

**We regret that we are unable to bring you any of John Brophy's CD Reviews this month as John's mother passed away when we were compiling these pages. We are sure you will all join us in prayers for her and wish John well in this time of grief. No doubt he'll be bouncing back next month with a bagful of reviews.**

**NIAMH PARSONS with  
Graham Dunne  
HEARTS DESIRE  
Green Linnet GLCD 12 19  
14 Tracks.**

This is the third Green Linnet album in as many years from Niamh Parsons and lays down a benchmark for traditional singing in English that will be emulated for a long time to come. The album opens with a spare rendition of My Lagan Love with touches of Seán nos technique folded gently in, next up is Robin Dransfield's Rigs of Rye and at this stage I went back into my vinyl collection, to find that Niamh has rescued a number of songs from the 70s folk club heyday and nurtured them back to life: Banks of the

Clyde, The West Coast of Clare, A Kiss in The Morning Early (less jaunty than the Mick Hanly version), Broken Hearted I will Wander, early Christy Moore with Bill Caddick's Syracuse. That is the one track which haunts me, (maybe it's because I used to live round the corner from the great man Caddick, maybe because I can remember the Vietnam conflict). Poignant too that it gets a second wind as the American forces are once again engaged in an Asian war. Talking of war songs, Done with Bonaparte is a real "must learn" the first time I heard it, I said "it's got to be one Frank Harte collected", but no, it's from Mark Knopfler and married here to the air Valentia Island (a favourite of Séamus Ennis) it has the patina of antiquity yet is as fresh as Brennan's bread.

Graham Dunne backs Niamh on guitar, the pair has been on road for the past couple of years and through countless live gigs the pairing have developed an uncanny understanding. Tony Gibbons, Terry Coyne and Anne Parsons Dunne, with guest musicians Josephine Marsh and Mick Kinsella working in splashes of colour on squeezeboxes and harmonicas provide backing and harmony vocals. Producer Dennis Cahill plays a restrained role on the guitar and mandolin; in short this album has the guinea stamp of timeless quality. Dunne and Cahill light the fire on two tune sets Jenny Picking

Cockles/Colliers (reels) and The Brown Bull of Cill na Mona/The Tipperary Temptress (jigs) bring the dappled light into a richly shaded forest of expressive singing.

The liner illustrations were drawn by the late Gwen Sale and show a masterful insight with the pencil line, like the singing it's the uncluttered spaces between the strokes that make the emotions work, it is an all too early epitaph but a timeless one.

Seán Laffey

**JOHN SPILLANE - WILL WE  
BE BRILLIANT OR WHAT?  
VERGE/EMI**

The long awaited second solo album from ex Nomos vocalist and songwriter John Spillane *Will We Be Brilliant or What?* rides in on his recent upsurge in local domestic popularity. When playing live John Spillane's natural character comes across easily with just an acoustic guitar for accompaniment. Dealing in an optimistic romanticism and his assertion of Cork as 'the centre of the universe' he emerges as part troubadour and part maverick prophet. His outlook is therefore personalised and also universal dishing out the big themes like love and romance while still retaining a personalised worldview based around his Corkonian upbringing. Mercifully John Spillane avoids the big issues lyrically and instead of getting caught up in worthy yet overbearing wordplay and overcomplicating issues he wins through via simplicity and an endearing personality.

It is on record, though where his natural selflessness sometimes comes unstuck with OTT arrangements, which threaten to stifle him. *Will We Be Brilliant Or What?* at times topples over with the weight of the backing arrangements. Hot House Flowers member Peter O'Toole's production adds sufficient pop gloss and a suitable weight in the name department. The graces in this endeavour come mostly from John Spillane himself. Spillane's singing is as wistful as ever and the assertion of an Irish Nick Drake is put forward by his whispered vocals on *The Dance of The Cherry Trees* and *Woman My Own*. The swaying romance of *Princes Street* and the outright weirdness of *Seánie Boo* and the *Big Blue Empty* both dazzle and baffle in equal doses. Peter O'Toole's production adds a new pop sheen to *The Dance of The Cherry trees* and *Were going Sailing* while the basically simplistic *I'm going to Set you Free* rides on rave fuelled aggression. Playing to his lyrical strengths and also updating the musical game plan, John Spillane has delivered a powerfully diverse and challenging work, which is well worth locking horns with.

John O'Regan

