

THE HEARTSTRING QUARTET CD Reviews - Print

****The Irish Times, 10/10/2008

Arty McGlynn's and Nollaig Casey's individual and shared contributions have reverberated in the work of everyone from Van Morrison to Riverdance to John Carty.

Nollaig's sister, Máire Ní Chathasaigh, and Chris Newman have quietly forged a formidable reputation for themselves as well, a harp-and-guitar pairing that's long jettisoned cosy notions of how these strings might intertwine.

Heartstring Sessions is a tighrope walk into uncommon worlds. Chris and Arty trade drumtight licks on Merle Travis's Saturday Night Shuffle, while the quartet tackle Lament for Limerick and excavate their souls in the process. This is traditional music at its very best: crossing boundaries, tapping our own tunes alongside bluegrass and ragtime borrowings. Many lifetimes' worth of music.

- SIOBHÁN LONG

fROOTS, November 2008

Believe me, I'm trying to be restrained, but having listened to this album repeatedly over the last week, it's impossible to resist entering hyperbolic realms. So, let's be blunt, if this CD is not a contender for album of the year, multiple awards and ennoblement for all concerned, then I'm fully prepared to eat every hat in Leitrim.

Its recipe for success seems simple on the surface. Take one of Ireland's most successful musical pairings, guitarist Arty McGlynn and fiddler Nollaig Casey (who've previously released two superb

albums in the form of Causeway and Lead the Knave), and unite them with another acclaimed couple in the shape of guitarist / mandolinist Chris Newman and Nollaig's sister, harper Máire Ní Chathasaigh, two equally inspired musicians who've steadily released a series of fine albums since 1988's The Living Wood, not forgetting Máire's groundbreaking The New Strung Harp from 1985. Stick them together in a studio, add a smidgen of live recordings, simmer, savour and serve (preferably with a fine red from the Douro valley).

Then sit back and enjoy the intricacy of two contrasting guitar styles (gutsy Arty and more intricate Chris), encapsulated in a stonking rendition of Merle Travis's Saturday Night Shuffle, Nollaig's utterly soulful fiddle which achieves its zenith on a raunchy rendition of Bill Bonroe's Gold Rush plus her eloquent vocal renditions of Among the Heather and A Mháire Bhán Óg. Finally, bask in the sheer beauty of Máire's harp – grace embodied, but with that ever-present sense of danger, and offering a complexity that oft-times defies comprehension.

What's more, each listening to Heartstring Sessions adds new subtle enjoyment and it's apt that its closing track (a set of reels kicked off by The Old Bush) gradually fades into the distance, suggesting that somewhere this stellar quartet is still enjoying its own musical company.

- GEOFF WALLIS

*****Scotland on Sunday, 5/10/2008

A string band made up of two duos - magnificently musical Irish sisters on fiddle and harp, with their

two virtuoso guitar partners. Nollaig also sings in English in 'Among The Heather' and an Irish version of the Scottish Gaelic 'Mhaire Bhan Og'. The instrumental quality is outstanding, but the majesty of Ní Chathasaigh's harp, especially in the 18th-century 'Song Of The Harp', and with the fiddle in the even older 'Lament For Limerick,' is the album's heart.

Dirty Linen (USA), March/April 2009

Here's a dream quartet: pair Irish guitar and fiddle duo Arty McGlynn and Nollaig Casey with English guitarist and Celtic harpist Máire Ní Chathasaigh, and you have some of the sweetest and most exciting music to emerge from the British Isles in a long time. Matching virtuosity with sheer good taste, this album of traditional and original music pours joyfully from the speakers. The quartet shows an amazing empathy between members, as demonstrated by the opening Newman composition, "Wild Goose Chase", on which Casey's free-flowing fiddle and Ní Chathasaigh's crystalline harp dance delightfully with McGlynn's fluid guitar lines and Newman's steady rhythm on acoustic guitar and fretless bass. There is some nice old-time picking-and-grinning, as on "Tom Cronin's Homework", as well as quiet moments of majestic beauty in "Song of the Harp". As one would expect, there are also some fiery jigs and reels. Surprises include the good-natured, guitar-centred cover of Merle Travis' "Saturday Night Shuffle" and a fiddle-and-mandolin take on Bill Monroe's classic bluegrass tunes, "The Yellow Barber / Gold Rush".

