



Lilt's CD "Little Falls" reviewed at irishphiladelphia.com, January 31, 2014

Review: "Little Falls" by Lilt

Some reviews write themselves. This is one of them.

I'll cut to the chase. "Little Falls" is a relatively new CD (late November 2013) from Keith Carr on bouzouki, banjo, mandolin and vocals, and the German-born flutist Tina Eck, also on tin whistle. Together performing as "Lilt". It is one of the finest recordings of Irish music I've heard in a long time.

The whole thing, from beginning to end, feels fresh, exhilarating, and wonderfully, blissfully alive. When I was thinking about how I would describe the sound these two produce, I remembered the title of an old Canadian Brass album: "High, Bright, Light and Clear." That's it in a nutshell.

There are a few minor flaws, but you would probably need the aural equivalent of an electron microscope to hear them. These two are so together as to be musically inseparable. They sound like one instrument. And both, of course, are seasoned pros. They play at a very high level.

Carr and Eck came together at traditional Irish music sessions around the Washington, D.C., area, so they're experienced sessioneers.

Sessions are spontaneous. Players forget how certain tunes go, or they remember after they've forgotten, and it seems like they often can't remember the name of the tune they've just played because, hey, they know a million of them. How can you keep track?

But every once in a while, the musicians will launch into a set of reels, and the whole thing just seems to be too impossibly great to believe. The music seems to spiral and soar to new heights. You wish you had remembered to turn on your digital recorder or iPhone because that particular moment would never come around again.

"Little Falls" isn't as spontaneous and wonderfully undisciplined, but still, it seems to capture those memorable moments. The CD obviously boasts better production. It's all well-rehearsed. That said, when you listen to this CD, you can imagine yourself sitting with a pint of ale at one of those D.C. sessions. Indeed, Eck and Carr are joined on most tracks by their session friends.

So enough with the gushing. What's all the gushing leading up to? What is "Little Falls"? And why are there so many questions?

Every track is a winner to a greater or lesser degree. But certain tracks are standouts.

I particularly liked "Planxty Dermot Grogan", featuring Tina Eck, accompanied by Carr on bouzouki and

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Kristen Jones on cello. It's as sweet and airy as spun sugar.

There's a set featuring the reels "Eddie Kelly's" and "John Brosnan's". The duo plays "Eddie Kelly's" like an air, and there are times when the tune almost sounds like Tudor court music. They pick it up with "John Brosnan's", and there's a graceful, seamless transition from the first tune to the second. But it's "Kelly's" that I really love.

Well-known sean-nos dancer Shannon Dunne steps out on the third track, a set of reels, "The Messenger" and "Roscommon Reel". It's a winner.

Carr shows off his banjo chops on the first tune in another set of reels, "The Galway Reel", "Seamus Thompson's" and "View Across the Valley". Those chops are considerable. Eck joins in with John Dukes on guitar for the second tune, and on the third tune, it's Dukes again -- this time on bodhran -- and fiddler Graham DeZarn.

Finally, there's a bonus track, not listed on the cover, and I wish I could tell you what the tune is. All I know is that you can really hear Carr on banjo at his very best, taking the lead on a reel that sounds more old-timey than Irish. And yet not. It's syncopated and jazzy, more newgrass than bluegrass. Catchy fiddling and guitar playing throughout. And there's another instrument somewhere in there that I'm not quite picking up. But really, really fun. It really is a bonus.

Bottom line: Buy "Little Falls". You'll play it until it skips.