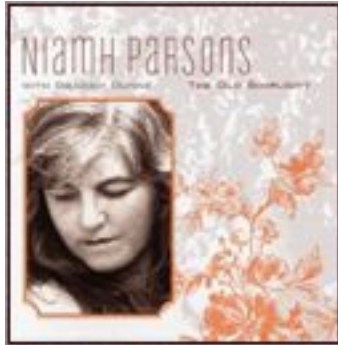


NIAMH PARSONS WITH GRAHAM DUNNE



The Old Simplicity

Green Linnet Records GLCD1232, 13 tracks

Let me run a metaphoric game by you. If you had to describe an album and a singer as a food or drink, could you pick a menu to match any given artist? Well for me Niamh Parsons would be a full blooded Spanish Rioja, a deep rich wine, full of character, with a hint of iron behind a complex blend of experience and flavours.

Full grown adult material is always to be expected on a Niamh Parson's album. She's a singer who doesn't need to compromise her integrity by selecting tracks that might get a bit of airtime, or that will appeal to one demographic or another. Her music like a good Rioja is for connoisseurs who know the singing tradition intimately.

This may have the distinction of being the last album recorded on the Green Linnet Label, that alone could bring it cult status but it deserves your attention, it is the last of a trilogy of excellent albums Niamh made for the now defunct Connecticut record company, each one a gem.

Here on 13 tracks Niamh and guitarist Graham Dunne pull of a wonderful double act of sensitivity, edgy realism and deep emotional insights. Take the first track 1917 (The French Prostitute) it's a big ballad, a full story with some great lines and Parson's handles it with sensitivity and a shot of resignation, Dunne plays a gypsy break over a musette accordion, but it feels right when in lesser hands it could have become an empty pastiche.

The album was recorded in Chicago and of course it was natural enough to bring in Dennis Cahill and he appears on high string guitar on the Poor Irish Stranger, where he duets with Dunne whilst Larry Gray adds an occasional bass line. Parsons gives the lads a rest from time to time and her ac-capella You Rambling Boys of Pleasure carries us along in a flawless master class in unaccompanied singing. The title track is a song by Kieran Halpin, a modern song on an old theme, a kindred spirit to the Parting Glass. There's so much that is good about this album, the pairing of Graham Dunne and Dennis Cahill on Moll and Poll Ha' Penny, Dunne's own Cumha an Ghrá (one for aspiring guitar pickers every where) and then there's a delicate understated first world war ballad John Condon, social comment on A Drinking Man's Wife and much more besides. Add to this some great liner notes and you can see that Niamh Parsons has not skimped on the last effort of her Green Linnet Triptych, this panel stands as darkly gilded as the other two, as complex as the rich ruby wine of Spain, as a parting glass to the fading glory of Green Linnet this is a loving toast to old decency.

Seán Laffey