Though the album is primarily instrumental, Casey sings on two lovely traditional songs, “Among the Heather” and “A Mháire Bhán Óg” (“Fair Young Mary”). Casey also contributed the jaunty reel “The Shooting Star”, and McGlynn the delicate, neo-classical “Reminiscing”. There is a great Newman-arranged set of tunes called “El Vals Argentino” in which he sounds for all the world like a South American Django Reinhardt. The quartet concludes the festivities with an amazing set of reels, which surely must be the highlight of their live shows. There are few albums that demand replay immediately after conclusion; this CD is one of them.”

- LAHRI BOND

Irish Music Magazine, November 2008

I must have heard this a hundred times or more, enough to get to really like it. My verdict? It is a wonderfully diverse album from four musicians who have been around a long time. How long? Well, I recall booking Chris Newman when he was playing with Fred Wedlock back in the 1970s, so I suppose three decades of professional music making is going to show its pedigree, and you wouldn't be wrong to go looking for it here. If it doesn't get hours of radio air time, there is no justice in this world.

There's a mature confidence in everything the two duos touch on this album, evident from the opening “Wild Goose Chase” which started life as a slow air, but you'd hardly guess that from listening to the result. Some tunes are simple, but when given the masterly touch by producer Chris Newman, they breathe a different sort of complexity. Take “Tom Cronin's Homework”: it's a bit of an Old-Timey Appalachian number,

not much more than a mandolin-led song melody, but I can see this appearing as a backing tune to a TV ad or two – it's as infectious as, say, Sharon Shannon's “Galway Girl”.

The album reflects the diverse musical roots of the four players, with the two sisters playing the strong Irish traditional cards, firstly on the gentle air “Song of the Harp” from the Petrie Collection of 1855. What is pleasing about this track and indeed about the whole album is that each instrument is given its own voice within the arrangements and allowed to run with the melody, something not always present on albums featuring the guitar. But there are few albums with two such world-class guitarists as McGlynn and Newman. Catch their re-working of the 1959 Merle Travis number “Saturday Night Shuffle”, with Newman flat-picking an acoustic guitar and McGlynn adding just the right amount of electric licks.

It's not all tunes, as there are two songs (“Among the Heather” and A Mháire Bhán Óg), and the surprise here is that it is Nollaig, not Máire, who is singing them – and what a good job she does, in a low sensuous voice.

If I had to make one over-riding comment about the album it's its sense of pace: dance tunes are fast but not frenetic, the American and Euro-jazz influenced tunes are hummable and captivating. (“El Vals Argentino” is a stunner, and McGlynn's “Reminiscing” has a classical Spanish feel about it, with one gorgeous minor moment at the end.) The mix of other acoustic traditions sits comfortably with Irish jigs and reels. It has fourteen tracks, but holds your interest from start to finish, so that you're surprised when it all ends – because of the variety

which sits you down in a comfy chair, makes you a cuppa and entertains you without shouting at you to have another biscuit.

A top drawer albums from one of the best independent labels in Celtic music.

- SEÁN LAFFERTY

Sing Out (USA), March 2009

I admire and even envy musicians who are able to take a classic player's style or segment of his repertoire and present it as you would an exhibit in a museum. Their recordings are handy for learning new tunes or becoming exposed to a particular technique. That said, I seldom listen to those recordings simply for pleasure. I like a recording that has variety and even takes a few chances: those are the recordings I return to time and time again for inspiration and entertainment. *Heartstring Sessions* is such a recording.

Renowned musicians all, guitarists Arty McGlynn and Chris Newman are joined by sisters Nollaig Casey on fiddle and harpist Máire Ní Chathasaigh for a lovely collection of songs and tunes old and new.

The CD opens with “Wild Goose Chase”, written by Chris. This tune was originally intended as a slow air, but, with the addition of Nollaig's fiddle, it took on an entirely new character. “Tom Cronin's Homework” follows with its distinctly Appalachian feel, which belies its heritage as an English dance tune. Nollaig's lovely vocals are featured on “Among the Heather”, with lyrics written by poet William Allingham from Donegal and set to a traditional air from County Cork. The arrangement owes as much to Mark Knopfler as to Irish tradition.

