

Music from a Small Island

Simon Mayor - CD review

Quotes from the press - short takes

fRoots

Another scintillating and accomplished collection from this abundantly talented master-of-all-things-mando and his partner. Brings together music from England and Scotland, played on mandolins, guitar, bass and fiddle, with three English songs sung beautifully by Hilary. An absolute winner on every count."

Folking.com

...listen to the musical masterpiece and you will be blown away.

... out-of-this-world mandolin playing...

... superb playing, soothing vocals, brilliant harmonies and amazing arrangements

... one of the greatest folk arrangers/musical instrumental masters of our time.

Folk Diary

... his playing is crisp and light and he plays with the confidence and clarity that marks him out as a master musician.

The Daily Telegraph

... the folk record of the year... evocative virtuosity... faultless singing... deliciously uncool

Rock 'n' Reel

Mayor's artistry... is breathtaking... dazzling musicianship that has become his calling card.

BBC Website

A welcome return to CD for the master of stringed instruments and his smooth-voiced partner-in-bass, featuring inspired, intricate compositions and tunes from the British traditions.

Folk & Roots Reviews

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... Hilary's beautiful soaring vocals

were it a piece of art it would happily hang alongside a Picasso.

I can't think of a finer purveyor of the mandolin

Back On The Tracks

Scintillating multi-instrumental magic from mandolin maestro.

Every time I hear Simon Mayor, I'm blown away. There are parts of this CD that set my heart racing, parts that make me laugh with delight and parts that make me feel wonderfully mellow. I can't imagine that there's a more entertaining or impressive mandolin player alive anywhere in the world. I'd love to be proved wrong, but I'm not sure my heart could stand it.

Folk Radio UK

Amazing musical arrangements which set this album apart from any other in this field.

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Rock 'n' Reel

His first CD since 1998 sees mandolin maestro Simon Mayor once again enlisting compatriot Hilary James for another collection of stunning performances and arrangements.

Mayor's artistry on various members of the mandolin family, as well as violin and guitar, is breathtaking. Combining the refined qualities of classical music in a folk setting on 'Three English Songs' - 'Rosebud In June', 'The Hunt Is Up/Bold Reynard' and 'Linden Lea' - for which Hilary James adds her sublimely beautiful voice to proceedings, the set amply displays why the duo are as in demand vocally as they are instrumentally.

Mayor's own compositions also feature predominantly on 'The Wharfedale Suite', where his instrumental genius has all the space it needs to impress and sparkle.

The musical excursion around Britain also takes in their 'Scottish Collection', which gives them a chance to demonstrate their mastery of the Celtic music medium, a perfect example being the version of Burns's 'Such A Parcel Of Rogues', whilst final track 'The Middlesmoor Waltz' provides further confirmation of Mayor's compositional skills, demonstrating superb control and the dazzling musicianship that has become his calling card.

5/5

Sean McGhee (Editor)

The Daily Telegraph

Youthful innovators turned 2006 into a vintage year for folk music and its offshoots, partly for the sounds they produced but mostly for one groundbreaking achievement: making other young people want to listen.

Yet, amid all the excitement about Jim Moray, James Thorkston and graduates of the Newcastle University folk degree course, the older generation was refusing to settle into slippers and rocking chairs. Bob Fox and Show of Hands made career-best albums and, arguably, the folk record of the year came – late and almost unnoticed – from another veteran, Simon Mayor.

After plugging away for years to boost the image of the mandolin, Mayor's musical odyssey from Dorset to Scotland has everything the discerning listener craves: thoughtfully mixed material, evocative virtuosity and (from Hilary James) faultless singing.

Instrumental folk music does not get more cultured than the Wharfedale Suite, inspired by Mayor's love of Pennines walking, and his Scottish Collection.

But a deliciously uncool and politically incorrect peak is reached with the hunting medley, a perky tune embracing James's exquisite interpretation of Bold Reynard.

Colin Randall

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Back On The Tracks

Scintillating multi-instrumental magic from mandolin maestro

Every time I hear Simon Mayor, I'm blown away. I'm not someone who is easily impressed by flashy instrumental virtuosity because, all too often, it can be employed to hide a lack of real musical content. No matter how wonderfully a musician plays, I get restless very quickly if the music doesn't seem to be going anywhere, or seems to lack structure. (Yes, I know that doesn't explain why I love drifty ambient music that goes nowhere but, hey, we're all allowed the occasional lapse of logic.)

