



New album by Edinburgh Fiddler and Composer
Anna-Wendy Stevenson
celebrates Scotland's Capital City



"Bursting with melodic invention, drama and palpable warmth for Auld Reekie. Composition is in Stevenson's blood"
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Nominated for the Scottish New Music Award

MAVERICK

CD REVIEWS - THE NEW RELEASES

Michelle Anthony

TORNADOES
Merclwyn Records

★★★☆☆

Life's stormy weather sometimes gives way to a beautiful reprieve



There's something familiar about the sound of Michelle Anthony's voice. There's no way to avoid comparisons to Aimee Mann—she shares that same clean-sounding, upbeat pop sound built around a lush, near-perfect voice and inventive elements of rock to keep things moving forward. This is Anthony's third release—she's no novice. But, like Mann and 'Til Tuesday, she's abandoned the country-rock sounds of her past in favour of lighter fare, with a message in mind.

An almost too-sweet delivery of *Spare Me* with its pulsing dance beat thankfully gains traction with the addition of distorted guitars and banjo over a robust chorus while the title track bites deeper, despite its plodding pace, as guitars ring the song into something memorable. *Permanent* proves an outstanding example of Anthony's beautiful voice yet, despite a rousing chorus and powerful piano, the song never gets fully airborne. Not so with *Black Cold Heart*—an album highlight—featuring vocals that drip like honey while deft accompaniment from Grant Tye's reliable line-up of 6-stringed secret weapons work wonders. Likewise, *Vacancy*—a sturdy, organ-guitar driven outing, injects a bit of magic into its melody. The supremely hummable chorus of *Beautiful* is something you don't want to stop too soon. At the same time, the comparably dull *January Singers* can't end soon enough, despite its back half. The party kicks into high gear with *Don't Deny*—a piano-based song that benefits from Anthony's ability to bend her voice, distinguishing it from the equally lush background vocals with a hook you can chew on. The slow, subtle *Yellow Harmony* features tasteful piano, ethereal backup vocals and more of Tye's arsenal of dreamy guitar sounds. The closing *Lights Of Chicago* is an ambient blur of sounds—heavenly chorales without any discernible direction and squalling guitars—yet, for all its apparent lack of cohesion, it builds into something wonderful that deserts the listener far too soon.

That she and husband, Scott and their two children have weathered personal storms over the last four years and survived to see a better day is the underlying theme that fuels *Tornadoes*. Fact is, Anthony is sitting on a powderkeg—if this voice were better-known, there'd be no stopping her. Her angelic range, intelligent lyrics and complex compositions sometimes tread ethereal—almost cosmic—turf but she leaves no doubt she's a burgeoning talent whose next move can't happen soon enough. **Eric Thom**

www.michelleanthonymusic.com

Mike & Peggy Seeger

FLY DOWN LITTLE BIRD
Applesseed Recordings

★★★☆☆

Mike and Peggy visit songs first heard during their childhood and teen years.



Mike Seeger passed away on August 7, 2009, a week short of his seventy-sixth birthday, and he's joined on this album by sister Margaret 'Peggy' Seeger, his junior by two years. *FLY DOWN LITTLE BIRD* is therefore by way of a musical memorial for the late Mike Seeger, folk musician and folklorist. Seeger means we're talking American folk music royalty and a dynasty that can hold its own with the Guthrie and Carter clans. Historically speaking, music permeates the Seeger gene. Their father, Charles Louis Seeger one time Julliard (music) professor, was a noted musicologist and composer, while among many accomplishments their composer/musician mother Ruth Crawford Seeger transcribed the songs for the John and Alan Lomax collection *OUR SINGING COUNTRY: FOLK SONGS AND BALLADS* (1941). For the record, Pete Seeger is their elder half-brother.

Raised in such a musically fertile environment, it was almost predestined that the siblings would become musicians...and almost unquestionably of the folk persuasion. Alexia Smith's liner note refers to Peggy as: 'his earliest musical buddy,' the siblings began playing stringed instruments in their early teens, and Mike went on to found the folk group New Lost City Ramblers. Peggy resided in Britain for over three decades with husband, singer-songwriter Ewan MacColl.

The fourteen folk songs on *FLY DOWN LITTLE BIRD* were recorded between 2004 and 2008, mainly in the study of Mike's Lexington, Virginia home, and they begin with an a cappella rendition of *Old Bangum*. Further to my earlier insight it's no surprise that over one-third of the selections bear the credit: 'recorded by John and Alan Lomax', while their father Charles edited *The Farmer Is The Man*. Mike accompanies his voice with banjo, fiddle and harmonica, while Peggy plays banjo, guitar, dulcimer and piano. Although *The Dodger Song* lyric dates from the 1930s, it pulls no punches with regard to deceitful, if not downright dishonest, lawyers, doctors, merchants, farmers and more. Has anything changed? The best-known tunes here are probably *Cindy* and the penultimate *Little Birdy*. *Red River Jig*, the album's only instrumental and a rather spirited one at that, with Mike on fiddle and Peggy on piano, closes *FLY DOWN LITTLE BIRD*. **Arthur Wood** <http://www.peggyseeger.com/>

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