

own solo album *Soma* emphasising the talents within the net. Now *Idir* is At first Light's first full proper band album but the evolution isn't quite complete yet. *Idir* when translated from Gaelic reads 'between and among', and that's where At First Light stand currently – in between establishing itself as a band and achieving a uniquely defined sound among its entity and they are almost there.

The pedigree is unquestionable with core trio of O'Connor, McSherry and second piper Francis McIlkuff holding court with vocalist/fiddler Ciara McCrickard adding necessary light and shade. Guest string players Tony Byrne, Michael McCague and Ruben Bada beef up the musical element and tidy any rough edges. The opening *Magnificent Set* opts for a slow melodic opening rather than greased lightning bluster which is reserved for *Ar Thor An Donn* which harnesses the rugged excitement of McSherry's family band Tamalin with a more refined mature touch. The performances are tight and disciplined, merging a gutsy drive with subtle melodic undercurrents. The stylistic integration of McSherry, O'Connor and McIlkuff is tightly bound and fine-tuned and Ciara McCrickard sounds comfortable within a band context. Her voice, deep with an engaging timbre, is best heard on pensive readings of *Ard Ti Chuain* and *Courting Is A Pleasure* Ensemble performances on *Maire An Cuil Oir Bhui* and *Bethan's Dance* balance introspection and all-out attack resembling The Bothy Band's kinetic outage betimes.

At First Light have grown and developed from prodigious soloists into a band of considerable clout and finesse. *Idir* neatly maps their progress thus far and augurs well for future developments. The evidence here is pretty remarkable, all that's needed is the extra fine tuning and consistency concentrated touring will bring and we're talking serious contenders for Altan and Lunasa's crown.

www.atfirstlight.net

John O'Regan

KATY CARR

Pasport Deluce MDL 414

This is so very good it could actually give the terms 'singer songwriter' and 'concept album' good names. Now there's a notion! London-based

Katy Carr came from the East Midlands but her grandmother's generation in the 1930s



Katy Carr



and '40s were from Poland. Already known for a fascination with all things 1940s and flighty (she's a qualified pilot and her band are called The Aviators), this one's entirely inspired by tales she's collected from Polish WW2 veterans, resistance fighters, survivors of detention camps, the Warsaw uprising and more.

But not only are these songs with real stories and strong images, they've also got great tunes and inspiring arrangements – her own piano and uke plus cello, violin, bass, tuba, trombone, and percussion from Guy Schalom – echoing sounds from both Polish traditional music and the era. And she's such a fabulous singer with a clear, expressive but unaffected voice.

Mostly in English, a little in Polish, the beautifully detailed booklet comes with translations and backgrounds to all the songs and lots of credits: it's tempting to paraphrase it all in a blow-by-blow account of the album but sometimes, frankly, it's better to shut up and let the artefact do the talking.

There's so much work, love and singular talent gone into this on nearly every level – "The BM597 Spitfire which features on *Motylek* was recorded by Katy Carr at Goodwood Festival of Speed..." – that it feels churlish to mention that what's visible on the outside of the bog-standard plastic jewel box with entry-level typesetting on the back gives no clue as to how good everything else is inside: I nearly overlooked it here. Cries out for classier packaging values. Don't let that put you off: this is major.

www.katycarr.com

Ian Anderson

KIMBER'S MEN

The Strength of The Swell A Private Label APL014

Kimber's Men began their voyage in 2001 principally as a quartet singing nothing but sea shanties. Following the untimely death of Roger Hepworth in 2005, the recruitment of two new members brought a considerable expansion of repertoire, with the result that today's quintet is regarded as one of the country's premier exponents of all manner of maritime music including original songs penned by crew members.

Their latest studio set – a well-stocked double album – is undoubtedly their finest collection to date. It presents at its core a modest compendium of shanties that are in the main reasonably well known on the maritime music scene but here are served up in lively, vital and refreshingly different treatments that, while retaining the authentic stamp of the worksong, never feel shouty or exaggerated in their gestures. Purists need not be offended either, even though Kimber's Men determinedly employ both harmonies and some doubletracking of chorus lines for a fuller sound (not that Kimber's Men have ever sounded under-strength, with their superbly rounded blend of voices that includes the famous rock-solid – or should I say earth's-core! – bass of 'ship's cook' John Bromley).