This CD is a musical portrait of the British Isles, starting out with the rollicking swing jazz romp *Midnight In Manchester*, ending with the stately *Middlesmoor Waltz* (it's in the Yorkshire Dales) and visiting *Linden Lea*, *Beamsley Beacon* and *Drumblair* along the way. Mayor is accompanied on all tracks by Hilary James on mandobass, double bass or bass guitar, and she also sings with a beautiful clarity and sensitivity on several cuts including *Linden Lea*

The 12 tracks on the album are arranged by the geographical locations they deal with, so *The Wharfedale Suite*, for example, includes three scintillating instrumentals based on places in the valley of the River Wharfe. The violin and mandolin duet on *The Strid* (it's a narrow stretch of the Wharfe near Bolton Priory) is an unalloyed delight, all the more impressive when you realise that Mayor played both instruments and yet managed to make their interplay seem as natural as

Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti in full flight. Some of Mayor's speedier passages in *Coming Down The Moor* are hard to believe but he never lets his astonishing nimble-fingeredness run away with him.

The *Scottish Collection* gives Mayor an opportunity to indulge his love of tartan-tinged tunesmithery, and has a somewhat more baroque feel than much of the rest of the disc. Such *A Parcel Of Rogues* features a multi-tracked fiddle trio, demonstrating again that Mayor's abilities are by no means confined to the mandolin. At times it seems unreasonable that one bloke can be so gifted on so many instruments. The sprightly *Barren Rocks Of Aden* features the disc's only guest appearance when guitarist Frank Kilkelly gets the opportunity to trade harmonised licks with Mayor's mandolin and more than holds his own.

There are parts of this CD that set my heart racing, parts that make me laugh with delight and parts that make me feel wonderfully mellow. I can't imagine that there's a more entertaining or impressive mandolin player alive anywhere in the world. I'd love to be proved wrong, but I'm not sure my heart could stand it.

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Folking.com

Mandolin, mandola, mandocello, violin, guitar, double bass, bass guitar...simply reading the sleeve notes for 'Music from a Small Island' portrays the tremendous talent this long-established duo have to offer; but go on to listen to the musical masterpiece and you will be blown away.

This is Simon Mayor's first CD release since the 'New Celtic Mandolin' in 1998 and is a reflective musical journey from Dorset via his native Yorkshire to Scotland; combining 'Midnight in Manchester', Three English songs (featuring Hilary James's bass and soothing vocals), The Wharfedale Suite (inspired by recent summers spent there), The Scottish Collection (a selection of traditional Scottish folk songs) and to finish 'The Middlesmoor Waltz' .

The entire album has a definite warming nostalgic feel to it, listening conjures images of wild windy mountains and traditional Tudor English dances taking place around great wood burning fires; an England long-gone.

Mayors out-of-this-world mandolin playing features heavily throughout but within The Wharfedale Suite he also plays violin, with outstanding results. There doesn't seem to be any stringed instrument that this man cannot play! Technically superb playing, soothing vocals, brilliant harmonies and amazing arrangements make this album one that has to be listened to. It truly reflects the genius and talent of Mayor as one of the greatest folk arrangers/ musical instrumental masters of our time.

Ruth Palmer

Folk & Roots Reviews

I'm reviewing this latest CD from Simon and Hilary wondering at the majesty of the mandolin and just how suitable it is in a 'mock' Tudor style. In the hands of a 'British' troubadour such as Mr Mayor particularly on the track "Rosebud In June" there is the refined beauty that you would expect and plenty more besides.

His arranging skills are without doubt some of the most thought provoking and intricately balanced pieces of musicianship you will experience and like other 'folk' artists of his ilk such as Alistair Anderson, Andy Irvine and Chris Newman his recordings should be required listening for any scholars of one of the most delicate instruments of the acoustic 'string' family.

The addition of Hilary's beautiful soaring vocals would give Maddy Prior something to think about and if I were to admit it I'd say it's probably the most scintillating track I'll hear this year!

Avoiding the stereotypes of a selection of Irish tunes, he opts for some Scottish melodies of which Scott Skinner's "The Laird Of Drumblair" shows his guitar playing is as gifted as his mandolin performance and the inclusion of "The Barren Rocks Of Aden" which I recognise as the street kids song "Ma, ma would you buy me a banana?" he doesn't slip up once.

This is the kind of recording that were it a piece of art it would happily hang alongside a Picasso. I can't think of a finer purveyor of the mandolin and with only a couple of our American cousins to nearly rival him, thank goodness he's British - Cushty!

Pete Fyfe

Music from a Small Island

Simon Mayor - CD review

Green Man Review

"What a cute record," my 18-year-old son exclaimed when this was running in the CD-player of my home office. I think I would rather use the word "charming," but otherwise we agree. If you want your guitars to be electric, or your records to be filled with heavy drumming or synthesizers, read no further. But if you like real people playing real music without worrying a second about what is popular or fashionable, read on.

