

HILARY JAMES

Biography

Hilary James is a singer par excellence. Her voice easily crosses the great musical divides and has featured everywhere from Classic FM to Radio 1. Within a week of its release, her first solo album *Burning Sun* was in the top ten airplay on Radio 2. An evocative blend of original and traditional songs, and a refreshing approach to the classics gained it immediate and widespread critical acclaim from Philadelphia to Latvia, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Norway and Ireland. This led to an offer from MTV award winning editor/producer Dan Lebenthal to make a video in Hollywood (Dan's previous projects include editing videos for M C Hammer!).

Apart from her fine singing, Hilary James was also a founder member of those witty western swingers *Slim Panatella and the Mellow Virginians*. She is also an accomplished double bassist and guitarist, but these days is rarely seen without her amazing mandobass, appearing regularly with mandolin wizard Simon Mayor both as a duo and with Britain's first, and ground-breaking modern mandolin quartet, *The Mandolinquents*.

Hilary James left her native Stoke-on-Trent for Reading at the age of eighteen to study one of her other passions, Fine Art, but music was never far away. With the early influences of Ella Fitzgerald and Anne Briggs, it was no surprise to find her both as featured vocalist with the University Big Band and running the University Folk Club. A trip to the Edinburgh Festival with the University Drama Society further whetted her appetite for performing.

Spending a postgraduate year in teacher training she became aware of the lack of quality music available in England for children and formed the *Musical Mystery Tour* visiting theatres, arts centres and schools with a mixture of instrumental fun, original narrative and witty songs, sketches and

musical information. In 1979 together with Simon Mayor, she recorded the first *Musical Mystery Tour* album on Acoustics Records, her own label. The enthusiasm of the press brought interest from the BBC and the James/Mayor team went on to present regular music education programmes for the next six years. Together they have now written over 60 songs for children and produced 5 albums in their *Musical Mystery Tour* series. A *Musical Mystery Tour* songbook with illustrations by Hilary is published by Faber Music.

Her talent for witty lyrics hasn't just been confined to children, and on more than one occasion Hilary found herself writing topical songs simultaneously for such diverse TV programmes as Play School, Playdays, Green Claws, and Newsnight!

But for all her talents, it is her versatility as a singer that gives Hilary James a unique position. For her second album, *Love Lust & Loss*, she teamed up with the veteran pianist Beryl Marriott - two generations taking a daring leap into long unexplored territory, bringing folksong back to its improvisatory roots. *Bluesy*, an album of country-blues, jazz-blues and swing featured a host of supporting musicians and was once more greeted with wide critical acclaim from the Yorkshire Post and fRoots to the bikers magazine, Backstreet Heroes. It was the first time this much applauded side of her stage repertoire had featured on CD.

Released in late 2004, *Laughing with the Moon* is Hilary's fourth solo album, a mix of traditional and original songs and tunes, featuring Simon Mayor's mandolin on four instrumental tracks (these days their names are usually mentioned in the same breath). *Lullabies With Mandolins* is their first album for children for some years and has met with unanimous critical acclaim.

Daily Telegraph

"Elegant singing"

Steppin' Out

"I can't help but be transfixed by the... exquisite vocals of Hilary James"

Living Tradition

"Lovely vocals radiate and delight."

fRoots

"Songs were never sung as exquisitely"
