

SIMON MAYOR AND THE MANDOLINQUENTS

CD REVIEWS **DANCE OF THE COMEDIANS**

Quotes from the press - short takes

The Daily Telegraph

If the test for any live album is whether it makes you wish you had been present, this sails through with distinction.

Sing Out!

a stunning acoustic tour de force, played by a quartet at the top of its game.

fRoots

Another delicious CD crammed with excellent musicianship.

Dirty Linen

This live CD captures both the wit and uncanny dexterity of this most versatile group... doing things with mandolins that most people didn't think possible.

folking.com

This album is a dazzling display of musicianship that will leave you open-mouthed in incredulous silence.

Burton Mail

... warm and intimate live recording. Refreshingly different.

Netrhythms

Their musicianship is abundantly excellent, while the music itself is intelligently arranged and always leavened with an equally delicious sense of fun

The Irish Times

there's serious musicianship at play... truly uncategorisable: a bracing alternative to boxed-in listening.

The Living Tradition

one of those groups that defy pigeonholing... effervescent... exotic... comically creepy... altogether it's just plain fun

Musician Magazine

... top quality musicianship and accompanying humour... a find of true class... highly recommended to anyone seeking a 21st -century example of British wit and skill.

BBC Radio 2 website

Folk, jazz, swing, Grieg, Rimsky-Korsakov, John Clare, Smetana - plus funny intros, wit and sparkle in this live set from the eclectic, virtuosic quartet.

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... this in-concert recording is a joy. One of those intriguing albums that almost defies classification.

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Rambles.net

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The Daily Telegraph

There are times when the sophistication of Hilary James's singing raises the question of how on earth she ended up on the fringes of folk music.

Working with Simon Mayor, an amusing, gifted musician and tireless champion of the mandolin, her vocal contributions may occasionally be overlooked or seen as a cultural novelty.

But amid all the spirit and composure of Mayor's quartet, in which James plays mandolin bass, the charm and texture of her soprano stand out, assisted by a whimsical selection of songs, notably a melancholy *The Song of India*, from Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko*, and the jauntier *Lullaby of Birdland*.

If the test for any live album is whether it makes you wish you had been present, this sails through with distinction.

Colin Randall

The Irish Times

The Mandolinquents are hell-bent on rehabilitating errant aficionados of the mandolin - with just a tincture of tongue in cheek in its sprightly repertoire. As renaissance man Simon Mayor leads his quartet a merry dance on this live recording, he uncovers the gorgeous fragility of an instrument that's long been used to bolster all manner of other instruments. Hilary James's vocals and mandobass infuse the collection with refreshing reflection, particularly on *Song for India*. Elsewhere there's serious musicianship at play. This is truly uncategorisable: a bracing alternative to boxed-in listening.

Siobhán Long

BBC Radio 2 website

Folk, jazz, swing, Grieg, Rimsky-Korsakov, John Clare, Smetana - plus funny intros, wit and sparkle in this live set from the eclectic, virtuosic quartet.

Musician Magazine

An instant delight, this is a superb CD of top quality musicianship and accompanying humour as writer and composer Simon - together with a very talented trio of performers - tackle an impressively wide range of material with genuine gusto and, when called for, tenderness.

Any act that can move in a live setting from light-hearted performances of *Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy* and the Brazilian gem *Apanhei-tei Cavaquinho*, to the delicacy of a gorgeous *Song Of India* merits an ongoing place in the limelight.

Boasting the talents of Hilary James (vocals/mandobass), Gerald Garcia (classical guitar) and Richard Collins (mandolin, banjo, mandobass), this is a find of true class. It is highly recommended to anyone seeking a 21st-century example of British wit and skill.

folking.com

Prepare to be enchanted, entertained and above all astonished by the mellow tones and dexterity of the Mandolinquents captured live - that's right... live! In all their glory the quartet of Simon Mayor, Hilary James, Richard Collins and Gerald Garcia are some of the finest exponents of stringed instruments to be found in these fair isles of ours.

Also, with a voice surely inherited from an angel Hilary performs with a beautiful clarity that brushes aside any pretentiousness inherited by so many divas.

In many ways this is a band 'covers' album including as it does many popular standards such as "Lullaby Of Birdland", "Loch Lomond" and the opening track "Pizzicato". This album is a dazzling display of musicianship that will leave you open-mouthed in incredulous silence.

Pete Fyfe

SIMON MAYOR AND THE MANDOLINQUENTS

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The Living Tradition

Simon Mayor and the Mandolinquents (Richard Collins, Gerald Garcia and Hilary James) are one of those groups that defy pigeonholing. Looking at the titles and composers on this disk I was reminded of the 'light classics' and 'international hits' that my grandmother enjoyed. She probably would have liked this one too, but don't let that put you off, or you'll miss a pleasurable experience. Stylistically, it's a real mixed bag - from the effervescent opening Pizzicato by Delibes through the 'exotic' Song Of India from Rimsky-Korsakov's Sadko, atmospherically sung by Hilary James; to the comically creepy bonus track The Spider In The Shed there is not a dud melody on the CD.