Simon Mayor and Hilary James appear and various guises. They can label themselves a duo, or as in this case someone's solo album, with the other half contributing. Whatever name they use their trademark is there, acoustic music played with the light touch only those who really master their instruments can use. Here Mayor plays mandolins of various sizes, violin and guitar, and James different basses, and they both sing.

I guess they have taken the title from Bill Bryson's wonderful book, "Notes from a Small Island," and they have divided the CD up into three sections, "Three English Songs," "The Warfdale Suite" and "Scottish Collection," the first and the last made up of traditional songs and tunes, and the middle suite composed by Mayor. He has also composed the starting and finishing tracks, "Midnight in Manchester" and "The Middlesmoor Waltz."

Many of the traditional tracks are well known, but Mayor and James make them their own. The treatment of "Such a Parcel of Rogues" for instance lets Mayor display

his ability on a number of instruments, and "Rosebud in June" first gets an instrumental arrangement, followed by James's clear soprano voice.

Sometimes I get the feeling that Mayor has hinted at classical composers when arranging the pieces. Here you have many of the classical marks, like tunes being swapped between instruments, delightful harmonies and small interludes. Had Mayor been born in a different age I feel his arrangements would have been written for a string quartet or why not a full symphony orchestra. My verdict is that Mayor and James once again have come up with a lovely record, in a style that is exclusively their own. Cute or charming, take your pick.

Lars Nilsson

Folk Diary

More pyrotechnics on string instruments - fiddle, guitar, mandolo, mandocello and (mainly) mandolin from the very talented Simon. This album is neatly arranged opening with a mandolin instrumental and then going into English songs with long-term associate Hilary James singing "Rosebud in June" and "Linden Lea" before we hear Simon multi-tracked on his three part "The Wharfedale Suite" before moving on to a Scottish selection where he gives a fine interpretation of a number of items from the well known end of the Scottish repertoire.

Always his playing is crisp and light and he plays with the confidence and clarity that marks him out as a master musician.

(VS)

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Rambles

No, this is not Bill Bryson put to music. This is Simon Mayor, ably assisted by Hilary James, proving once again the delight, the joy, the importance of good music well played.

Mayor is one of those people who really can draw magic from wood and strings. Although we do not hear his voice, he exudes joy in the sounds he produces. If ever you hear music speak, it is on albums like this.

On this album, he brings together the music of England and Scotland -- somehow Wales fell off the island. He opens with the very upbeat "Midnight in Manchester."

Then the mandolin is ably augmented by the vocals of James on a wonderful song from the tradition titled, "Rosebud in June." She continues with other vocal pieces such as "Linden Lea," using a poem written by William Barnes.

Mayor composed a great set of tunes for "The Wharfedale Suite," recalling the beauty and majesty of that landscape. He then whisks us north to the wild and wonderful "Scottish Collection," where he arranges some traditional tunes to help us visualize the great land. Among these, "The Barren Rocks of Aden" will lift your spirits and animate your digits. The album closes with the relaxed and relaxing cadence of "The Middlesmoor Waltz."

This is a CD of music to relax with or to visualise those places you have seen or dream of visiting.

Nicky Rossiter

Country Music Gazette

Daar zijn ze weer, Simon & Hilary, inmiddels een bekende verschijning in dit blad. Ze zetten elkaar beurtelings op een

voetstuk. Deze keer is de plaats voor mandoline-meester Simon Mayor. Hij heeft z'n instrumentencollectie weer tevoorschijn gehaald: mandolin, mandola, mandocello, violin, gitaar.

De bijdrage van Hilary James is functioneel, ze speelt double bass, basgitaar en mandobass en zingt gedurende een tiental seconden in "Rosbud in June" Op dit album een thematische indeling: Three English Songs / The Wharfedale Suite / Scottish Collection. Ook vocalen van Simon, maar hier en daar duikt vooral de glasheldere stem van Hilary op, zoals in het breekbare "Bold Reynard" en "Linden Lea".

Op de binnenkant van het achteblad van het CD-boekje prijkt hun inmiddels indrukwekkende collectie albums, van elk apart, van hen samen en heel belangrijk, hun kinderprojecten.

Folk Radio UK

This is an outstanding album in which Simon Mayor has crafted some amazing musical arrangements which set this album apart from any other in this field. Together with Hilary James, an amazing singer and musician, you will be led on a cleverly put together album that I can only describe as genius. I had a lot of fun, yes I said fun, listening to this album. It had me hooked from the first track "Midnight in Manchester" through to the lovely "Middlesmoor Waltz".

It's obvious from the outset that Simon has placed a tremendous amount of thought into the weaving of the tunes and songs he has conjured up for us on this album. The Album has received excellent reviews which I shan't try to re-invent here.

If you want to pleasure your ears with something new and wonderful buy this...