A couple of unusual selections are included on *Heartstring Sessions*, including "Saturday Night Shuffle" by Merle Travis. Arty and Chris adorn this wonderful raggedy tune with lots of guitar ornamentation and a persistent drive. Another apparent oddity is the pairing of "Yellow Barber" with Bill Monroe's "Gold Rush". The combination of Máire's harp and Nollaig's fiddling along with Chris and Arty's guitars makes the first tune from the playing of Kentucky fiddler Buddy Thomas sound remarkably Celtic in spirit; Chris' mandolin and Nollaig's fiddle take center stage on the Monroe classic.

I fear this review only scratches the surface of this terrific recording. There is a great deal more wonderful music on *Heartstring Sessions*; in fact, I think I'll play it again.

- TD

**TRAD Magazine (France), Jan 2009
(The CD also received TRAD's
BRAVOS Award...)**

Attention, chef d'œuvre ! Voici un quartet formé de la réunion de deux duos qui tournent déjà depuis un bon bout de temps : celui de la harpiste Maire Ni Chathasaigh et du guitariste Chris Newman (qui a déjà fait une demi-douzaine d'albums) et celui composé de la violoniste Nollaig Casey, sœur de Maire, et du guitariste Arty Mc Glynn (qui en a fait un peu moins). Bref, ce qui se fait de mieux avec les cordes en Irlande aujourd'hui ! 14 sets : des jigs, reels, airs lents, deux chansons, un air de bluegrass, un thème de Merle Travis, une valse argentine... tous aussi sublimes les uns que les autres ! Le morceau d'ouverture, "Wild Goose Chase", va très certainement devenir un classique, tant sa mélodie qui

saute à travers diverses traditions ne vous lâche plus la tête.

- JEAN-PASCAL ASSAILLY

The Living Tradition, Nov/ Dec 2008

Two of the mightiest pairings in current folk, McGlynn-Casey and Newman-Ni Chathasaigh combine to give a tour-de-force of breathtaking order. In a rare outing together the two sisters (Nollaig and Maire) complement each other in true familial fashion, more than ably supported by their musical partners.

Classic songs such as "A Mhaire Bhan Og" and "Among the Heather" are interspersed with breakneck instrumentals including Merle Travis' "Saturday Night Shuffle" and Newman's "Wild Goose Chase". All non-original compositions are extensively researched and their provenance identified in the copious notes accompanying the CD - which also detail the instruments played (down to the actual strings used - no stone is left unturned). The total effect is enhanced by Newman's meticulous production, and the loving care taken in arranging the pieces is evident throughout of the consummate professionalism of all four artistes. Here are four people whose muse has come of age, and who take no risks (but continue to surprise their audiences). That they obviously love playing together goes without saying. That it's taken this long for them to get together in the studio has been our loss - now thankfully rectified here and hopefully the beginning of a long musical journey.

If I had to choose a favourite it would be the medley of "The Yellow Barber" and "Gold Rush" which gives all four opportunities to shine on their respective instruments in solo instrumental breaks but also

demonstrates subtle interplay between them. Nice one.

The collective are extensively touring together this Autumn, and on the evidence of this album deserve to play to packed houses everywhere (as they probably will anyway).

- GREM DEVLIN

The Ulster Herald, 25/9/2008

Four of the finest musicians and singers from these islands combine their talents to produce an amazingly eclectic mix of songs and airs on a new album entitled *Heartstring Sessions*. Some of the most noted names in Irish music, guitarist Arty McGlynn, fiddle player Nollaig Casey and harper Maire Ni Chathasaigh, team up with flat-picking guitarist Chris Newman to record a complex mix of what is collectively their own personal choice of material. It's the music they love - from sparkling Irish dance tunes, beautiful airs, old songs with a contemporary twist and striking new compositions - right through to bluegrass and ragtime rockabilly. Arty needs no introduction locally - he's given us decades of talent, from *McGlynn's Fancy* to recordings with some of Ireland's best known artistes. Maire is a hugely influential harpist who has carved out a niche for herself in Irish music. Maire's sister Nollaig has toured with Riverdance and performed with some of the world's best-known artistes, while Chris Newman's guitar playing is simply astounding.

- JOHN McCUSKER

Le Peuple Breton (France), January 2009

Associez deux duos de renom, deux soeurs, la violoniste Nollaig Casey et la harpiste Máire Ní Chathasaigh, deux des guitaristes les plus créatifs, Arty McGlynn et Chris Newman, et vous obtenez un quartet

exceptional qui s'est retrouvé pour la première fois pour produire l'excellent album *Heartstring Sessions*.

