

Rosie Doonan - POT OF GOLD (Silvertop Records SRCD. 03)



Not all that long after winning 2006's BBC Young Folk Award, local lass Rosie gave us an astoundingly good debut album (*Moving On*) on which she showed a mature grasp of emotion-based songwriting that matched the accomplishment of her singing, together with a real gift for intelligent and accessible musical setting that doesn't patronise the listener. That debut would always be considered a hard act to follow, and yet Rosie has triumphed without a doubt with *Pot Of Gold*, a further exceptional collection of her own seriously well-crafted songs. She also includes towards the end of this new disc an impressive, well-judged and stirringly ornate (wide-screen Celtic) version of *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*, which both creatively moves on from and respects its traditional folk origins.

Rosie's own songwriting still retains its distinctive quality of acute self-realisation and keen reflection, and the eleven new songs on *Pot Of Gold* make us think about the deeper implications of experiences and circumstances with which we're all very familiar. Inevitably, heartbreak and disappointment in love figure large here, with the yearning entreaties of *Lay Your Love* and the unspoken intimacies of *Darker Side Of You* particularly strong (if musically very different) expressions of this state. The delicate café-waltz that steers our journey *Into The Fire* provides a subliminal warning, while the limpid string setting of *Lady Blue* provides a cushion of reassurance.

Then there's the lusciously beautiful, yet vulnerable piano-backed ballad *Winter Song*, another of the disc's many brilliant demonstrations of just how superb, and genuinely versatile, a singer Rosie is. For whether she's evoking deep ache, thoughtful introspection or carefree joy she always seems to get the level and tone of expression absolutely right - and her vocal control (through a true knowledge of her own voice) is second to none. Three songs prominently feature the ukulele: the plaintive *Nobody Better*, the nonchalant tripping uptempo come-on of *Pot Of Gold*, and the hidden bonus track, the curious crooning 30s-pastiche *Victor*. While in direct contrast to the less lavish of the acoustic-based settings on the songs I've already highlighted above, there's a more overtly "produced", almost sunshine-pop treatment in evidence on *Fall For Me*, with its honking sax and driving rhythm, which opens proceedings in confident and stylish mode, and the breezy summery freedom-nostalgia of *Pop Song*.

Which brings me to remark on the uniformly high calibre of Rosie's supporting "band" (the core being Gary Stewart, Miklos Woodwood, Katriona Gilmore and Sarah Smout, with appearances on isolated tracks by, among others, Tom McConville, Hannah James, Sam Sweeney, Chris Hanks, Ben Murray, Tony Swain, Tony Bacon and Rosie's dad Michael. Additionally, Andy Bell's production is masterly, exhibiting an instinctive feel for subtle layering that also enables individual instrumental timbres to reach out of the texture and grab the ear at moments that truly complement what's going on in the lyric at that point. There are times (like on *Say Goodbye*) when the string-heavy backdrop evokes a lusher and richer take on the Robert Kirby productions for Nick Drake; but, rather than just resting content to provide an all-purpose wash as backing, Andy clearly understands and responds to what Rosie herself is singing - and how she's singing it - at these key moments.

So, if you thought *Moving On* was a quite marvellous debut, then prepare to be dazzled all over again with this *Pot Of Gold*, which thankfully is closer at hand and easier to reach than the end of that rainbow!

www.rosiedoonan.com and www.myspace.com/rosiedoonan

David Kidman