

## ROBIN & BINA WILLIAMSON - Birdseye Village Hall,

9th August 2008



Any gig by Robin Williamson is bound to be a very special event, one of distinctive and individual character, and this welcoming and intimate village-hall concert proved no exception (I even managed to win the delicious home-made cake in the raffle, but that's another story!).

The last time I'd seen Robin live, two or three years ago, he was resplendent in his customary one-man showman role as genial gentleman-bard, master harper, singer, guitarist and storyteller, whereas on this August occasion he was performing a joint gig with his talented wife Bina.

Although the reality was that Robin's still unavoidably formed the dominant musical presence, as you might logically expect, the degree of togetherness between the couple in performance was impressive, and both heartwarming and infectious.

Bina's own performance skills have really developed apace over the past few years, and she now plays a variety of instruments (including autoharp, bowed psaltery and sundry percussion) as well as providing distinctive vocal support. Robin, of course, proved himself jack-of-all-trades as ever, pleasingly virtuoso on harp and more than adept on guitar, mandolin, whistle and harmonica, while also beating time on a drum placed strategically by his side. Not to mention his truly involving vocal stylings, ranging from deeper avuncular tones to whispered confidentialities to raucous humorous banter and character studies which aided the telling of the tall story which formed a centrepiece of his first set.

The remainder of the programme was of a purely musical nature, and (typically) wildly eclectic in the true Williamson manner - although perhaps the biggest surprise was that it included no Incredible String Band material and (if memory serves correctly) only two of Robin's own compositions (Song Of Life, celebrating the longevity of his marriage, and Listening, which I believe will be the title track of his forthcoming CD). But in truth the whole of Robin's and Bina's performance was enchanting and companionable, like an evening's informal at-home music-making spent in warm and convivial company.

Much of the material had that good old traditional old-time feel: there were loving renditions of a couple of Carter Family standards and a medicine-show piece, for instance. The exciting and refreshingly unpredictable menu was completed by a Blind Joe Taggart cover, an intriguing Song Of The Whale (intoned by Bina to shruti-box and whistle accompaniment), a song in Punjabi, a version of the traditional Acre Of Land, a lively setting of Psalm 24 and a couple of sets of tunes sparkingly and proficiently played. Robin and Bina kept the capacity audience both involved and captivated throughout the many changes of mood and instrumentation - which in itself is no mean achievement in this day and age. Somehow everyone felt so invigorated by the concert that nobody seemed to mind stepping out into the dreadful weather on offer outside the hall afterwards!

The support spot, by the way, was provided by "local lad" (Huddersfield - and proud of it!) singer-songwriter Roger Davies, who shares with his near-namesake (Ray, I mean) a rare ability to affectionately and unassumingly naturally chronicle the delights and foibles of modern life (and his local patch), with an always totally accessible melodic bent and a refreshingly economic turn of phrase. Roger proves seemingly effortlessly that the old-fashioned values of well-crafted songwriting are far from dead, and that the provincial can indeed be raised to the level of fine art. And (self-deprecating title of his second CD notwithstanding!), Roger's a thoroughly nice guy too. Catch him while you can.

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