

Dougie MacLean
Early



Dougie MacLean “**Early**” Dunkeld Records

OK, here’s the premise. This album contains ten songs that Dougie penned during his early years as a performing musician, none of which have previously appeared on recordings this Scot has released on his own label, Dunkeld Records. Eight of the songs, have, however, featured on albums MacLean made for other labels, circa 1978/1982.

According to the liner, the oldest song here, “Sad Dreams,” and never previously recorded, was written when MacLean was aged sixteen. That would make its vintage *circa 1970*, and this Perthshire bred *son of the soil*, didn’t make his recording debut until the mid-seventies when he was a member of the Scottish traditional music quartet, The Tannahill Weavers. With his skill as a writer developing, by the mid eighties, MacLean’s lyrics began marking him out as a man who held profound respect for the land and the traditions of sustaining it, as well as the people who worked on it. All of the foregoing was balanced with MacLean’s penchant for introspection, melancholy even, and “Sad Dreams” proves to be an early example of that. The opening track, “Lover You Don’t Have To Cry,” is a self-explanatory title written for his Australian born wife, Jennifer, probably during the latter half of the seventies, and it now appears on a recording for the first time. A long established facet of the packaging of Dougie’s recordings is the inclusion of watercolour paintings by Jennifer MacLean, and in this case “Butterstone Bells,” grace the front of this album liner.

In chronological order of appearance “Till Tomorrow” and “Over My Mountain,” date from the 1978 Plant Life duo recording “**Caledonia**” that Dougie made with the late Alan Roberts. In 1980, and recorded for the same label, MacLean made his solo debut with “**Snaigow**,” and it’s represented here by “Rolling Home.” His sophomore solo disc, and final Plant Life release, “**On A Wing And A Prayer**,” surfaced the following year, and here Dougie reprises “More Fool I” and “Silver And Gold.” In 1982 the Dambuster label issued MacLean’s “**Butterstone**,” a collection that took its name from the village, near Dunkeld, which has been the Scots base for some two decades. Three cuts are featured from the latter collection, namely “Just A Little Thunder,” “Down Too Deep” and “Sailing To Australia.”

Of the foregoing MacLean back catalogue, they are what they – *early works*. That said, I would pick out a few cuts for special mentions. “Sailing To Australia,” is a reality that faced thousands upon thousands of Scots, particularly during the Highland clearances of the opening half of the nineteenth century. Although non-specific in terms of timescale, MacLean’s lyric includes the reference “*So I must go from this cold Highland snow, Now that the hard times have come.*” Songs of parting are ingrained in the Scottish psyche and “Till Tomorrow” is one of the best, while “Over My Mountain” is almost its antithesis. According to Dougie it was inspired by Mount Benachally, near his Perthshire home, and is a forerunner of MacLean classics that eulogise his *native soil*, such as “Solid Ground” and “The Land.”

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 02/04