

'Cuckoo Tree' by Kelly & Woolley

Reviewed by Carl Filby



Matt Kelly and Gary Woolley have been playing together for more than ten years and are well-known on the local folk circuit in East Anglia, Herts and Essex. I am personally indebted to them for playing at Royston MusicFest over a number of years and I have seen them play on a number of occasions, most recently at Royston Live where they based their set on the songs from this new album set for launch on Friday 17th March 2023 at Cambridge Folk Club.

The album comes in a nicely produced traditional 2-part case with the CD inserted in one side and an informative 16-page booklet in the other which shows that the writing credits are split fairly evenly between these two talented musicians. I always find it interesting to have both the lyrics and, ideally, some accompanying explanatory notes about the origin or motivation behind each song, so the Cuckoo Tree perfectly meets my personal preferences in that respect.

I think the key to Matt and Gary's success as a duo lies partly in their background which embraces a huge variety of music. This is apparent from the range of different styles which are reflected in the album and you can read more about their background on their website (see below). The songs are often very personal but also reference stuff that is going on in the wider world which is where the accompanying notes come in handy.

Not for the first time in the duo's history there is a track on the album, 'Robeson', which relates to Gary's interest in the mining community and another, the title track, refers to Joni Mitchell's illness whilst regretting the disappearance of a symbol of childhood. 'Man from Juarez' was inspired by the high level of deaths among young Hispanic men in Texas and more generally there is often a degree of empathy and support of the underdog and underprivileged to be found in Matt and Gary's songs.

But, don't get the idea that the prevailing mood of the album is downbeat. The overall style could certainly be described as gentle, but there are plenty of uplifting tracks including the Appalachian style 'Exploitation Blues', 'Don't Waste Your Breath' and the final track, the Cajun style 'Mardi Gras Revisited'. Underpinning the whole album, and I admit here to being a long-time fan, is Matt's sublime fiddle-playing, which is heard to good effect on 'Joy's Waltz' with Gary's excellent accompaniment on guitar.

I was lucky enough to win a signed copy of this album in the famous Royston Live raffle but had already bought their two previous albums 'Miner's Eyes' and 'Papers In My Shoe'. One thing that they all have in common is that the enjoyment increases with every listening and I can also recommend catching them live as they always add quality to an evening of folk music. You can find out more from their website below and I hope you will be able to catch them live again at Royston MusicFest later this year.

<https://www.kellyandwoolley.co.uk/>

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