

‘What Are We Trying To Say?’ by Megson

Reviewed by Carl Filby (April 2023)



‘Megson’ are husband and wife duo Debbie and Stu Hanna who both hail from Teesside where they met many years ago and they have been performing together for around 20 years now. I first came across them around 10 years ago when Creative Royston, the not-for-profit voluntary arts organisation, staged a concert featuring Megson as a Royston Arts Festival event. Not only do I hail from Teesside but I am also a long suffering supporter of Middlesbrough FC (the Boro’) and was amazed to find back then that were others like

me “down South”. Not only that, but coincidentally, I now find myself as the current ‘Chair’ of Creative Royston reviewing their latest album. So, there we are, I have declared my interest!

This is their 13th album, written during ‘lockdown’ and their first for 4 years. It comes as a three-way fold of a cover with some interesting illustrations, featuring items from nature and two walkers in a variety of settings and poses. The only thing missing, in my copy at least, is a lyric sheet, although I did wonder whether this was some ironic reflection on the title of the album.

The absence of a lyric sheet doesn’t really matter in one sense as the vocals are very clear and distinctive, so it’s not as if anyone is going to struggle to make sense of the stories that Debbie and Stu have woven into the songs that make up the album. Eight of the ten tracks are written by Debbie and Stu and it is the stories that are the key to this album and perhaps to Megson’s success as an award-winning folk duo and childrens entertainers.

Perhaps my favourite on the album (at the moment) is the tale of star-crossed lovers, Russian writer Anastasia Romanova Krandievskaya and William Stead, editor of Darlington’s Northern Echo (which I used to read occasionally). A rather sad tale which came to an end with a journey on the Titanic (you’ll have to listen to find out who dies) but beautifully sung and underscored by Stu on guitar and guest musician John Parker on double bass.

I also particularly enjoyed ‘Canny Old Blind Willie’ a traditional song taken from the ‘Newcastle Song Book’ with Stu on fiddle perfectly complementing Debbie’s expressive vocals. The Newcastle Song Book (which I hadn’t heard of either) is apparently a collection of comic and satirical songs in the Geordie dialect, which is descriptive of eccentric characters and the manners and customs of the labouring population of Newcastle and its immediate neighbourhood.

The album was released on 24th March and you can obtain copies by contacting Debbie and Stu via their website <https://www.megsonmusic.co.uk/> You can also find details of the remaining dates on their tour as you can also in the ‘Gigs & Tours’ Listing on the main [Unicorn Folk](#) website.
