

*Cármina- My *Crescent City*

Preview

In the past we already sang the praises of Cármina's qualities based on productions such as ***On a Quiet Street*** and ***Weather in the Heart***. We recently received a preview of their latest CD ***My Crescent City***. This CD, produced by **Donal Lunny**, once again confirms the great quality produced by this band.

Music by Cármina can be best labelled as Celtic/Jazz. The fusion between Jazz and Folk is made intelligently. Beautiful poetic lyrics (**Pippa Marland**) which are written from a personal viewpoint but occasionally have a universal content are accompanied by a suitable acoustic arrangement (**Rob King**). Despite the large complement of musicians Cármina sounds more subdued than on previous albums with the exception of a few tracks. The whole package exudes a pleasant sense of intimacy.

Apart from the core band members, guest performers such as **Ritchie Buckley** (sax). **Paul Williamson** (flugelhorn, trumpet), and **Donal Lunny** (bodhran, bouzouki) feature on the album. The CD consists of ten tracks: seven by Marland/ King, two covers and one traditional.

Cármina fans will recognise ***23/In the Morning*** and ***Lord Franklin*** from previous albums. However, both tracks have been newly arranged.

Cármina weaves Irish traditionals through their own compositions. The type of arrangement has been given much thought, particularly by **Rob King**. Through these built in traditionals the expression of the tracks is increased.

The outro to ***23 in the Morning*** is ***The Moneghan Twig***, a reel which is a perfect match for the melancholy/optimistic lyrics of this song because the key continually alternates between major and minor. The same reel is the prelude to the splendid sax piece by **Ritchie Buckley**. ***The Mountain Road*** is another magnificent reel which is part of the traditional, ***Lord Franklin***, on this album. The most exquisite performance of this song will probably be that by **Michael O'Dhonnail** (with **Kevin Burke - *Promenade*- 1979**), who died last year, but Cármina's version also makes a lasting impression. One of the main reasons for this is Pippa Marland's marvelous vocals but the sensitive pipes/flute pieces by **Dairmaid Moynihan** and the brass part by **Paul Williamson** add to the emotional charge of this story of deprivation.

The flute part played in ***Stretched on Your Grave*** by **Brian Morrissey** is the complete opposite of that of his colleague, Moynihan. Morrissey's performance of the reel ***Toss the Feathers*** at the end of the track is almost grim and aggressive, which ties in wonderfully with the sentiments of anger and rebellion expressed in the lyrics. Incidentally, ***Stretched on your Grave*** is sometimes mistakenly attributed to **Sinéad O'Connor**. The music was actually composed by **Paul King (*Scullion*- 1979)**. The lyrics are a translation of the 17th century Irish poem ***Taim shinte as do h'uiagh*** written by **Frank O'Connor**.

Marland got her inspiration for the title track ***My Crescent City*** from a poem by renowned poet and jazz critic **Phillip Larkin**, who wrote an ode to saxophone player **Sidney Becket**. The Crescent City is a less well-known nickname for **New Orleans**, which is generally known as **The Big Easy**.

Cármina's great social commitment is shown in ***Blessed are the Broken***, which won the **Tipperary International Song of Peace Award** in 2007. Song

of Peace is part of the **Tipperary Festival of Peace** at which musicians as well as politicians (past award winners include **Bill Clinton** and **Nelson Mandela**) are decorated for their peace efforts. The **Nottingham Evening Post** ran the headline ***Pippa's Perfect Song of Peace*** and anyone who listens to this track has to agree with that headline.

Christmas songs or rather songs which represent the Christmas spirit are a reoccurrence in Cármina's work. In the past they recorded **Joni Mitchell's** song, ***River***. Now they add their own flavour to **Eliana Tomkins' *December Song*** (on the album ***Rapture***). The track, which is an extremely pleasurable listening experience even outside the Holiday season, is a poem written by **Carol Ann Duffy** set to music. It has the feel of a love song.

The album is a musical feast. Firstly because of Pippa Marland's velvety voice, which moves me most in the slow ballads. Songs such as ***Hungry Hill***, ***Still Falls the Rain***, ***December *Song*** and ***My Crescent City*** get under your skin and settle themselves there permanently. Saxophone player **Ritchie Buckley** plays stunning solos in tracks such as ***My Crescent City***, ***Mostly Myself*** and ***Cold, Clear of the Mountain***. New to the Cármina sound are the trumpet and the flugelhorn (**Paul Williamson**) but these instruments genuinely add to it. Williamson's accompaniment of the beautiful ballad, ***Still Falls the Rain***, on the muted trumpet are of great beauty.

Another element which I greatly appreciate is the fact that **Geoff Castle** plays the piano more often than the synthesizer. However, the latter is used extremely effectively in ***Stretched on Your Grave***. The piano is inextricably linked to the Cármina sound. Geoff Castle shows himself to be a worthy successor of the deceased **Pete Jacobsen** in his sparkling piano solos for example in ***My Crescent City***. Violinist **Chris Haigh** provides a phenomenal fiddle break in ***Blessed are the Broken***, **David Goodier** (bass) and **Nick France** (drums, percussion) are the solid rhythm section of the band. In **Brian Morrissey** (banjo, whistle and bodhran) and **Dairmaid Moynilian** (uilleann pipes and whistle) Cármina has found two extremely talented musicians. They add the Irish touch to the Cármina sound on this CD together with **Donal Lunny**. The ensemble between Lunny (bouzouki) and Dairmaid Moynihan (uilleann pipes) in a tune composed by Moynihan, which ends the track ***Blessed are the Broken***, is nothing short of impressive.

Bookers of (folk) events apparently don't share my enthusiasm for Cármina. The band goes on tour in the Netherlands in April 2008. This tour up until now is limited to only one concert at the Folkhook in Sevenum on April 6th. This is a crying shame, that is the conclusion to which you will come after listening to the new Cármina. The band is still negotiating with several record companies (among which EMI the Netherlands) about a release of this album. We'll keep you posted.

Grade: 9+

Paul van der Wiel

translated by Meike - many thanks