

Justin Bonar-Bridges - Truth Be Told

Cincinnati fiddler Justin Bonar-Bridges has been listening carefully for a long time to the great Irish traditional musicians, past and present, while quietly building a reputation among those who know the music best. Now he's released his first solo CD, and it's a gem of an album that was well worth waiting for. His deep understanding of the music and careful attention to details of phrasing and ornamentation are apparent, but what really distinguishes this recording is Justin's great musicality. In an era where most traditional music recordings feature bands and heavy-handed arrangements, Justin has taken another, bolder route, with most tracks played solo or lightly accompanied on bouzouki or guitar, allowing the tunes themselves to take precedence. I'm delighted to hear this fine CD and I highly recommend it.

- Randal Bays, Seattle

Truth be told . . .

. . . Irish music is the language of my heart. Though I have only known the country as a visitor, the tune and song of the older generations are more my home than any physical location. Many past musicians, geographically displaced, found the same solace in the music. Their playing was rarely characterized by an obsession with technical precision and dazzlement, but rather by an outpouring of the heart. They expressed their personal joys and sorrows through the tunes, but respected the tradition passed on by those that came before them. It is my intention to do the same with this offering.

A word about tuning:

What we now think of as standard tuning (A=440) is a recent development. Even in living memory, older generations of fiddle players tuned as much as a half-step flat, if not more. Many fiddles resonate more richly in lower tunings, giving the music more depth and a warmer quality. I give my tuning relative to A=440 from low string to high on every track as an invitation to fiddlers to explore the instrument's range more fully.

01. The Drunken Gauger / Maid on the Green (Set Dance and Jig)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

The first tune is a popular set dance in Clare where, legend has it, Junior Crehan got the tune from dance master Pat Barron via a bit of clever chicanery.

02. O'Mahoney's / Cronin's (Hornpipes)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

I got O'Mahoney's, also called the Clareman's, from a recording of Kerry fiddler Denis Murphy.

03. The Banks of Sullane (Air)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

I learned this song of unrequited love from the singing of Ollie Conway, courtesy of the Jim Carroll and Pat Mackenzie Collection.

04. The Horse's Leotard / Connaughtman's
Rambles / Pipe on the Hob (Jigs)

Tuning: F, C, G, D

The first tune is known as “My Brother Tom” in O’Neill’s Music of Ireland, though James Kelly, Paddy O’Brien, and Daithi Sproule called it by this much more interesting title on one of their albums.

05. The Old Copperplate / Paddy Fahy's (Reels)

Tuning: Eb, Bb, F, C

The Old Copperplate is a widely played reel. The second is one of the more straightforward compositions of Galway fiddler Paddy Fahy.

06. Glenbeigh / Kilnamona (Barndances)

Tuning: G, D, A, E

Two lovely tunes that I learned from Joe Ryan at the Willie Clancy Week in 2004. Joe was a masterful player of hornpipes and barndances.

07. Templehouse / College Groves (Reels)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

The Templehouse ranked as one of my favorite reels when I was nine. A couple of years later it was the College Groves after I got my first cassette of Bobby Casey.

08. Breeches Mary / Martin's One-Horned
Cow / The Rose in the Heather (Jigs)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

A Denis Murphy recording was my source for the first tune, O’Neill’s the middle one, and I wound up with the third at some point along the way.

09. Kitty Goes a Milking / Sporting Nell (Reels)

Tuning: G, D, A, E

This is a great pair of reels - the similar starts make it an easy set to remember!

10. Banish Misfortune / Morrison's (Jigs)

Tuning: G, D, A, E

The first tune seems to crop up at sessions all over the world both because it is a great tune and because musicians are a superstitious lot. In that spirit Steve and I take a “roaring session” approach to this set.

11. A Fair Wind (Reel)

Tuning: Eb, Bb, F, C

I'm not sure where I learned this tune, or even if I'd played it before! It popped into my head while I was at the studio, and it wasn't until I got home that I was able to track down the name.

12. Father Dollard's/ The Fiddler's Contest
(Hornpipes)

Tuning: Ab, Eb, Bb, F

A popular hornpipe also called "The Chancellor", followed by another find from O'Neill's.

13. Porthole of the Kelp / Mother's Delight (Reels)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

Bobby Casey composed the first tune. I was taught the second by Peadar O'Loughlin, who starts both tunes with the same phrase. I try my hand at the more common opening the second time around.

14. The Donnybrook Fair / Paddy Carty's
Favorite / Tatter Jack Walsh (Jigs)

Tuning: Gb, Db, Ab, Eb

Three lovely jigs at just the right tempo.

15. The Lobster (Reel)

Tuning: F, C, G, F

A wonderful tune that favors either simple settings or adventuresome ones. The notion of having two open strings tuned to the same note was not unheard of in Irish music years ago.

16. The Ragged Hank of Yarn / West Clare
Railway / My Love is in America (Reels)

Tuning: G, D, A, E

A tribute to the years I spent learning from Kevin Crehan, wherein he introduced me to the playing of Bobby Casey among others. The outer two tunes come from Casey, and I picked up the middle from Kevin when he wasn't looking!

17. Caoineadh na dTrí Muire (The Lament of
the Three Marys) (Air)

Tuning: Eb, Bb, F, Bb

An old religious song I learned from the singing of Seosamh Ó hÉanaí. Although there are three in the title, the only Mary referenced in the song is the Mother of Christ.

Thank You

Megan Beck, Susan Gilligan, Cindy and Steve Matyi,
Kevin Crehan, Jayme and Jim Bridges,
Randal Bays, Brock Napierkowski, Stephanie Benson,
Michael Thompson, Connie and Vincent Lasorso,
Liz Knowles, Patrick Ourceau, John Skelton,
John Burgess of SoundFoundry Productions,
Dan and Jeff at Group Effort Sound Studio,
to all of the mentors, peers, and students
who have guided me on the path so far . . .

. . . and to you, for supporting traditional music
by buying this album and not copying it.

Recorded

2013 OCT-18, NOV-14, & 22
at Group Effort Sound Studio
Crescent Springs, KY

Engineering, Mixing, Mastering

John Burgess, SoundFoundry Productions
Cincinnati, OH

Design and Production

Bridgebeck Studios

© 2014 Justin Bonar-Bridges All Rights Reserved