



## Maria Dunn **"The Peddler"** Distant Whisper Music

Four years have elapsed since the release of Alberta based Scottish/Canadian Maria Dunn's last solo recording, **"We Were Good People."** Where Dunn's storytelling lyrics consistently embraced historic fact on earlier albums, the characters and events portrayed in **"The Peddler"** are in the main fictional, although, on a couple of occasions [here], contemporary social comment has crept in.

In terms of melodic approach a distinctly Celtic flavour pervades this collection, the ten songs having been penned in their entirety by Dunn. The energetic opening track "Katie Comes A-Callin'," c/w jig, will certainly arouse, within earshot, any slumbering listener. Initially sung a cappella, Dunn's focus in "The Peddler" is war. The lyric reflects that a recent conflict was marketed with vigour by politicians and power brokers, akin to a peddler cajoling the public to *"buy his [tawdry] wares."* Sisterly sibling rivalry relative to loving the same man is explored in the *murder ballad* "The Elder Sister," and the narrator states [categorically] at the outset, *"Good People, I must warn you, I'm the villain of this song."* The opening lines *"The horrors of this bloody war, I'll take to my grave"* set the scene in "Tell Her I Was Brave," the conflict being a contemporary one based upon the subsequent insight *"there's bombers overhead."* Dunn's lyric concludes that it's ordinary citizens who pay the ultimate price when warmongers satisfy their lust for battle[s].

Where "The Elder Sister" focused on rivalry, "You Can't Take That Away" reflects on [sibling] harmony. Based, loosely, on the life of Mary Read who disguised herself as a man and joined pirate Calico Jack's crew, "Sailor Song" portrays a seventeenth century woman, a skilled singer and fiddle player, ahead of time. "La Baule" is a wistful sounding instrumental featuring Dunn's accordion, album producer Shannon Johnson's fiddle, Simon Marion's acoustic guitar and Jeremiah McDade's whistle, and takes its name from the [Atlantic] coastal resort in North-West France.

In "Signal Hill" a father travels westward across Canada in search of work, but eventually returns [home] to construct a home in the place where his heart always lay. The life of an émigré to Canada who, born in Poland circa 1906, lived there through the horrors of WWI is the focus in "Chavala, Eva." After coming to the 'new world' in 1922, in time, Eva found peace, love and, as a skilled seamstress, prosperity. At the close, a mature in years Eva is portrayed enjoying one of life's true riches, observing her daughters' children grow up. This album, Dunn's fourth, closes with "William McIlroy's" a celebration in word and melody of a beloved uncle who passed away during 2007.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10.

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 01/09.