

NIAMH DUNNE

*Portraits*

Private Label ND001

Limerick's Niamh Dunne is already renowned for her accomplishments on fiddle; a classically trained violinist, she's also, for the past eight years, been a key member of the award-winning band Beoga, with whom she's recorded three CDs. Prior to which, Niamh's only available recording had been *Legacy*, a joint album with her father Mickey (the famed Limerick piper) and her sister Brid.

Now, at last, Niamh has finally got around to releasing a proper solo album that fully capitalises on her deep love of song (although she does get to play the fiddle too). It's a beguiling mix of traditional and contemporary material which seems to get that tricky balance just right and very naturally too. The depth of her feeling for her native region and its heritage is apparent right from the outset on *Ballyneety's Walls*, which tells of Limerick's victory during the Siege Of Limerick in 1690, which is aptly followed by the yearning ballad *Beauty Of Limerick*; later on the album we find another Limerick standout, *Cáilín Rua*.

Niamh's wonderful, warm singing voice is ideally focused by the excellent recording and receives a perfectly judged degree of instrumental support from a small pool of musicians that includes Seán Óg Graham (guitars), father Mickey (Uilleann pipes), Trevor Hutchinson (bass), Kate Ellis (cello), Barry Kerr (low whistles) and Ramon Murray (bodhrán, percussion), while backing vocals come courtesy of Noelie McDonnell and Nicola Joyce. Other musicians put in isolated appearances to great effect: there's Richard Nelson's dobro adding poignancy to Joe Dolan's *Foxy Devil*, Cathal Hayden's sensitive fiddle on *The Games People Play* (a song which Niamh makes her own by taking a more reflective stance than most), Catriona McKay's harp on *Cáilín Rua* and Damien O'Kane's banjo on the spirited opener.

But this is so much Niamh's own personal collection, unerringly conveying the essence of her interpretive flair and her gorgeous singing. Every single track is a highlight in its own right, and the listener feels privileged to be in Niamh's intimate company for this all-too-brief timespan. While her version of Richard Thompson's *Strange Affair* can hold up well to competition, it's also been a revelation to discover new songs through Niamh's advocacy – here I'm thinking especially of Seán McCarthy's *Shanagolden* (another song with a Limerick connection, incidentally) and the beautiful traditional song *Jimmy Mo Mhíle Stór* (Niamh's treatment of which is crowned by Seán Óg Graham's impeccable flowing guitar solo). All told, this is a quite sublime record, one that's been worth the wait.

David Kidman