

Niamh Parsons

In My Prime

Label: Green Linnet

By its nature, vocal folk music is narrative. Particularly in the traditions of the British Isles, all of its elements should serve this purpose. Anything that distracts from the flow of words, then, is anti-folk. If this sounds a little cold, it's only to make it clear that Niamh (pronounced "Neeve") Parsons has got it right. On her newest album, the Irish singer offers a selection of material, most of it traditional and all of it within the tradition of telling stories through song. Each track is set to the barest of instrumentations, which center most often on the impeccable work of acoustic guitarist Graham Dunne. Four performances are a cappella, including the title cut, a classic marriage of wounded love, modal melody, and fragile metaphor, which Niamh and her sister Anne Parsons-Dunne sing in unison over a low, pipe-like vocal drone.

With her precise technique and delicate phrasing, Parsons challenges listeners who have lost interest in the potential of lyrics and grown too easily impressed by vocal exhibitionists. Yet the emotional devastation woven through the tales told in "Orphan's Wedding" and "Lakes of Coolfin" comes to us all the clearer because of the dispassion of the singing and its gentle accompaniment. Melody, poetry, feelings made deeper by their restraint: There are lessons beyond music throughout In My Prime.

-- Robert L. Doerschuk

August 18, 2000

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