



Arty McGlynn, Chris Newman, Nollaig Casey and Maire Ni Chathasaigh **“Heartstring Sessions”** Old Bridge Music

Here we have two women - sisters actually - raised in West Cork, Ireland and their respective guitar playing husbands, one Irish [born in Omagh, Co. Tyrone] the other English [born in Stevenage, Hertfordshire]. Maire Ni Chathasaigh took up the harp at the age of eleven and is credited with reinventing its use in Irish traditional music. Her sister Nollaig Casey's chosen instrument is the fiddle and, frankly, it would be easier to list artists she hasn't performed/recorded with in the Irish traditional and contemporary folk scene. Regarding the latter comment, the same goes for husband Arty McGlynn. As for Chris Newman, he is acknowledged as one of the planet's most accomplished acoustic guitarists.

The quartet opens with Newman's amusingly titled and rhythmically spirited instrumental “Wild Goose Chase,” one of only five original compositions in this fourteen track collection. Later in this set, Nollaig contributes “The Shooting Star” and Arty follows with “Reminiscing.” For a number of years, Newman has been a music lecturer at Newcastle University and, according to the liner notes, the melody to the second track “Tom Cronin's Homework” was created by one of his students. Essentially an instrumental album that leans heavily on arrangements of traditional material – there are only two vocal tracks - jigs, reels and more pervade. “Song Of The Heart” is melodically slow and wistful, while the almost sedate “The Yellow Barber” is teamed with Bill Monroe's rate of knots “Gold Rush,” and the closing selection of reels “The Old Bush”/“Spike Island Lasses”/“The Crooked Road” are wild and energetic.

Featuring a lyric by Donegal poet William Allingham [1824 - 1899], “Among The Heather” is the first of two songs on which Nollaig takes the lead vocal, the other being the traditional “A Mhaire Bhan Og” [the title translates as “Fair Young Mary”]. Not only was Merle Travis an American original as far as his songwriting was concerned, he developed his own syncopated style of finger picking which was dubbed ‘Travis picking.’ Here, employing acoustic and electric guitars and a bass, Arty and Chris inject life and energy into Merle's “Saturday Night Shuffle,” and combine again later in the disc for the Latin flavoured “El Vals Argentino.”

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 01/09.