Dance Of The Comedians was primarily recorded live at New Greenham Arts in Newbury. Helpfully, they've kept the applause to a minimum and made the intros and chatty interludes separate tracks, easily skipped once they begin to pale. I must admit, they are a funny bunch (even without the facial expressions and stage business enjoyed by the live audience). Laughs aside, they're all excellent musicians, and the diverse programme allows them to display their talents. I especially enjoyed Lullaby Of Birdland. Its looping melody suits James' voice, the classical guitar solo works surprisingly well, and Mayor's violin has a touch of Stephane Grappelli about it. Duke Ellington's Caravan as rendered by Collins on the 5-string banjo is pure genius. Another favourite is Summer, a delicate duet between Garcia and Mayor based on a Chinese melody. The sound is clear and lively, the instruments are well balanced, and altogether it's just plain fun. For a good time, give it a whirl.

E Bradtke

Dirty Linen

For years now, Simon Mayor and Hilary James have been doing things with mandolins that most people didn't think possible. In the whimsically named Mandolinquents, Mayor (mandolin, violin, guitar) and James (mandobass and vocals) are joined by classical guitarist Gerald Garcia and Richard Collins on mandolin, banjo and mandobass. This live CD captures both the wit and uncanny dexterity of this most versatile group.

The recording begins with the band's signature take on the delicate 'Pizzicato' from Leo Delibes before launching into the swinging Brazilian jazz of "Apanhei-Tei Cavaquinho." James sings the winsome "Song Of India" from the opera "Sadko", after which the group heads into a highly humorous and impossible fast tune, "The Typewriter" written by American composer Leroy Anderson.

"Lullaby Of Birdland" is cabaret-style jazz in the tradition of Stephane Grappelli with some delicious violin playing from Mayor and is sweetened by James' soaring soprano.

Garcia shines on the Russian romp "Czardas" and the classical "Rigaudon" from "The Holberg Suite" by Grieg.

Traditional songs, such as "Loch Lomond" and "Will You Come To The Bower", are given a fine airing, and the CD comes officially to a close with the tour de force of "Dance Of The Comedians" from Smetana's comic opera "The Bartered Bride". Bonus tracks include Mayor's Russian/Sheffield skit, which serves as a completely unrelated intro to the Arachnida cowboy song "The Spider In The Shed".

Who knew that so much fun could be had with a little instrument with eight strings?

Lahri Bond

SIMON MAYOR AND THE MANDOLINQUENTS

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Sing Out!

While it's not folk music in any strict sense, this new album from the wonderful Simon Mayor and his set of accomplices is a stunning acoustic tour de force, played by a quartet at the top of its game, and who approach their music with a relaxed sense of humour.

That much is obvious: from their treatment of Delibes' "Pizzicato" which kicks off this live set to their inclusion of that old, difficult classic, "The Typewriter".

But they're quite capable of getting serious, too, turning in an excellent version of "Lullaby Of Birdland" and a take on Duke Ellington's "Caravan" that's remarkable, not just for the excellence of the playing, but for the fact Richard Collins switches to banjo to do it.

Both Mayor and Collins are virtuoso mandolinists, backed by Gerald Garcia on guitar and Hilary James on mandobass and vocals. You will find a couple of folk pieces ("Loch Lomond" and "Will You Come To The Bower") but this group just likes to romp crazily through music. It all culminates in a hilarious spoken take on the Russian accent and a good-natured sing-along as a an easy way to come down.

The beauty of this disc is that the players rarely set out to showcase their chops - those ridiculously fast lines are simply them playing the melodies set by the composers. If you like the mandolin this is the sort of album you need in your collection

CN

Netrhythms

Here's another delicious CD from this band of "mandolinquents", effectively a mandolin-and-guitar-orchestra comprising Simon and his cohorts (Hilary James, Richard Collins and Gerald Garcia) who between them play an assortment of mandolins along with both classical and steel-strung guitars, a violin, a banjo and the lumbering

mandobass (which has to be seen to be believed - it's larger than its player, I'm convinced!).

Recorded live in concert (though neatly spliced together from different performances), it's a scintillating hour-long set comprising pieces from all over the repertoires and genres - folk songs and tunes, jazz standards, virtuoso party-pieces, classical miniatures, light-music novelties, ballet excerpts, and all arranged and played with the consummate skill we've come to expect as given from the reliable partnership of Simon and Hilary and their two long-term collaborators.

