

The Poozies - YELLOW LIKE SUNSHINE (Greentrax CDTRAX. 342)

This fabulous female group returns after two years of almost complete silence with a slightly revised lineup and a whole set of sparkling new material that both retains the famous Poozies blend (their signature instrumental complement of two harps, accordion, fiddle and guitar) and extends and diversifies their already admirably eclectic repertoire.

It's the band's first recording since the departure of founder member Karen Tweed in 2007, her place having been taken by accordionist Mairearad Green - whose immediate strong empathy with the other ladies of the band (Sally Barker, Patsy Seddon, Mary Macmaster and Eilidh Shaw) is miraculous.

Yellow Like Sunshine, befitting its bright, summery package, is a happy album (albeit not without its more reflective moments), replete with joyous and smilingly precise playing. The disc starts with an unusual stroke (a bit of a coup-de-grâce), an insistent bluesy riff that ushers in a Gaelic waulking song, set to an eerie electroharp booming, this neatly segueing into a gently driven strathspey John Stephen Of Chance Inn.

A feisty acappella take on Laura Veirs' Black Eyed Susan forms a complete contrast and points up the ladies' trademark versatility, Mary's cool lead ideally counter pointed by gospel-type embellishments and gorgeous harmonies from the rest of the group: it's keenly arranged, but sounds spontaneous.

The ensuing tune-set pairs a march and a jig then whips it all up into a Galician-style frenzy with Roddy MacDonald's El Paco Grande. The next two songs are both from Sally's pen, but highly contrasted: the poignant Canada (inspiringly combined with the traditional air Oh Mo Dhùthaich) and the romantic ballad Two Hearts.

Fine though these are, my favourites among the songs have to be the final two: a lovely rendition of An Páistín Fionn from Patsy and a supremely chilling take on the McCusker/Tams anti-war collaboration Will I See Thee More? from Mary (with just a spare pipe drone and spectral harmonies for backing). Just as in the group's stage set, instrumental sets alternate with songs, with the scoring, focal emphasis and part-trading constantly shifting and changing to maintain interest.

The extended medley at track 8, which includes a tune by Karen Tweed, is a particular success, and Eilidh's superlative fiddling (and composing) skills are brought to the fore on the rousing second tune of the Planxty Colonel set. But the album as a whole gives an especially satisfying sequence for listening pleasure, sounds fresh and lively and is both well-balanced and excellently recorded: what a shame that the otherwise attractive package contains no track notes or lyrics (and there are none on the band's website either).

<http://www.poozies.co.uk/>
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