

NIAMH PARSONS

In My Prime

Green Linnet GLCD 1203

*Bonny Woodhall, Green Grass it Grows Bonny, In my Prime, Here Johnny, Annan Waters, Orphan's Wedding, An Paistin, Black is the Colour, Two Sisters, Lakes of Coolfin, Bold Doherty, So Here's to You.*

On reading the testimonials which accompanied this CD, I was left wondering what could be added to the superlatives and praise already heaped upon Miss Parsons, but here goes, anyway.

The first impression I got from listening to the album is the apparent sheer delight this singer has in her chosen art. She sounds as though she really enjoys what she is doing and is doing it effortlessly, although I am sure that this is not the case. You do not get this good without putting in a lot of hard work. She maintains the listener's interest by lavish use of ornament and by varying the loudness and softness of her delivery. There is far too much going on in her performance for your interest to flag in even the longest ballad. Her voice ranges from a soft, husky low register to high notes which are either silky smooth or harsher and more emphatic, depending upon which mood she is seeking to convey.

The accompanying notes mention some of the singers who Niamh Parsons admires and, though not listed, I thought I detected a June Tabor influence in some of her phrasing and sweeping low notes, particularly in the unaccompanied Annan Water, although her style and voice are very distinctive and entirely her own. Incidentally, although not credited here, the tune used for this Scottish Border ballad is English traditional and was fitted and somewhat altered by Nic Jones.

The use of a lot of decoration can sometimes make it difficult to hear all the words in a song, as is the case on the first track, Bonny Woodhall. However, the overall sound is so pleasing that it hardly detracts from one's enjoyment at all, and, anyway, all the words are contained in the accompanying booklet. This first song certainly whets one's appetite for the rest of the album. The story of a soldier, who leaves his true love to go to war and is subsequently seriously wounded in battle, is sung with great feeling. The beautiful tune is enhanced by the simple but tasteful guitar accompaniment, with other instruments coming in and going out as appropriate.

Her singing of Orphan's Wedding – a song by Andy M Stewart about lovers who discover they are siblings – is masterful. Not an easy song to sing this, with high notes suddenly and expectedly soaring skyward, particularly at the end of the second line, and other phrases dropping to a low register. However, Miss Parsons handles all this as effortlessly as if she were singing a song pitched entirely in the middle of her range. I loved the opening notes of Paul Kelly's mandolin and the finishing phrase of Mick Kinsella's poignant harmonica, the whole hung together by Graham Dunne's sympathetic guitar playing.

Not to be missed is The Lakes of Coolfin with its lovely piano accompaniment by Seamus Brett. Singing in her soft voice, Parsons relates in a gentle, wistful way the story of a young man who drowns whilst taking an early morning bathe.

These are just a few of the many delightful tracks on this album; it is a recording which the discerning lover of folk song will not want to be without.

Joan Mills