N. Casey, bien connue en Bretagne pour avoir été de l'aventure de l'Héritage des Celtes et qui a aussi brièvement fait partie de Planxty et de Coolfin aux côtés du non moins célèbre Dónal Lunny, joue habituellement avec son mari A.

McGlynn mais ne dédaigne pas à l'occasion poser le son aérien de son fiddle sur la harpe de sa soeur Máire.

Et quand leurs guitaristes de maris unissent leur gout pour le trad, le bluegrass et le jazz, vous avez dans l'oreille une musique à l'éclecticisme certain mais ô combien brillante.

Leur album est donc, lui aussi, un mélange éclectique de trad irlandais, de vieilles chansons (oh! la voix de Nollaig!) et de compositions plus récentes des quatre complices, un album où même le bluegrass et le ragtime trouvent une petite place.

Des arrangements sophistiqués démontrent le talent évident de ces quatre-là. Des impros à la guitare tandis que fiddle et harpe dégagent une douce chaleur sur les jigs et reels qui vous permettront de reconnaître tel ou tel morceau au détour des quatorze pages de l'album.

- PHILIPPE COUSIN

Irland Journal (Germany), Winter 2008

Dieses Album haben die beiden Schwestern und Ihre Partner selbst gegönnt. Das hört man nicht nur, das spürt man förmlich. Lange musste die Folkwelt warten, bis ein Zusammentreffen dieser vier begnadeten Musiker endlich auf einer CD dokumentiert wurde, aber das Warten hat sich gelohnt. Jeder Musiker bringt nicht nur sein ganz individuelles Können hier ein,

sondern auch seine jeweiligen musikalischen Einflüsse, was letztlich für viel Abwechslung sorgt. Newman und McGlynn sind zwei Gitarristen, die sich, jeder mit seinem Stil, seit Jahrzehnten am Markt behaupten und denen die Fachwelt viel Bewunderung entgegenbringt. Máire versteht mit der Harfe umzugehen wie kaum eine zweite in der Welt der keltischen Folkmusik und ihre Schwester Nollaig gehört ohnehin zu den bekanntesten Fiddlerinnen der Szene – kaum eine Spitzenband mit der sie noch nicht auf der Bühne stand. Die meisten Stücke auf dem Album sind unverkennbar irisch, wenngleich auch Anleihen z. B. beim Bluegrass gemacht wurden. Zweimal wird gesungen. Allerdings ist nicht, wie man vermutet hätte, Máire die Sängerin, sondern Nollaig. Die *Heartstring Sessions* sollte man im CD-Regal haben – eine wirkliche Besonderheit.

INSOUND Magazine (Italy), February 2008

Continuando a seguire a piacere le suonatrici d'arpa non potevamo non imbatteci nel nuovo lavoro di Máire Ní Chathasaigh ("La più interessante e originale arpista irlandese moderna, così ne parlava Derek Bell dei Chieftains), che con Chris Newman anima un duo di primo piano nella musica acustica internazionale. Dopo anni de onorato servizio, si sono dati una rinfrescata e, cambiato il look, hanno portato la loro musica fuori dai confini cui li aveva relegati l'attenzione per la musica celtica. Ci sono sì arie e gighe di antica ascendenza, ma non mancano echi jazz e bluegrass, pennellate chitarristiche quasi westcoastiane, per non parlare del banjo dell'americana Cathy Fink che

dialoga col violino di Nollaig Casey (la sorella di Máire), Un lavoro complesso che coniuga l'innegabile virtuosismo strumentale con la piacevole sorpresa di una rinnovata vena compositiva.

