

Corrina Hewat | reviews | My Favourite Place

[Footstompin Music](#) FSR1719 (2003)

After 10 years as a full-time musician, and having already appeared on albums by some 20 different artists and groups, Scottish harpist and singer Corrina Hewat hasn't exactly rushed into releasing her debut solo CD but she's not been idle, either, emerging as a performer, composer, arranger and tutor of equal note, with a touring schedule that's taken her across three continents. She's also been a key figure in several landmark Scottish ventures of recent years, including the 2002 Scottish Women tour, Linn Record's Complete Works of Robert Burns series, and the 31-strong Unusual Suspects concert at this year's Celtic Connections festival.

The central trait unifying Hewat's multiple gifts is her fondness and facility for exploring interfaces -- chiefly between folk and jazz, but also in among blues, soul and classical influences. All this breadth of experience and style finds marvellously concentrated yet spacious expression on *My Favourite Place* complemented by David Milligan on piano, percussionist Donald Hay, and Karine Polwart's backing harmonies.

On the vocal front, tracks range from a bold, spiky updating of *Sheath And Knife* to an understated take on the jazz standard *When I Dream*. Hewat's own compositions -- such as the brilliantly wayward *Traffic* and the soulful, title track -- feature prominently among the tunes, together with a handful of beautifully wrought traditional numbers.

Sue Wilson

The Sunday Herald

As soon as I started to listen to Corrina's beautiful debut solo CD - a delicious, mellow, richly satisfying fusion of jazz/roots/blues styles (pure magic to a person of my musical tastes!), I was immediately transported to my very own 'favourite place'. Corrina is a prodigiously talented harpist (I cannot think of a more accomplished female musician), and creates an incredibly expressive, resonant and vibrant sound on her blue and gold Camac harp. Add to this her gorgeous, sensual voice, David Milligan's crossover piano playing, Donald Hay's jazz drums, and Karine Polwart's beautiful backing vocals, and you find yourself in a very special place indeed - and reluctant to tear yourself away... the musical arrangements on this album are stunning.

Corrina and her husband David Milligan met at Leeds College of Music, West Yorkshire; Corrina has a degree in Jazz, Popular and Contemporary Music, and David is a Postgraduate of the College. Corrina was the first ever harpist to undertake the course - a true pioneer! You may not know that she already has some 20 recordings under her belt, most of them in collaboration with other artists, including much Celtic Connections involvement, especially with the Scottish Women project. She is also currently producing some wonderful recordings with Shine and Bachué. The jazz/blues influence in her music is striking, and for me wonderful, because to hear this marrying so beautifully with a Burns song, traditional jigs, and Corrina's own highly original compositions, really is something else. And yet her music remains steeped in the Scottish tradition.

The album's material is very strong indeed. Opening with the traditional ballad 'Sheath and Knife', a dark tale of murder and incest, the expression in the incredible piano playing is marvellous, and Corrina's restrained harp playing is superb. We then travel to Corrina's 'Favourite Place', a beautiful piece of music inspired by a long weekend in the company of some of her favourite musicians. 'The Banks of the Nile', sung 'a cappella' with Karine, is a traditional song, with marvellous lyrics, telling the tale of young lovers soon to be parted by

war. 'Harmonics/Martyn's Jig' begins with Corrina's very striking harp improvisation, resonant and satisfying, and leads into the jig (written for Martyn Bennett). It's hard to believe that just one Camac harp is capable of creating such a stunning sound.

The awful practice of forcing a wild creature to 'dance' for human 'entertainment' is captured perfectly in 'The Bear Dance', with its monotonous, hypnotic, rhythmic drum and harp arrangements - this is a very striking track. 'Ae Fond Kiss', a beautiful Burns song, is sublimely and sensually sung by Corrina - with minimal harp accompaniment - another stand out track from this exquisite album. As Corrina says, Burns rocks! Two slip jigs follow, 'Brose and Butter/Drops of Brandy' - the combination of the jigs played by Corrina with the jazz piano and drums is superlative.

Corrina next sings the beautiful Carol Kidd jazz classic 'When I Dream' (they toured Asia together); she recorded the song to 'get it out of her head'. Now I can't get it out of my head! 'Traffic' is another highly original composition, offbeat, chilled, and a public apology by Corrina to her mother for her teenage angst! 'Hogties Jig' and 'Baltic Square Jig' follow, great tunes with brilliant accompaniment by David and Donald. 'Sharon and Mark' is a lovely tune written for her friends' wedding - and exquisitely played. Corrina's last composition, 'A Raft of Oak', combines some very vibey percussion with David's piano and Corrina's vocal.

