

Celtic Angel



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Celtic Angel CD released 2014 Performed produced and arranged by Leela Barbara Fraser and Celtic Angel Music 16 Songs 57 Minutes 45 seconds. Rating *****90%

Song List:

1 The Wild Mountain Thyme	2 Danny Boy
3 An Eriskay Love Lilt	4 Mairi's Wedding
5 Scotland the Brave	6 Skye Boat Song
7 The Road to the Isles	8 The Dark Island
9 A Cradle Song	10 Amazing Grace
11 Baby Eyes	12 Will Ye No Come Back Again
13 A Scottish Soldier	14 The Isle of Innisfree
15 Loch Lomond	16 Driftwood

Review:

On a global scale Canada is too frequently overlooked as a source of Celtic traditions and culture. South Eastern Canada in particular was a major area for the settlement of the Irish and Scottish diasporas as long ago as the seventeenth century. The Celtic culture those migrants brought with them tended to be well preserved, with Cape Breton Island and Nova Scotia in particular working in much the same way that the Appalachians worked as a preserving area for British and Scottish balladry.

Leela Barbara Fraser, a native of Nova Scotia, was born into that tradition, having Irish and Scottish ancestry four generations back. She grew up in a living tradition with the encouragement of her parents and siblings. In her album *Celtic Angel* she tastefully perpetuates what she knows. Of the sixteen tracks ten are old favourites from the world of traditional folk, while another 'A Scottish Soldier' is often wrongly considered to be old, apparently being about a mercenary in Europe somewhere around 1750. In reality the song appeared in 1961 and reflects the viewpoint of an occupation soldier in post WW2 Europe. 'The Isle Of Innisfree' is not the W.B. Yeats poem, but a composition by Richard Farrelly. Yeats did write 'A Cradle Song' which is included here and Fraser composed the tune for George B. Shaw's poem 'Baby Eyes.' Other traditional works are rearranged or have either tunes or lyrics added, but only the fine version of 'The Dark Island' is a totally modern song. Like 'A Scottish Soldier' it fits in well with the older songs. The few lesser known works such as 'Driftwood' 'Baby Eyes.' 'A Cradle Song' and

‘Mairi’s Wedding’ provide welcome contrasts; the best traditional albums give surprises and bring to the fore lesser known works that deserve appreciation. A few more like this would have been good, especially if they were to come from Canadian developments in Celtic music. Perhaps that could be the basis for a future album?

Fraser’s soprano does not overwhelm the songs or the instrumental background. Given that the instruments include bagpipes, stings, a piano, the violin, a tin whistle, the Celtic harp and a bodhran, this is an achievement. Unlike so many Celtic recordings, the instruments here do not drown out the singer and overwhelm the song. Everything is balanced well, being finely attuned and Leela Barbara’s voice conveys warmth and sincerity without being overly emotional, dramatic or loud.

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