- GIGI MARINONI

Folk London, Dec 2008 - Jan 2009

When two popular duos on the current folk scene unite and the partnerships are of the musical excellence of McGlynn and Casey, Newman and Ni Chathasaigh the resulting outcome must surely be impressive. The musical quality achieved on this, their first album together, does not disappoint. Their individual talents combine to create a wonderfully bright exciting sound smoothed to perfection. The distinctive and differing guitar styles of Newman and McGlynn, both at home whether picking out the gentle Song of the Harp or firing up the inevitable Irish jigs, combine innovatively with the exquisite harp playing of Maire, sometimes lively, sometimes delicate and the superb fiddle playing of Nollaig. Traditional songs such as A Mhaire Bhan Og learnt from the sister' parents, and Among the Heather, learnt from their mother are interspersed with lively instrumentals to create a well balanced and carefully crafted album. The varied selection of tunes range from the slow majestic Lament for Limerick through the wistful Reminiscing to the dynamic Wild Goose Chase. The interplay between the two guitarists on their version of Merle Travis's Saturday Night Shuffle is three and a half minutes of sheer joy. The packaging includes a ten page booklet detailing the tunes, their origin and instruments played, while the production throughout the CD is faultless.

**New Folk Sounds (Netherlands),
April/May 2009**

Leuk die familiefeestjes. Vooral als er muziek gemaakt wordt. En dan niet van die gezapige 'kijk opa ik kan ook viool spelen' of de oubollige 'Familie X' orkestjes, maar echt gemusiceer! Dat zit bij de zwagers Arty McGlynn en Chris Newman met de zussen Nollaig Casey en Máire Ní Chathasaigh wel goed. McGlynn is een aalvlugge solist, terwijl Newman de kracht haalt uit superb flatpicking en mandoline werk. Vooral ritmisch zet de man fundamenten neer die onverwoestbaar zijn. Nollaig kennen we vooral van fiddlepartijen in diens van Dónal Lunny en Ní Chathasaigh kan je zonder meer de belangrijkste hedendaagse Ierse harpiste noemen. Ze timmert met echtgenoot Newman al langer aan de weg als duo. Op eerdere albums verruimden ze het verstikkende Keltische met Amerikaanse folk, ragtime, bluegrass en zelfs jazz met Hot Club de France tunes op harp en gitaar, waar menig echte manouche jaloers op zo worden. Ook nu vind ik de composities waarin men 'vreemd' gaat het meest aantrekkelijk. Er zit spanning in, dynamiek, verrassing, power en gedrevenheid. Het hoeft niet althijd uptempo te zijn, zoals de fraaie air 'Song of the Harp' bewijst. Net zo lekker klinkt de country klassieker 'Saturday Night Shuffle' van Merle Travis. Volkomen omgewerkt en afwijkend van het origineel, maar dat is nu net folkmuziek! De 'Lament for Limerick' is een majestueus en barok-achtig gespeeld werkstukje. Indrukwekkend, maar ook opgewekt afgerond met de vrolijke hornpipe 'Thomond Bridge' als tegenhanger voor het serieuze. Een minder sterk punt van Máire Ní

Chathasaigh zijn de vocalen. Op Heartstring Sessions laat ze dat over aan zus Nollaig. Iets stemvaster, maar ook zij is niet echt overtuigend. Het aantal vocale tracks is echter tot twee beperkt. Als afwisseling voldoen ze, maar gelukkig overheerst het instrumentale. Luister maar eens naar de vloeiende gitaarsolo of het unisono gespeelde duet tussen harp en viool in 'The Shooting Star'. Dat weet je dat je daar meer dan genoeg aan hebt.

- MARIUS ROETING

Quartet CD Reviews - Online

Net Rhythms, 12/10/2008

This lineup may sound like it has the trappings of a supergroup, but the musicians wear their brilliant light under a bushel for this ebullient and joyful offering has appeared with all possible modesty. Those two legendary guitarists, Chris and Arty, have for long been at the forefront of creative cutting-edge interpretation of tradition (within whatever musical “region”), and their mastery of style and innovation has long been a talking point among discerning music lovers. Máire's command of the Irish harp is unrivalled, while her sister Nollaig's exquisite fiddle playing has long been revered for its combination of fire and lyricism. What a spellbinding combination of talents then!#

On this exemplary disc, eclecticism is the watchword, and when allied to playing of this calibre you just know you're in for a fabulous ride. It's like a home-grown Transatlantic Session, with Irish and other Celtic musics meeting bluegrass and ragtime head-on and producing something fresh and vibrant with all the spirit of the best sessions in town. The first four tracks alone demonstrate what a fine balance is being struck: Wild Goose Chase (a composition by Chris himself) has harp being pursued by guitars and fiddle over a Hispanic landscape, while Tom Cronin's Homework has more of an old-time feel and the pace slackens for the delightfully “orchestrated” Song Of The Harp (only surpassed by the majestic Lament For Limerick later on the disc) and the crew then jig out on

a traditional set that would knock most full-time tune-bands into a corner. Chris and Arty turn in a beautifully understated, gently rockin' (fun rockabilly-style) duet variant of Merle Travis' Saturday Night Shuffle (with a middle-eight derived from oral tradition - ie Chris's brother Mark!). Chris's El Vals Argentino is a persuasive illustration of how several seemingly different musical styles can prove on closer examination to have much in common. Even the breakneck pace the foursome adopt for the Bill Monroe Gold Rush doesn't wrong-foot any of them in the slightest!