Their musicianship is abundantly excellent, while the music itself is intelligently arranged and always leavened with an equally delicious sense of fun. Some spoken intros have been retained within the sequence, and these convey through easy good humour and cunning puns a good sense of the infectiously convivial atmosphere to be enjoyed at the concerts (If you've enjoyed the cross-stylistic adventures of folks such as David Grisman, Dave Apollon and the late Jerry Garcia, then you'll find much kinship in the playing of the Mandolinquents, while the combo's takes on the classical bonbons are second to none. I particularly enjoyed their performances of Grieg's Rigaudon (the final movement of the Holberg Suite) and Duke Ellington's Caravan.

Simon's merry band has another ace in the hole, however, in the shape of Hilary's seriously beautiful singing: on this set alone she turns in peerless performances of Loch Lomond and Lullaby Of Birdland, and settings by Simon himself of poems by John Clare and Sylvia Townsend Warner (I wasn't quite as convinced by the Rimsky-Korsakov aria I'll admit, although it's equally peerlessly sung in French).

If this kind of feelgood, adventuresome and eclectic "Cook's tour" through the musics is your kind of thing, then you'll want this disc in your collection for definite.

David Kidman

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County Times

It's 10 years since musician, composer and wit Simon Mayor and the other three musicians of the Mandolinquents got together for their first album and to mark the anniversary their new live CD Dance of the Comedians comes out next Monday.

The jolly regrouping recorded at Greenham features 13 tracks mixing classical and contemporary music highlighting the mandolin, culminating in Dance of the Comedians from Smetana's comic opera The Bartered Bride.

Ballet music from Delibes, George Shearing's Lullaby of Birdland, Duke Ellington's Caravan, folk songs from Scotland and from further afield, and that show-offy and now almost antique fun piece The Typewriter are all included.

Some have vocals by Simon's frequent collaborator Hilary James who not only has an elegant voice but also plays the more cumbersome mandobass.

The other members are Gerald Garcia, one of the first Western guitarists to play in China; and Richard Collins, still one of the hottest banjo players around.

The group return for two bonus encore tracks with a humorous story introduction that's almost as long as the Home on the Range cowboy song spoof The Spider in the Shed that brings to an end a marvellously civilised evening of inventive musicianship.

Barry Jones

Burton Mail

Mandolin orchestras were hugely popular in the 1930s and remain so in the USA and mainland Europe.

Mayor and the Mandolinquents fly the flag alone in the UK and more's the pity on the evidence of this

warm and intimate live recording on which the ensemble, featuring ace mandolinist Mayor plus mandobass, banjo and guitar - and more mandolins, of course - perform a mixed set of instantly recognisable classical aires mixed with contemporary material and their own brand of light-hearted fun, accompanied by witty commentary from Mayor and pals. Refreshingly different.

Andy Parker

South Hams Newspapers

This four-strong mini-orchestra have several acoustic albums in various combinations behind them, and this in-concert recording is a joy.

Using not also mandolins, but also classical guitar, violin and banjo, and occasional vocals from Hilary James, they present a dizzy, eclectic programme of classical showstoppers by Rimsky-Korsakov and Smetana, old swing and ragtime pieces, traditional reels and folk songs like Loch Lomond, plus good-honoured live introductions.

One of those intriguing albums that almost defies classification.

John Van der Kiste

fRoots

Another delicious CD crammed with excellent musicianship from mandolin-orchestra comprising Simon and chums, Hilary James, Richard Collins and Gerald Garcia. Recorded live in concert, they play a comprehensive selection of intelligently arranged baroque and balletic bonbons, light classics, jazzy show-stoppers and the occasional folk song (beautifully sung by Hilary James).

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Rambles.net

Live recordings are dangerous. Yes, the performance may go horribly wrong, but what I mean is that they can also be addictive to the fan -- and this is definitely one of the latter.

Simon Mayor has made the mandolin the "axe" of the new century. Here he is joined by his oft-time collaborator Hilary James along with Gerald Garcia and Richard Collins. This delightfully named group, the Mandolinquents, take us on a trip through fantasy land with mandolins, banjo, violin, guitar and mandobass -- a really weird looking "yoke" -- that makes great music.

As well as making the mandolin better known, they also introduce the general audience to classical pieces that we may be familiar enough with to hum but would never have a clue as to the titles. The opening track, "Pizzicato" is case in point.

There are also introductions to lesser-known pieces, such as James' vocals on "Song of India."

Everyone is familiar with that whimsical piece "The Typewriter" where the music mimics that ancient writing instrument at work -- although half of you probably don't know that sound.

As well as classical and operatic pieces, they bring us versions of traditional or folk classics like "Loch Lomond" and "Will You Come to the Bower." "Summer" is an intriguing piece based on a Chinese tune. The final track is a humorous piece called "The Spider in the Shed."

The possible bane of the live album is when you may tire of the patter between tracks. The Mandolinquents think of this, and the talk is on individual tracks for simple jump-overs.

Come here for the novelty, but you will stay for the great music.

Nicky Rossiter