

# The English Mandolin

Simon Mayor - CD review

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## fROOTS

From the man who brought you The Mandolin Album, The Second Mandolin Album and Winter With Mandolins - more mandophilia!

This is a delight, Simon Mayor's mandolin playing is without peer, and he's chosen a balanced and entertaining selection of stuff here. My first reaction was that this might be pleasant "background music" - then I played the CD. It's one to listen to properly, and repeatedly. The Folk/Roots credentials are strong, despite the fact that much of the material is Purcell arranged Mayor or Holst arranged Mayor (etc), as much of it draws on traditional tunes such as Lilliburlero and Staines Morris. The rest simply sounds as if it does. Hilary James helps out on bass and guitar, and Mayor plays a little guitar himself, but he's concentrated (wisely) on that which sets him apart - his consummate ability with the mandolin family. The delicate, harpsichord like quality of the mandolin, mandola and mandocello provide a coherent yet varied palette of sound to carry the tunes - and this is very tuneful indeed.

Don't be misled into thinking that this is an esoteric collection, interesting only to mandolin players. If you like good, "folk" tunes played in an inventive and interesting manner, on an unusual instrument (for this type of music) you'll like this.

*Alan Murphy*

## Rock 'n' Reel

Mandolin maestro Mayor has on 'English Mandolin' returned to a cause close to his heart, the exploration of the mandolin family (mandolin, mandola and mandocello) within the context of 'Classical' composers Gustav Holst, Percy Grainger, Edward German and Peter Warlock.

Mayor's mastery of the instruments and understanding of its beautiful tones, melodious colour and ability to produce rich textures makes for an outstanding listening experience.

The clarity and natural brightness of the mandolin family, makes the whole of 'English Mandolin' a work of epic proportions touched with a regal quality.

*Steve Caseman*

## Folk North West

This is not something to put on while you Hoover the house or drive the car. This is a serious piece of work! I'm a very big fan of Simon Mayor (and Hilary James) having seen him live, and marvelled at his command of his instruments and his empathy with whatever music he plays. It's truly amazing that he is self-taught! Here he takes music from mainly 20th century composers and adapts it for the mandolin, a much neglected, but in his hands, very versatile instrument. Stunning technique, complete commitment and a deep feel for the music are the characteristics of this album. I urge you to buy it, but only if you are willing to devote to it the level of attention it deserves.

*Dave Day*

## Folk Write

This is Simon Mayor's fourth album using instruments of the mandolin family - not just the mandolin, but also the mandola and mandocello. Simon plays guitar, and his partner Hilary James guitar and double bass, to bolster the bottom end. Most of the material is not taken directly from traditional sources, but consists of arrangements of pieces composed using traditional tunes or in a traditional style. Perhaps the best known are the opening and closing pieces, the St Paul's Suite by Holst and Peter Warlock's Capriol Suite, consisting of four and six short dances respectively. The Holst in fact does not use traditional tunes, except Greensleeves as a counter melody in the last movement. In contrast, the Capriol Suite is based on tunes from a collection of dances published in the late sixteenth century. Warlock's own period (early twentieth century) is given away by some distinctly modern harmonies. The arrangements of these and the other pieces by Grainger, German and Purcell are remarkable for the fullness and variety of the sound.

At the top end, the sound also sparkles, and this is a bit of a surprise to those more familiar with the orchestral originals or arrangements for wind band.

The three tunes directly set are Staines Morris, the Unfortunate Tailor and Lord Marlborough. Of these Lord Marlborough works the best, mixing three, four and five in a bar in energetic style. There is an excellent set of sleeve notes. This is a very fine record indeed which should give pleasure not only to mandolin enthusiasts but to wide audience.

*David Crofts*