

**Steve Hicks & Lynn Goulbourn - HICKS AND GOULBOURN (Own Label, no catalogue number)**



Now I don't have an awful lot of information on this Leicestershire-based duo, but they certainly made a big impact on the crowd at the latest Acoustic Rotherham showcase with an almost indecently wide range of material played and sung with an almost indecent amount of professional presentation and accomplishment and first-class musicianship - and all with just two voices and two guitars!

There's just a touch more than that complement on offer on their CD, with two tracks creatively utilising Lynn's multitracked vocals, one which entails Steve adding an extra guitar part (*It Ain't Necessarily So*), and two or three friendly guests putting in odd appearances (Neil on fretless bass and Jae on harmony vocals for a couple of tracks apiece), but for the rest of the time it's all pretty much as you'd hear Lynn and Steve in the live club setting, treating us to a rather whistle-stop tour of their repertoire as honed in that very environment since the duo's inception a mere couple of years ago.

They exhibit a fantastic degree of expertise across a wide musical field, which impresses from the outset almost without appearing to try too hard (not an easy feat!), yet sometimes (if I must be brutally honest) almost too readily (nay, comfortably) meeting any stylistic challenge you might care to throw at them.

Want a suitably gutsy, driven traditional adaptation? - well, there's *A Sailor's Life*, cast adrift on a rippling sea. Want a nifty fingerstyle guitar showpiece? - well take *Stairway To Mozart*, which blesses guess what ostensibly disparate marriage (good old Zepp in K331 Turkish-rondo mode), or, in more leisurely mode, Handel's celebrated *Arrival Of The Queen Of Sheba*. Want some enterprising second-chance takes on material from the pop charts of earlier eras? - well pick and choose from the Eurythmics' *Here Comes The Rain Again* to the Zombies' *She's Not There*. Add to this already capricious mix a couple of well-poised show-tunes (*Moon River*, *Till There Was You*), a pinch of classic delta (Willie Brown's *Mississippi Blues*), a soupcon of Americana (John Prine's *Angel From Montgomery*) and a satisfyingly accurate flit through Pentangle's *Light Flight*. Finally, a small complement of lesser-known items provide more than enough interest and balance: Carolyn Hillyer's powerful, vocally-rich *Wrapping The Bark* and the deliciously DADGAD Bill Mize instrumental *Spring Fever* (has Steve really got seven fingers? - it almost sounds like it!) are arguably worth the price of admission on their own, while the airy jig-rhythms of *Home By Barna* form an ideal introduction to Steve and Lynn's nigh-impeccable artistry.

Every listener will find something to treasure within the range of styles of performance on offer on this CD, and even if at times there's an overall sneaking suspicion that the duo really are trying to be all things to all men they certainly proudly maintain the courage of their convictions.

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