

'Gog Magog' by The Trials Of Cato

Reviewed by Carl Filby



In 2017, I organised the judging for Royston Folk Club's Young Artists Competition and amongst the entrants were The Trials Of Cato. I booked the boys for Royston MusicFest in September the same year the very first time I saw them and they went on to win the competition, with Katie Spencer the runner-up, so the standard was very high.

Yes, I am blowing my own trumpet a bit here, though in truth anyone with half a musical cell in their brain would have recognised the talent on display that

evening. Mainly, I'm delighted that the band appear to be thriving, especially as they were just starting to break big in late 2019 immediately before Covid put a hold on everything.

The band's previous album 'Hide and Hair', released late 2018, won Best Album at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards in 2019 thus providing something of a challenge to 'live up to' but whilst very tempting, I always think it a mistake and missing the point to make comparisons between albums by the same band.

Undoubtedly, The Trials of Cato are not the same band that they were, having lost Yorkshire lad Will Addison and gained Yorkshire lass, Polly Bolton, formerly of The Magpies. They are different for a variety of reasons, probably the most obvious being the prominence of Polly's voice, though Robin Jones still takes the lead on a couple of numbers and is prominent on other tracks.

Polly plays Mandolin, Irish Bouzouki and Clawhammer Banjo; Robin plays Tenor Banjo, Irish Bouzouki and 5-String Banjo, and Tomos Williams plays guitars, bass and keys and provides percussion along with Robin. They have lost nothing of their instrumental virtuosity and it's good to see that their Welsh heritage has been acknowledged with the inclusion of a more upbeat version of 'Aberdaron' which first appeared on their original EP release under the title of the band's name.

There is a lot to like about the way that the band has evolved since their first album though I would have liked to have had a bit more information about the compositions to accompany the lyrics. Perhaps that omission is deliberate to emphasise that the band and the album is very much a team effort and perhaps also to account for the way that the band can re-imagine traditional tunes beyond the point where a simple credit for another arrangement will suffice.

After playing the CD 3 or 4 times I particularly like 'Ring of Roses' and 'When Black Shuck Roams' and their interpretation of 'Bedlam Boys' which is already causing a stir. In my opinion, one of the great strengths of 'The Trials of Cato' is that they combine an excellent blend of instrumental pieces with the vocal numbers and I'm sure that my favourites on this album will change as I listen to it more.

Unfortunately, Royston Live's (formerly the folk club) Christmas Party clashes with the band's upcoming gig at Cambridge Junction, my nearest venue, on Friday 9th December. If you live elsewhere, you may still be able to catch the remainder of their tour dates taking place all over the country before then. They are a terrific live band so do go and see them if you get the chance and you can find all the details and more on their website: <https://www.thetrialsofcato.com/>