

STEVE TURNER

Spirit Of The Game Living Tradition
LTCD1105

Steve's seven albums have come at the two ends of his decades-long involvement with the folk scene with a long gap in the middle of his career. There is no doubt that the later Olly Knight-produced albums are the best and that this is one of the finest.

The mature Turner voice comes over with more control, passion and commitment and this combined with superbly inventive concertina accompaniments and the excellent and varied choice of material place his albums amongst the most interesting of the old guard of folk revivalists.

The songs are well chosen with some unfamiliar ones amongst them. The formula is one that his fans will be familiar with: the better sea songs and shanties, one from Paul Metzgers and, of course, a certain Corsican pops up – this time twice. The title *Plains Of Waterloo* crops up and we think we are in familiar territory but as Steve points out, this is "a generic title that used by at least ten different songs" though this one, Steve finds, "reports the battle in fairly accurate detail". The excellent words of the other, *Done With Napoleon* comes from an unexpected source, Mark Knopfler.

Another regular feature of his albums is his sparing but effective use of guests. This time the mighty voices of The Wilson Family bring their power to some choruses.

The album comes in the larger DVD case which is becoming a more frequent third option to the usual digipak/plastic CD cover alternative.

www.thetraditionbearers.co.uk

Vic Smith

NITE WORKS

NW Comann Music CM001

Displaying an alarming case of taking your own sweet time, Niteworks finally deliver their first album, an object so long rumoured you began to wonder if it was, after all, just a figment of fevered anticipation. Still, here it is; *NW* sits staring at me across the study.

Flip back to 2011 and a debut EP awash with promise. Here was a band who didn't just mash up electronics/club vibes with the nearest trad item to hand, rather carefully chosen snatches of age-old Gaelic melody, song and lore, were thoroughly blended so the modern complemented ancient in perfect balance. Clearly of the same mindset as the late, much missed Martyn Bennett, *NW* is, contemporary music born of the Highlands and Islands; this is endemic, this is now, just as much as that boring hip-hop, soul-lite derivative you'll work out to at the gym. In fact you could well say it's more relevant. Niteworks DJ and remix to countless across Scotland, turning club nights into a reminder of a history/ culture beyond the dance floor. The Gaels retain that inherent identity so much of our nation has lost, the Victorian oppression dished out during the Clearances has left its mark. *Somhairle* samples poet Sorley McLean, declaring the present population bred for emigration, through a loop and vocoder. If that was the case in his day, Runrig changed perceptions, Niteworks continue the fight back.

NW is an album of cooperation as the main quartet are filled out with guest vocalists delivering the rootsier elements.

Maraiche provides washes around Kathleen MacInnes's traditional vocal with gurgles, bounces and echoes creating a shifting fog. *Taobh Abhainn* is more restless, an insistent beat urges Alasdair Whyte's mouth music to reel on the fiddle and harder rhythmic slaps. In the midst of all the electronic storm there's

a pipe and violin duet which is delivered as straight folk, though the opener *Beul Na H-Oidhche* sets out their stall right under your nose, quiet beginnings build though intertwining rhythms mashing up the pumping beats, a whoosh, whirl, tinny percussion before pipes deliver a Hamish Moore reel over layered synths and sheer bravado.

As if wanting to prove their more mainstream credentials Laura Donnelly rides the pulsating vibe of Anais Mitchell's *Coming Down*. Gloriously ambient it rises on an ocean of harmonies as the band create a near-symphony. "Nothing's going to stop me now," she purrs and my money's on the band having the same philosophy.

An absorbing album, be assured it has hidden depths and its bolder elements will send tingles down your spine. More than first meets the ear.

www.niteworksband.com

Simon Jones.

ALICE JONES

Poor Strange Girl Splid SPLIDCD017

Born and raised in Ripponden (one of Yorkshire's westernmost outposts), Alice was first exposed to folk music by her parents, since when her interest has persisted, encouraged and nurtured by the mighty Ryburn 3-Step organisation. Alice is an enviably proficient singer and multi-instrumentalist, in demand for ceilidhs and session work. Her most recent collaboration was with the indefatigable Pete Coe on the brilliantly researched presentation *The Search For Five Finger Frank*, based on the legacy of Frank Kidson. However, she's sensibly waited until good and ready to release a solo album, with the happy result that *Poor Strange Girl* proves a magnificent showcase for her versatility.

Perhaps the most immediately striking aspect of Alice's artistry is that she's a significantly impressive singer. Her voice has real personality and stature, with unpretentious, forthright Yorkshire relish. It possesses a depth and substance which both informs her interpretations and lets her penetrate to the essence of her chosen songs, generally drawn from English or American folk tradition. Alice's singing also displays an intuitive sense of rhythm (likely stemming from her expertise as a dancer – Appalachian and longsword), as does her stylish self-accompaniment (piano, harmonium, whistle and tenor guitar). Her piano playing, while bold and full-toned, is refreshingly unlaboured and fluid. On this CD she benefits additionally

Alice Jones



from the instrumental skills of Tom Kitching (fiddle) and Hugh Bradley (bass), both on the songs and on three enchanting tune-sets (self-penned bar a Swedish polska).

On *The Cruel Mother*, the unsettling melody and its scoring of jabbing fiddle, bowed bass and harmonium furnishes a suitably sinister aura for the engaging narrative. Alice follows this with an enthralling piano-backed rendition of *Green Bushes*, an outstanding performance that complements equally insightful accounts of *Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still* and the delightful Erik Darling 'adaptation' *Woody Knows Nothing*, while First World War popular song *Long Long Trail* provides the affectionate album closer.

This *Poor Strange Girl* has given us a beautiful and thoughtfully sequenced disc with year-best contender writ all over it. <http://alicejonesmusic.com>

David Kidman

THE ZEN HUSSIES

The Charm Account own label ZHCD04

Bristol/Bath eight-piece the Zen Hussies have been tearing the joint up for fifteen years or so, and their fourth album sees them translating an exuberant mix of brass, blues and the rest into a coherent and powerful set of songs that have at times the righteous anger of punk and a celebration of low life... the 'deathwish pub-crawl' of the opener *Quafftide* features twin trumpets and baritone sax belting into mariachi like they just discovered it, before the Hussies swing into big band jazz (*Somedays*), Muppet-Dixieland (*Broken Leg*) and good English ska on *Life's A Gas*, *Bill*, full of growling dissent for sheeplike conformity. Singer and lyricist Jules Landau whips the band through its paces on the racy show blues of *Impecunious Blues* and the cartoon creepiness of *The Devil's Doorbell*, and there are moments of surf-ska and blues guitar'n'brass frenzy, all tightly and joyously played.

All these stylistic influences could make for not much more than a revivalist listen (did someone mention the Hot Sardines?), but the toughness of the lyrics and the ease with which the band set about the different moods – even the anarchist *Party Sarny*, which out-Joe Strummers Joe Strummer in its Latino outlaw swagger – bring a unity that brings about its own identity, with a very English sensibility and a very world music bounce: a great combination. Charm? I should cocoa! www.zenhussies.com

Ian Kearey