

William Jackson

Reviews

The New Harp CD

Review

The New Harp wears its harp on its sleeve, depicting an example of the instrument and its exponent: and sure enough, it's renowned William Jackson, now a rather magisterial figure to those who remember him as young Billy Jackson of Ossian, and of the wistfully evocative suite devoted to Tennents' Brewery, plus a thousand other stages. This collection celebrates a variety of topics - and indeed, locales - from Dunadd, ancient capital of Dalriada, to Donegal, North Carolina and France; and also takes in a grand sweep of chronology, from the early 17th century to Ossian (the poet, not the band, this time) and up to World War Two and "The Heights of Cassino", by Dan McRae of the Camerons; and then to the arrival of his daughter's god-daughter. *Once again a triumph of the harpist's art*, with a joyously limpid cascade of notes that conjure up a tranquil river on a sunny day - or to destroy the poetic mood entirely.

Scots Magazine, "Listen to This "
August 2008

Land of Light CD

Review

The title cut, and main theme on this CD is not yer grandpappy's Scottish anthem-no Braveheart Bluster here-albeit a bit of an echo of it later in the non anthem cuts-just the right amount. This is about Scottish culture and achievement, and the seeking after truth and justice, rather than that Scots have been the world's mercenaries. This is about Columcille, Robert Burns, Robert Tannahill, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Adam Smith. This is an unusual anthem, particularly when one considers the origin of anthems..

The whole theme of "Land of Light" is repeated, with a main version followed by instrumental, choral and Gaelic versions, the latter sung by Mairi MacInnes. "Land of Light" has a simple text, straightforward, and therein lies it's other strength. It is moving because it has the directness of the Ring of Callanish!

The anthem is followed by a series of cuts which work with it and complement it. I found the harp solo in Columcille particularly appealing. In both his performance and composition, as in all of the previous works I have reviewed William Jackson has always exemplified the consummate artist.

It was ironic that listening to "Land of Light" this real poem to Scottish intellectual and artistic achievement was rudely interrupted at the New Hampshire Highland Games by other music, which while it has it's place, caters primarily to those who have Braveheart burnout, and who probably have never read the poetry, or the history, or the economics, or the novels, or have seen the art, or in any way witnessed the hundreds of contributions that Scots have made to western civilization when they have not been pushed by economic necessity or quest for justice to pick up a spar, claymore or rifle.

"Land of Light" is an Anthem for Scotland's future!

New Hampshire Highland Games
September 2008

Duan Albanach

Review

For such a musical rendition of an often bloody, wretched history, this CD has a grand sense of life. That is evident right from the start with “Joseph on the Golden Strand,” though this is not part of *Duan Albanach* proper, but the opening act—a sample of what is to come—which at the best points on this CD is simply exhilaration in musical form. “An Honourable Peace” is an honourable piece—beautiful and regal.

“Mons Graupius” incorporates the carnyx, that beast-headed Celtic war trumpet from the mists of history. This is put to good advantage—where one hears all the chaos of this forgotten bloody battle where was heard one of the first quotes from a Celt—the famous “make a desert and call it peace” speech. “Mons Graupius,” taking musical twists, so well sums up the guerilla warfare that day turned into. And they still wonder what happened to that legion.

“Dalriada” is a solemn, brooding, historical prelude to the foundation of the Kingdom of Scots by Irish immigrants. Here, as elsewhere, the composer comes in on his harp, with vocals by MacKenzie. “Dunnichen” turns into a magnificent victory march with the pipes and whistle of Iain MacDonald [and Jerry O’Sullivan] in the lead along with the orchestra. This ends with the last ghostly echo of the carnyx.

“Bannock Burn” is an ode to the peaceful landscape that once witnessed the bloody fight for freedom. This is emotionally gripping because of both this juxtaposition and the artistry that conveys it. “Lia Fail” ends in triumph, a grand reaffirmation of the continuing life of Alba. The instrumentals and vocals all come to bear here.

Along with artists already mentioned are Alasdair Fraser, Jerry O’Sullivan, Paul Jennings, Joseph Sobol, Paul Kenny, and Cecilia Weston and the Scottish Festival Orchestra. The best of the best, *Duan Albanach* will long be remembered as a grand musical poem in any field of music. -- AK

Celtic Beat, Release Review
April 2005

Duan Albanach

Review

William Jackson’s earlier extended compositions are well known...The Wellpark Suite and St Mungo Suite and Inchcolm. This latest offering centres on a setting of the Scottish poem Duan Albanach and is brought up to CD length by a number of shorter individual pieces.

This is very pleasant, tuneful and in places, quite memorable music.

Apart from some appropriately odd, battle-cry noises from a carnyx (Celtic war horn) at the outset of the main piece it’s mostly also very pretty music, with William’s own harp never far from the front of the sound. There are stirring strings on Mons Graupius, some lusty Gaelic singing from Eilidh MacKenzie on Lia Lail (The Stone of Destiny) and more typically tinkly harp sounds in some of the shorter individual pieces that make the CD up to full length.

So - what is this? Is it 21st century Scotland’s answer to Vaughn Williams or an erstwhile folkies pretentions to classical grandeur?

It’s certainly not the latter and only time will tell about the former. This sounds like rather good film score music, as does much of Vaughn Williams output. It would underpin “Rob Roy” rather well, if that film didn’t already have a good score. It’s not at all pretentious - it’s just good, tuneful, well-orchestrated music with definite folk roots (remember them?).

Alan Murray
The Living Tradition
November 2003