This is an exceptional recording, the result of Corrina's exploration of many musical styles since she turned professional some 10 years ago, and very warmly recommended to anyone who delights in listening to an artist who truly relishes combining the best elements of traditional, contemporary and jazz influences. I just love this album - and I have to thank my 'boss' for his intuition and excellent judgement in sending this one to me!

Debbie Koritas
Roots Review

After serving her musical apprenticeship with Bachué Café and debuting as one third of the excellent Shine, local lass turns in her first solo album. Sparing in her accompaniment - there are never more than three musicians to a track - her sensuous electroharp makes Phil Cunningham's bullish "Hogties Reel" into an airy, feminine piece, and none the worse for that. Improvising on old tunes, or sparkling on self penned ones, she creates a warm, rich and grown-up sound. Her vocals also deserve notice. The new arrangement of "Sheath and Knife" costs the incest and murder ballad some of it's darkness, but the spare treatment of "The Banks of the Nile" and the oft-visited "Ae Fond Kiss" are intense gems.

Jim Love
The Inverness Courier

First solo release from singer and harp player Corrina coming on the back of a growing/glowing reputation as one of the most original artists on the contemporary Scottish music scene. Joining Corrina are Karine Polwart on vocals, David Milligan on piano and Donald Hay on drums. 'The Banks Of The Nile' features Corrina and Karine un-accompanied, two wonderful voices, while the improvisation between electroharp and drums on 'The Bear Dance' is superb. Recommended.

Graham Radley
NetRhythms

Scotland's CORRINA HEWAT is a superb singer, a virtuoso harpist & very gifted composer. She's also highly individual, very playful & never twee. At least one of her own instrumentals will likely remind you more of Thelonious Monk than of any other Celtic harpist. She can sing a Robert Burns classic as if it had been written yesterday. "MY FAVOURITE PLACE" is a mature artist's debut as leader; she's appeared on around twenty albums over the past ten years. As one critic has remarked, Corrina has "a jazz singer's flexibility, a blues singer's economy, a folk singer's heart."

"BROSE AND BUTTER/ DROPS OF BRANDY"

Lively & fresh treatment of two slip-jigs: her electro-harp with David Milligan's piano & drummer Donald Hay's brisk brushes.

"AE FOND KISS"

Corrina, solo - her voice & harp. Uncanny: hands-down, the most emotionally potent version of the song I've ever heard (& I've heard lots!).

"HARMONICS/ MARTYN'S JIG"

Solo electro-harp: begins haunting-delicate-expectant-improvisatory, harmonics-laden & spare, and then shifts into a beautifully limber-flowing-dancing slip-jig dedicated to Martyn Bennett. Ingeniously structured.

"THE BEAR DANCE"

Improvisation, with a groove: based on a trad Scots tune. Her electro harp & Donald Hay's bustling-tolling brushed drum kit has genuine surprises: shifts in & out of being recognisably "Scots" & of being "earthy" & "ethereal".

"A RAFT OF OAK"

Enigmatic-restless-questing song for the author's multi-tracked Scot's female voice with David Milligan's piano & Donald Hay's thunking-limber brushed drums.

"The Planet"

RADIO NATIONAL

Corrina Hewat is what June Tabor would be if she were a harper. Like Tabor, Hewat's repertoire is as broad, deep and cool as the North Sea. She does everything except what you might expect. A Scottish standard like Robert Burns' Ae Fond Kiss is transformed into a sleepy torch song, with Hewat's voice leaking smoke and the low strings of her electroharp buzzing like basso bees. She takes a Sheena Wellington favourite "Sheath and Knife" and sings it straight, but makes her harp sound like a cross between an acoustic bass and a tabla. Hewat revels in mixing innovation and tradition. For example, "Harmonics" is an experimental piece that sports namesake ringing tones, but to it she appends "Martyn's Jig" which she plays in classic Celtic style. That mix is indicative of the album's thoughtful presentation of material. Hewat is aware that improvisational jazz can stretch an audience, but also tax it. Thus she usually follows innovative compositions with something more conventional. "Sheath and Knife", for example gives way to a delightful a cappella duet with Karine Polwart, and "Ae Fond Kiss" to a bouncy instrumental version of "Brose and Butter". Much of her jazzy side is also tempered with hints of pop, as on "When I Dream" or "Raft of Oak", the latter of which is also a smart meditation on a Scott Skinner tune. Skillful playing, innovative composing, a lovely voice, red hair, and a blue harp. What's not to like?

Sing Out! Magazine