The worksongs are complemented by a handful of spirituals, classics like Stan Rogers' *Mary Ellen Carter* and Bill Meek's *Harry Eddom*, and a clutch of fine originals by 'ship's captain' David Buckley including *I Will Always Be There*, *Asleep In The Sand* and his Hugill tribute *Stan The Shantyman*. Any necessary instrumentation is handled sensitively and adds to the release's listenability. The set sports copious, authoritative and informed booklet notes with full lyrics, and is excellent value-for-money.

Available via Amazon.

David Kidman

KILMARNOCK EDITION

Pay It Forward Greentrax Recordings, CDTRAX370

Kilmarnock Edition is a six-piece supergroup of singer-songwriters who are all established solo artists in their own right. The band comprises the well-known Greenock singer Yvonne Lyon (vocals and piano), Scots singer Alex Hodgson from Prestonpans (vocals and acoustic guitars), Gaelic singer Fiona J Mackenzie, from Dingwall (vocals and kalimba), Lisa Rigby (vocals, acoustic guitar and shruti box) from Edinburgh, Italian-born Roberto Cassani from Perth (upright bass and vocals), and Stu Clark from Edinburgh (percussion and backing vocals). Additional accompaniment is provided by Mary Ann Kennedy (clàrsach), Allan Henderson (fiddle), Craig Dunsmore (trombones), Jaimie Stables (trumpets, flugelhorn) and David Lyon (accordeon et al).

The group were initially brought together as individual winners of the Burns International Songhouse of 2009. They were closeted together for a week to write original songs in English, Gaelic and Scots, and the upshot was a gig in the Scottish Parliament on St Andrews Day, and this splendid, diverse album of poppy folk and folk-inflected pop. On a number of tracks (such as the beautiful hymn-like *Seasons*) the singers all take turns on lead vocal, flitting from English to Gaelic to Scots. Yvonne Lyon's infectious *Only In Your Love* will appeal to anyone who likes the work of Eddi Reader. Lisa Rigby's spine-tingling anthem *Women O' The Earth* deserves to be adopted by a bestselling film soundtrack and earn her a fortune. Smoke Robinson fans will appreciate Alex Hodgson's soulful voice and the funky brass accompaniment on *Sunshine*. There is laugh-out-loud panto theatricality in the comedy duet *How Can We Live?* by Roberto Bassani and Fiona Mackenzie. This eclectic collection bubbles with exuberant musical variety, gentle humour and vivacious pleasure. The sheer range of musical styles brings back fond memories of Wildcat Theatre shows and Fairground Attraction concerts. Mo làn bhean-nachd oirbh!

www.kilmarnockedition.com

Paul Matheson

STEFANO SALETTI AND PICCOLA BANDA IKONA

Folkpolitik Finisterre FT57

As the title suggests, this album contains folk music that is tied up with politics, in particular music that is connected with popular uprisings against autocratic governments in the Mediterranean area.

The opening track, *Piazza Tahrir*, ingeniously blends street sounds from a documentary about Tahrir Square with the sound of an oud from an Oum Kalthoum track to conjure up the atmosphere of the popular uprising that was Egypt's part of the Arab Spring. The album goes on to draw together music from different locations and time periods: from the expulsion of the Jews and Arabs from Catholic Spain in 1492; the rebelling of Sardinian people during the French Revolution; Catalan and Republican opposition to Francoism during the Spanish Civil War; the Portuguese and Greek opposition to their respective military dictatorships; the exiled Palestinian diaspora and a few songs from the band's home country of Italy. Much of the material is drawn from sources close to the events, but some are songs composed by Stefano Saletti and sung in Sabir, a lingua franca used by pirates, sailors, merchants and ship-owners.

Some of the songs are directly about the conflicts and some have become associated with events by a quirk of history, but none