, chiefly concerning Mike's at times rushed delivery of his own lyrics; and I'm heartened to find that he's addressed this issue by reworking his Ballad Of Isaac Holden for the new disc. This song certainly feels much more credible, with its now more measured delivery enabling the words and melody to work together at the service of the tale.

Mike appears to have taken this advice to heart on the creation of the majority of the remaining six originals on this new disc; his wartime epic Agent Zigzag and the catchy, satirical worthy-diatribe Dracula The Banker (both sung acappella) benefit from being taken at a plausible (and more comfortable) pace, as does the harrowing Mind Over Matter (which movingly portrays the mistreatment of English/Irish prisoners in POW camps). However, Mike's inborn enthusiasm for taking the songs a touch too breathlessly fast and presenting tumbling torrents of words in not-always-completely-scanning lines, surfaces again on Pongs Of Praise – a true story recounting his unfortunate holiday experience last year (I'll not spoil it for you!). Mike's adaptation of Tommy Armstrong's forgotten 1913 poem, which forms the disc's title track, also suffers, albeit mildly, from this affliction – or perhaps it just needs more "singing-in".

Having now discussed the proportion of the disc which contains Mike's own songs (seven out of the 14 tracks), I must give some consideration to the seven cover versions that remain, scattered among Mike's originals; and I'm sorry to say that for the most part these don't quite seem to measure up. A gentle treatment of John Conolly's Angels Of Lincoln fares best, and Christmas At Sea and Leon Rosselson's fable of Tim McGuire perhaps come off quite well, with a reasonable enough stab at Shoals Of Herring along the way, but Mike O'Connor's stunning Carrying Nelson Home needs much more gravitas than Mike W and his strumsome 12-string are able to give it here, and his accounts of Peggy Gordon and Delaney's Donkey are somewhat in the nature of routine floor-spot performances.

In short, the covers feel suspiciously like makeweights or padding in the context of the disc as a whole.

Mike still has plenty to offer though, as his own songs prove time and again, and the CD's worth buying for those alone.

Available from mandsweston@btinternet.com for only a fiver.

http://www.myspace.com/mikeweston2