Variety proves the spice of the disc with two songs sung deftly and precisely by Nollaig (I especially liked her take on Among The Heather). Everywhere you turn on the disc, in fact, the unstintingly high standard of the playing is miraculous, the musicianship supreme; all of the musicians are noted for their virtuosity and their fastidious attention to detail, but this aspect never allowed to get in the way of the expression of their intense musicality. Even non-guitarists will regularly marvel at Chris's superlative flatpicking and his tremendous gift for improvisation, and the sheer range of textures and moods Nollaig conjures from her fiddle (and viola) strings is astonishing, while the warmth and power of Máire's harpistry would melt even the sternest harp-allergy, and Arty's rhythmic inventiveness is but one compelling facet of his extraordinary talent prominently displayed on this disc. So if you want a scintillating and varied menu to

spice up your listening, you can do no better than indulge yourself with the excellent *Heartstring Sessions*.

- DAVID KIDMAN

Fly - Global Music Culture, 28/11/2008

Occasionally an album starts on such a high note and builds such a sense of anticipation of what is to come that surely whatever follows must be a disappointment.

Heartstring Sessions boasts Arty McGlynn, Chris Newman, and sisters Nollaig Casey and Maire Ni Chathasaigh, and the opening track, Newman's Wild Goose Chase is a virtuoso performance from all four: the fiddle, guitars and harp weave in around each other to create a statement of an opener. Over the next 14 tracks the almost certain disappointment never arrives and the album raises itself back to these early heights over and over.

The guitars in particular give some of the older tunes a modern twist, and scattered among the old Irish tunes are a few written by members of the quartet a bluegrass number (the first time I've heard bluegrass with a harp).

The last time we met Ni Chathasaigh was on Firewire and though I'm certainly not the most enthusiastic of harp admirers, Ni Chathasaigh's harp playing is inspired, complemented by sister Casey's fiddle playing, is really brought to the fore in Lament for Limerick.

It's Newman's guitar playing that pulls everything together for me, especially when he gets into his groove in El Vals Argentino, but if you

are particularly fond of harp (fiddle, etc etc) there's every chance it will do the same for you. If the last set of reels sounds almost as though it were a different band and recorded in a totally different setting that's because it was, marking the quartet's creation back in 2002, and it gives the listener a pretty damn good idea why they decided to continue.

This is serious folk with a playful twist, and the combination of the two duos creates a force to be reckoned with.

- WYL MENMUIR

Folk and Roots, October 2008

This album is a real family affair featuring two of the folk scene's favourite duos co-joined as a quartet in a real showcase in the art of performance. There's nothing clinical in the approach to the music which comes across as entertaining and technically faultless in equal measures – a hard feat to achieve particularly in these cynical times. The musicianship of Arty, Chris, Nollaig and Maire is exquisite and I defy anyone not to be inspired by the group's enthusiasm which will also leave you incredulous at the dexterity of each of the members flailing digits...if proof were required check out the astonishing "El Vals Argentino". On more subtle numbers such as "Song Of The Harp" you can imagine the melody utilised as part of a film score to accompany panoramic landscapes and the wonderfully understated ballad "Among The Heather" sung by Nollaig will put you in mind of sitting outside a French café sipping coffee whilst idly letting the world pass by. Soaking up the gently pulsating rhythm and bluesy guitar lead lines, joined by the interplay between fiddle and harp trust me when I say this is a seriously

'sexy' track and you'll just have to buy the CD to see what I mean.

Unlike so many (predominantly) instrumental albums I receive where certain tracks don't sit comfortably within the whole package this is as near faultless as they come and of course is highly recommended.

