

NIAMH PARSONS

Heart's Desire Green Linnet GLCD 1219

After two eclectic albums with the Loose Connections and a spell in Arcady, Niamh went back to her roots (well, in reality she'd never left them) as a singer in the traditional style, without compare. Two absolutely stunning solo albums followed, which sort of makes *Heart's Desire* that difficult third album. In an age where novelty and innovation seem more important than quality, it's a brave person who resists the temptation and sticks to what they do best. Which rather makes it the difficult third album for this reviewer, who totally exhausted his list of allowable superlatives in *fR194* and 209. So we'll take as read the glorious vocals and subtle interpretive skills that make Niamh one of the best singers on the planet.

If any evidence is needed, the opening *My Lagan Love* is a tour-de-force, an object lesson in tackling one of the tradition's hardest songs to sing; the contrast with the delightfully gentle *Rigs Of Rye*, which follows, is remarkable. There are more contemporary songs (in a traditional style) than on the earlier solo albums, including Andy Irvine's *West Coast Of Clare*, Bill Caddick's *Syracuse*, and Mark Knopfler's *Done With Bonaparte* (sung to a traditional tune). Well-known traditional songs include *The Bonny Light Horseman* and *A Kiss In The Morning Early*.

Guitarist and touring partner Graham Dunne once again proves his worth as a delicate accompanist and also contributes a couple of virtuoso instrumental tracks; Josephine Marsh (accordeon), Niamh's sister Ann (vocals) and a few other friends make occasional contributions, but the real star is Niamh's singing. Niamh researches and chooses her material with great care: producer Denis Cahill has done just as careful a job capturing the essence of her voice, and letting the singer and the song shine through. *Heart's Desire* is dedicated to her late father, and there's a certain wistfulness and tinge of sadness throughout. It's probably her best album yet, and what better tribute could there be?

Bob Walton