

# The Mandolin Album

Simon Mayor - CD review

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## The Daily Telegraph

The mandolin has usually had something of a bad press. If anyone is belatedly to lift its reputation, it may well be Simon Mayor. His eclectic collection of music adapted for the instrument and its derivatives includes reels, a waltz, Handel (Arrival of the Queen of Sheba) and Vivaldi, one of the few composers of renown to write for mandolin. The arrangements are uplifting and the album is a joy.

Since street credibility may be at stake here, I report without comment that someone at French television was so taken with Mayor's interpretation of Vivaldi's "Concerto for Mandolin" that he played it during the recent Miss France contest. This modest accolade for an unsung instrument was followed by a modest triumph for les territoires d'outres-mers - the crowning of a young lady from Tahiti.

*Colin Randall*

## fROOTS

"A collection of original compositions and newly arranged classical pieces featuring the mandolin, mandola and mandocello", reads the sub-title. And elsewhere in the notes, "It's strange that today the instrument remains under-exploited this side of the Atlantic, so here's an album of mandolin music with a European flavour, some old, some new." Under-statements both!

Simon Mayor has been around the British folk scene for quite a while now, usually partnered by Hilary James. And yes, we all knew that he was a bloody good mandolin player. I wasn't prepared for just how good this CD is, though - one of the best (mostly) instrumental works by an English acoustic musician that's so far been made. And it shows most similar instrumental albums to be pretty damn mechanical by comparison. Mayor has multi-tracked himself on mandolin-family instruments plus guitar, whistle and fiddle in places, whilst the admirable Ms. James contributes double bass and a couple of beautiful vocals. Everything about this record is exemplary, from the quality and spaciousness of the recording, through the dazzling playing, the imaginativeness of the arrangements, to the sheer class of Simon's own compositions (everything from thirty-two-and-a-half bar reels through fake Russian steppe dances, almost-Carolan tunes, bits of baroque, to explorations on English and Celtic themes.) On the way, he also gives Messrs. Handel, Bach, Berlioz and Vivaldi a good mandolining.

Sheer joy to listen to, it has the inspirational quality that, when hearing an advance cassette at a friend's house, made this reviewer dive for the 'phone and demand a copy now!

*Ian Anderson*

## Q Magazine

Mayor's title perfectly describes the album's content. Here is a collection of original and adapted pieces for the mandolin played in a variety of folk, jazz and light classical stylings.

Its success lies in the fact that it is the first British album to stand comparison with the best American albums in the field, the ones that reawakened the spirit of this century's sleeping mandolin orchestras. The David Grisman Quintet in 1977 became the yardstick against which others were measured; in its wake, a number of copyists buzzed faddishly around for a while, but few developed distinctive voices. Mayor has.

On The Mandolin Album, defying the US norm, he looks to his homeland and European classicists like Bach, Vivaldi and Handel for style and inspiration. Multi-tracked on mandolin, mandola, mandocello and other instruments and with a solitary accompanist in Hilary James, the measure of his success may be judged by the wit and invention of his arrangement of Vivaldi's Concerto for Mandolin and his own Maple Flames.

*\* \* \* \* Ken Hunt*

## Amazon - Editorial Review

Simon Mayor is a mandolin virtuoso, indeed it's tempting to describe him as the mandolin virtuoso, as the field isn't exactly packed with contenders. Ricky Skaggs comes to mind as his only serious rival for the title but Mayor, unlike the American Bluegrass wizard, is truly an all-rounder who possesses not only a formidable technique but a grasp of styles that range far beyond the folksy tunes that form the cornerstone of contemporary mandolin repertoire.

This album is basically an opportunity for Mayor to show off in a variety of settings: best of all are his own suites of tunes, in which he plays jigs and reels in finger-contorting arrangements and at hair-raising speed.

Annoyingly, he also accompanies himself extremely well on guitar, mandola, mandocello and even, on occasion, fiddle and whistle. But the classics hold no terrors for Mayor, either, and he dashes away with carefree abandon at Vivaldi's famous mandolin concerto, as well as some bits of Bach, Berlioz and Handel.

In the end this may be an album strictly for mandolin connoisseurs, but for every one of those Mayor's music is a constant source of inspiration. He's made several albums since, with The Second Mandolin Album being equally eclectic and equally delightful.

*Mark Walker*