- PETE FYFE

Folk World (Germany), October 2008

Imagine two sisters, both leading Irish musicians, who are each married to one of the most outstanding guitarists on the Celtic scene, each couple being a highly renowned duo in their own right - and those two couples have never ever recorded anything jointly. But now, finally, the long awaited and long planned joint album has finally been released, combining the magic of top harpist Maire Ni Chathasaigh and Chris Newman with his unique guitar style with superb fiddler Nollaig Casey and guitarist Arty McGlynn.

And the wait has been worthwhile.

This is a great album full of musical ideas, sparkling tunes and excellent playing. The mix is probably roughly what you would expect of this combination of talent - traditional Irish tunes with a contemporary twist, some of their own own compositions, as well as some ragtime and even a waltz with South American origins. The couple of songs on the album are sung by Nollaig.

An uplifting album full of interest and enjoyment; an album which should not be missed in a good Irish music collection.

- MICHAEL MOLL

Quartet Live Reviews

******The Glasgow Herald,
13/10/2008**

The unwieldy billing of this concert may in time give way to Heartstring Sessions, the name of the album that sisters Nollaig Casey and Maire Ni Chathasaigh and their partners have just released to show what can happen when two duos pool musical resources.

Loads of strings might even suffice, since as well as Casey's fiddle and Ni Chathasaigh's harp, there are two guitars and a mandolin involved in producing a repertoire that has its heart in Ireland but goes down through America's old time, bluegrass and country picking traditions to an Argentinean waltz designed for dancers, presumably, who don't like to hang around with the same dance partner for too long.

There is tremendous breadth and depth of experience involved here - from classical orchestral work to Donal Lunny's grooving folk-rock band in Casey's case - and it shows through in consummate playing, brilliantly articulated jigs, reels, hornpipes and Galician dance tunes, and the marvellous combination of Newman's burning-fingers urgency and McGlynn's poker-faced, apparently effortless high-tempo melody playing and steady, lush-toned rhythm guitar work.

Newman, their most natural public speaker, also contributed entertaining introductory tales, including an insight into how the oral tradition worked in his home town, Watford, resulting in versions of tunes that, however impressive, were as accurate as Chinese whispers.

A song in either set from Casey, one in English, the other in Gaelic, added extra variety, although there's probably enough contrasts in their various quartet and duo instrumentals to satisfy most ears, from Ni Chathasaigh's starkly keening harp lament for Limerick and McGlynn's stately, almost regency-period Reminiscing, to the foursome's breathtaking dash through bluegrass godfather Bill Monroe's Goldrush.

- ROB ADAMS

Músicas del Mundo, January 2009

La ganadora del premio Danny Kyle el año pasado en Celtic Connections, Bethan Nia abrió el show en la Strathclyde suite, GRCH. Habiéndose presentado ya en Glastonbury, Lorient y otros escenarios, traspasando las fronteras de su Gales natal, a través de su voz y arpa celta, cantando en inglés y galés, le costó ganarse al público de la sala. De hecho hay quien se levantó del asiento -en primera fila- antes del final. Tras el "incidente", la artista indicó que sólo quedaban 2 temas. El último fue una canción sin música, que probablemente fue la que más gustó, al menos a mí.

De nuevo el concierto principal, que vino a continuación, fue el que conquistó al respetable. Letal (en el buen sentido) la combinación de los dúos formados por el genial guitarrista Arty McGlynn y la cantante/violinista Nollaig Casey (Cork, Irlanda) y la hermana de Nollaig, Máire Ni Chathasaigh (arpa y voz) junto a su pareja a la guitarra Chris Newman. Realmente

incendiarios (juntos y por separado). Disfrutamos de las voces e instrumentos de las chicas, de los dos dúos por separado, de los guitarristas por separado, y todas las versiones resultaron increíblemente atractivas.

Se presentaron todos los temas exhaustivamente y hasta el serio Arty contó la historia de uno de los "set of tunes", con mucho detalle y para deleite del público, que rió divertido. En realidad, en Irlanda existe un concurso de "contar historias", muy popular, en el que probablemente nuestro Arty ganaría. Incluyo, como curiosidad, el "set list" de la noche, que Chris fue tan amable de darme. Hora y media larga de excelente melodías, entre las que no podía faltar mi favorita "Tune for a found harmonium". Máire anunció que recientemente han grabado un disco (largamente planeado) "Heartstring Sessions", el mismo que presentaban esta noche.