



Kate Rusby **"The Girl Who Couldn't Fly"** Compass Records

Kate Rusby's sixth solo release **"The Girl Who Couldn't Fly,"** I guess I'm counting 2002's **"10"** as an album rather than a compilation/retrospective, comes across as simply more of what has gone before. It's easy to understand why - all of Kate's solo albums have been produced by hubby John McCusker - and while the guy is a bona-fide talent, on her recordings he errs on the side of safety rather than seeking adventure and indulging in wayward [musical] excess. What's more the source of the songs can best be described as the "tired old treadmill" mix of, traditional arranged by Rusby/McCusker, or words traditional and music by Kate, while finally, there's a higher than [ever] before percentage of "traditional sounding" originals penned by this Barnsley bred lass. There's significant comment on the latter element in the penultimate paragraph. Oh yes and there's one cover song from a non-folk source. Apart from the introduction of a brass section on a few of the cuts, between tracks 1 and 12, competent as the playing is, there's nothing going on that's going to shake the folk music world to its foundations.....rather a number of time-served Rusby fans may develop an "urge for going."

The album opens with a sly wink in the form of the bawdy, nay familiar "Game Of All Fours," trad. arr. by Messrs. Rusby and McCusker, in which a gentleman and a beautiful maiden [aren't they always] happen to meet one morning, and are soon sharing an assignation by the side of the road. The thought crossed my mind while listening to this album that the traditional folk canon is full to overflowing with tales of men and women eager to sport with one another while there are precious few examples of same sex romps. Slow paced, "The Lark," the first of seven new Rusby creations, gives voice to a restless spirit who simply withered away for the lack of love. Kate shares the vocal with Idewild's Roddy Woomble on her second newie "No Names," but it comes across as just another wistful tale of a couple, one of whom is about to spin off this mortal coil. A lyric about death underscored by a folk tune, nothing new there!

The traditionally credited words to "Mary Blaize" are actually that of Oliver Goldsmith [b. d.], the full title of his poem being **"An Elegy On The Glory Of Her Sex, Mrs Mary Blaize,"** to which Rusby has furnished the music. It appears that, in life, Mary Blaize demonstrated philanthropy to all she met yet died alone. The plaintive sounding "A Ballad," with words traditional and music by Kate Rusby, finds a fair young maiden not only jilted on her wedding day, but another [woman] standing in her place at the altar. **"The Girl Who Couldn't Fly"** was released in the UK over a month prior to the Stateside edition on Compass Records, and one UK reviewer brought a smile to the face of this aged scribe by posing the question, why had Rusby decided to cut "You Belong To Me" from the **"Shrek"** [2002] soundtrack? The innocence of youth! While the writing credit may read Pee Wee King, Redd Stewart and Chilton Price, the latter actually wrote the song while the other pair shared credit in exchange for publicising it. Patti Page was the first to record "You Belong To Me" and reached U.S. Pop # 4, while circa 1952 Jo Stafford scored a # 1 Pop single in the U.S.A. and in the U.K. - Stafford was the first female vocalist to top the U.K. chart. Stateside, a decade later, The Duprees version peaked at # 7, while Dean Martin's reading only made the lowly # 12. Plaintive best describes Kate's reading.

Taking a few liberties with historical fact the "Bonnie House Of Airlie," a traditional song arranged by Rusby/McCusker, recalls the raising to the ground of the Scottish house of Airlie by the wicked Earl of Argyle, the premise being that the Earl of Airlie supported the Stuart dynasty. While the song doesn't go any further, revenge was not only sought it was sweetly executed. The latter cut apart the second half of **"The Girl Who Couldn't Fly"** is exclusively the domain of Kate Rusby compositions. While her effort is commendable, the goose-bump count was non-existent as one track merged into the next. Anyone naïve enough to employ the words "moon" and "shadow" in a song title or lyric, knows little about the history of popular music. Yusuf Islam, in a younger guise, took out the sole patent on that pairing decades ago.

Each time Rusby repeats them one hears the earlier, and probably better, song. In "The Elfin Knight" the unnamed narrator declares her love for the warrior, "Wandering Soul" is a home from the road song, while the "official" closing track, "Fare Thee Well" [in the vein of "No Names"] is self-explanatory by its title. The "bonus track," "Little Jack Frost," featured in the animated cartoon "**The Tale Of Jack Frost**" broadcast by BBC tv [in the U.K.] on Christmas Day 2004. Based on David Melling's book of the same name [ISBN: 0340852003 Hodder Children's Books] the story [and cartoon] features "*the inhabitants of an enchanted forest who are fascinated by a small boy with snow white skin and magical powers who arrives in their midst.*" For obvious reasons, Rusby's lyric is therefore aimed at the children's music market.

In flight Rusby's voice is as usual - sublime, the sounds generated by the top-notch crew of support players can't be faulted, but the collection lacks excitement due to the presence of too many [plaintive] ballads, while the lyrical content is best summed up by....heard it before, too many times. Mark time on recordings too often and your fans walk....

Folkwax Score 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 10/05.