

Sam Carter - KEEPSAKES (Captain CAP. 002)



Rutland-born and now east-London-based, Sam is a tremendously assured young singer-guitarist-songwriter who rather against the odds quite knocked me out when I saw him perform at last year's Derby TMA Festival, at which point he'd just released a taster five-track EP *Here In The Ground* which revealed a more-than-just-promising emerging talent.

This is emphatically not just another "kid with a guitar" coming out of nowhere to fool the world into thinking he's the Next Big Thing - Sam's startling maturity is there for all to see, but he wears it lightly and assumedly.

His follow up record, *Keepsakes*, picks up exactly where the EP left off, in fact, with Sam's powerful, biting vocal perfectly matched by his simply outstanding guitar playing, displayed to excellent advantage - and in a supremely cleanly focused recording - on nine self-penned original songs framing an isolated trad-arr cover. The latter (*Oh Dear, Rue The Day*), might in such company be easily treated (and summarily dismissed) as a makeweight, but it's a bitter and intense reading with a natural folk-revivalist feel that's hopefully not the last we'll hear of Sam's evident feel for traditional material (there's some great fiddle playing from Sam Sweeney on this track too).

Back to the original songs, and these maintain a high standard indeed. The opening salvo *Yellow Sign* dazzles with the intricacies of Sam's fingerpicking complemented by his distinctly Simpsonsque vocal - little surprise, then, that we learn that Sam was taught guitar by Martin Simpson, but he's fast developing his own individual style as the rest of the CD shows.

Sam's songs reflect tellingly and quite conversationally, and by the way with considerable maturity of outlook, on everyday matters of life and love and work. He seems to draw on the acclaimed English folk troubadours for inspiration both musical and lyrical, but of that mix he proves more than able to concoct his own special brew.

While his affectionate and yet at times knowingly dry wit when commenting on English foibles may recall Chris Wood, Robb Johnson or even Billy Bragg, his (slightly nasal but not offensively so) singing voice strongly reminded me variously of early Roy Harper, Robert Wyatt (Station Road, Taxi), Chris Wood (Hired Hands, Pheasant), or Alasdair Roberts (Dew).

The fresh acoustic musical settings, while revolving around Sam's exceptional picking, also display ingenuity with use of a string section (Captain), Pentangular-inspired jazzy percussion (Pheasant), a more conventional rhythm section (Fight, Taxi) and occasional piano and cello (notably on the masterful, melancholy closer Spill Those Secrets).

Finally, a mention for the album artwork, which neatly reflects the treasurable nature of the audio artefacts within: a perfectly formed and realised gem of a record.

<http://www.myspace.com/samjohncarter>