

Gigspanner Big Band

at The Landmark Arts Centre Teddington

Friday 11th April 2025

Concert review by Carl Filby

This was a concert that I had been looking forward to since first hearing the band's new album *Turnstone* and you will be able to tell just how much I was looking forward to it by my album review on *Unicorn Folk* (under [Music/CD Reviews](#)) last month.

But before I begin I must pay tribute to the local community for having turned what was the near derelict Church of St Alban the Martyr when my wife lived in Teddington in the 1980s into an apparently thriving centre for the Arts. It provided superb acoustics in an impressive setting for what was indeed a wonderful concert.



The evening started with the first three opening tracks from *Turnstone* in the order they are on the album, being *Suffolk Miracle*, *Sovay* and the wonderful *Silver Dagger*. Actually, all the tracks on the album are wonderful and quite a few of them rise above that description to the extent where finding the necessary superlatives becomes difficult. *Silver Dagger* stands out for me because it shows off Hannah Martin's lustrous voice to great effect in the first half and then the playing of Peter Knight on violin and Phillip Henry on dobro guitar in the second half.

I thought that the band were perhaps going to play straight through the album after the first three tracks, which would have been fair enough at this album launch but instead they launched into an old favourite with John Spiers taking the lead vocals on *Haul In The Bowline*.

Then it was back to the new album with first of all *Hind Horn* which provided an opportunity for an extensive intro section featuring Henry's dobro guitar again with Martin's vocal backed by those from John Spiers and Sacha Trochet. One of the great things about coming to a live concert is that it provides an insight into the dynamics of the music, i.e. who does what, which listening to an album alone, however marvellous, just doesn't give you.

The short-ish first half concluded with the plaintive refrains of *Hard Times Come Again No More* before the more buoyant companion piece on the album, *Arthur Peter's Reel*, lifted our spirits once again.

The interval lasted a little longer than scheduled because of the long line of people queuing to buy CDs and no doubt wishing to talk to the band all of whom helpfully appeared at the sales desk.

The second half began with much anticipation as the audience knew that was going to be longer than the first and *Betsy Williams* was the chosen track from the new album to get things off to a jaunty start. That was followed by the anthemic *What Wondrous Love Is This* which, as on the album, morphed into the moving and beautiful instrumental piece, *Sweet Highland Mary* in which the sounds of Peter Knight's violin seemed to literally soar into the high arched ceiling of the Church above. I'm not religious but this felt like a small glimpse of heaven.

If that wasn't enough the next track from the album, ***When Fortune Turns Her Wheel***, had been slowly working its way up towards becoming my favourite track on the album with successive plays, although the word 'favourite' itself seems superfluous when presented with such a 'wondrous' selection of music on the same disk. I liked the track because it starts and ends with some exquisite violin from Peter Knight and in between there is perfectly understated backing music from all the band which allows Hannah Martin's magnificent voice full reign to shine in an almost languorous manner. In concert, this is turned into an opportunity for some wonderful improvisation with Martin on violin providing the complementary, rather than 'duelling' counterpoint to the sound of the master himself. As Martin remarked, in concert the piece is both exhilarating and slightly alarming in that one never knows quite where it is going, but of course, in my opinion at least, that is one of the beauties of live music especially when performed with such skill.

After that came a traditional song which can be found on the band's previous album, ***Courting Is A Pleasure***, performed by many musicians over the years though Martin mentioned Nic Jones' interpretation of the song as being the one she associated with it.

The Rolling of the Stones followed that, a song that I have always liked since hearing Blowzabella perform it many years ago and based, I believe, on Child Ballad number 49, The Twa Brothers. The lead vocal taken here by John Spiers again, with all the band demonstrating their vocal prowess at one point.

There was a palpable air of disappointment when it was announced that the next track would be the last before the encore but that quickly dissipated as the band broke into a traditional bluegrass song, ***The Boy That Wouldn't Hoe Corn***, which the Edgelarks (Martin & Henry) have made their own and which I had coincidentally come across on YouTube only a day or two earlier. I don't even like 'bluegrass', well not until I heard this, the opening of which provided another opportunity for the dobro maestro Henry first on guitar, then with his consummate singing. (Ok, I know nothing about 'bluegrass' but I do have a good 'ear' for music!) The rest of the band then had an opportunity to showcase all their individual musical talents, important because it gave Roger Flack and Sacha Trochet a chance to shine and remind the audience that the wonderful music results from the performance of all their members not just those at centre stage. I wasn't timing this track but it seemed to go on forever and would have done if the audience had anything to do with it!

I don't think anyone would have complained if the concert had ended there and then, but instead we were treated to an actual encore in the shape of the final track on the new album, a selection of tunes comprising ***Northern Frisk, Red Haired Boy & Moth From Upstairs***.

Have I mentioned yet that I really enjoyed this concert? Certainly one of the very best that I have been to and I have been to some good ones, including this year. I travelled around 100 miles there and back to see this concert and with signalling difficulties closing down Teddington rail station I only just made the connection back to Royston on the night. However, had I been forced to sleep at King's Cross rail station it would still have been well worth the trouble!

After reading the above do I really need to encourage you to go and see the Gigspanner Big Band in concert if you possibly can? If you can't do that then buy ***Turnstone*** instead, though I think if you do one of those things you will definitely want to do both. There are plenty of Gigspanner concerts coming up in 2025 and you can keep track via the Gigs & Tours Listing on [Unicorn Folk](#).
