

Children's Favourites from Acoustics

Hilary James & Simon Mayor - CD review

Rambles

When I listen to this CD, words like charming, refreshing, playful and irresistible pop up in my head. I may be 53 years old, but if this is only meant for children to listen to, then count me in that category.

Children's Favourites is a collection of songs and instrumentals recorded especially with children in mind. There are a few pieces of "classical" music on it, like a hornpipe from "Water Music" by Handel and the first movement from Vivaldi's "Concerto for Mandolins". And Mayor sings a lovely new lyric to Schubert's "The Trout," renamed "The Slippery Slimy Trout." Then there are some traditional ones. James sings "Lavender's Blue" in a very slow fashion, bringing out the song's original use as a lullaby. Then there is a French lullaby, "Fais Dodo," sung in the original language. And they have rewritten "As I Was Going to Banbury," reworking the lyrics and changing the tune. Here it is called "The Road to Banbury."

And interspersed between the songs are small sketches, featuring Mayor and James doing small introductory dialogues.

But what impresses me most about this collection is their ability to write new songs for children. I must say I have a very critical mind when it comes to newly written children's songs. During my short stint as a music teacher, I avoided many of them. Often I found them underestimating the children who were supposed to sing them. After all, children do not want to be small. Their wish is to grow up and to be taken seriously by their elders.

James and Mayor have the ability to write songs that appeal to children and to the child within adults without ever sounding childish. They do not oversimplify things, but trust their audience to be able to pick up on clever musical passages and word games in the lyrics.

"The Snowman's Song" tells of the dangers of being a snowman. Either you have to freeze, or else you melt away. And can a snowman fall in love, or will

the warm feelings melt him? "The Spider in the Shed" describes in detail how a spider chews his prey. "My Bike" is James's description of how any sport but cycling is too dangerous. And "The Farmyard Tango" cleverly includes a bit of can-can while describing the difficulty experienced by some of the animals at the farm ballroom dance.

Well, I could mention all the tracks on it. I really enjoy it, but you have already guessed that, haven't you? And the label on the cover "Real Music, Real Instruments" tells it all really. Guitars, mandolins (of course), percussion, whistles, vocals and sound effects. Everything is superbly executed and it all fits in.

I have only one question. Will we parents (and grandparents) really pass it on to our children (and grandchildren)? Or will we keep it for ourselves? I am in luck, my grandchildren do not understand Swedish, so...

Lars Nilsson