

The Expatriate Game ~ CD Reviews

The Expatriate Game

Day Job Records DCD 106; 57 minutes; 2005

Now here is an intriguing collaboration. *The Expatriate Game*, a play on the title of Dominic Behan's renowned song *The Patriot Game*, does indeed feature one ex-pat, the London-based US-born finger-style guitarist Duck Baker, who is here in cahoots with Londoners Maggie Boyle (of Donegal stock) and Ben Paley (whose father Tom formed *The New Lost City Ramblers* with Mike Seeger and John Cohen).

Therefore, unsurprisingly, the album carries the subtitle of 'Traditional Irish & American Music' and sees singer and flute player Boyle (well-known to many through her work as a duo with Steve Tilston, John Renbourn and many others), fiddler Paley (whose track record includes playing with *The Levellers* and *Blur/Gorillaz* honcho Damon Albarn) and Baker (whose CV includes collaborations with Michael Mantler/Carla Bley associate, trombonist Roswell Rudd, and Appalachian singer Molly Andrews).

The material here is predominantly Irish, though some tunes have reached the trio via a roundabout route and others are popular in both the Irish and US folk traditions. Maggie's song choice encompasses several very familiar ditties, including *Kitty Lie Over* and *Bonny Portmore*, though, as ever, she reinvigorates her material in typically refreshing style. Duck's only song, *Rye Whisky*, a natural choice considering its first line ('If the river was whisky and I was a duck' – though note that this is the folk and not blues version made famous by the likes of Blind Lemon Jefferson) is delivered with affectionate irreverence.

He also proves himself to be an expressive picker on an evocative rendition of Seán O'Dwyer of the Glen while Ben's fiddle comes to the fore on *Temperance Reel* and provides spirited interplay with Maggie's flute on *Over the Waterfall*. Overall, the album's very relaxed feel supplements enhances the enjoyment factor and offers the very real sense that these three musicians not only understand their music but know how to convey their grasp of the traditions to a

wider audience.

Geoff Wallis 15h June, 2005

Having already reviewed this for Tykes' News (The West Riding's Mighty Folk Organ), I may actually meet the Draconian Deadline, so here goes.

What I told TN was that traditional Irish and American music is definitely what we get, played by three of the finest musicians you are ever likely to hear. They are Duck Baker (US-born guitarist), Ben Paley (fiddle player of US parentage) and Maggie Boyle (singer and flautist of Irish parentage). The music consists of three songs from Maggie (mostly Irish), a song from Duck (slightly Charlie Poole-based) and nine delicious sets of tunes which lap back and forward across the atlantic with consummate ease.

Maggie's songs are 'Bonny Portmore', 'I Am A Youth That's Inclined To Ramble', and 'The Banks of Claudy', (from the O'Copper family of Bally rottingdean). She also adds great vocal to 'Kitty Lie Over', which Michael Crane describes in his excellent notes as a 'charming tune/ditty', while neatly encapsulating their philosophy with "They ...consider the tension between the Irish and American sense of rhythm something to play with rather than iron out."

As the listenings repeat (and believe me, they certainly repeat), it all starts to make sense. Guitar, flute and fiddle weave seamlessly in and out of the tunes until there's nobody driving, no passengers, just three wonderful musicians making wonderful music.

Reviewers rarely get a second chance, so I relish this unusual opportunity to tell TLT what I neglected to tell TN - this is a great record. Duck Baker gives what is basically a guitar masterclass throughout, mixing object lessons in both lead playing and accompaniment. Ben Paley shows himself to be Mr. Appropriate, providing flair and empathy in equal parts. Maggie Boyle, as well as playing some champion flute, has a voice to stop the clock on your wall and the heart in your body.

Credit for the superb quality of the recording can be laid at the attic door of Mike Hockenhull. Good job all round.

Alan Rose, The Living Tradition Issue 63 July/August 2005

This is a somewhat unlikely combination, but one that works superbly well. The London-based American guitar wizard, Duck Baker combines with flutist and singer Maggie Boyle and our local fiddling superstar, Ben Paley. With Maggie having a London Irish background and Ben's parents being American, the theme of the album and its name comes from people who are living away from their cultural and musical roots. The songs and tunes come from America and Ireland and there is some glorious singing and playing throughout. The high spots include Maggie's beautiful singing of "A Youth Inclined To Ramble", Duck's slow and majestic rendition of "Sean O'Dwyer of the Glen" and any time when the fiddle and flute are heard together, but particularly

on their beautiful setting of "The Blackbird." (VS)

Vic Smith FOLK DIARY APR/MAY 05

His most recent CD, *The Expatriate Game*, a splendid collaboration with Maggie Boyle and Ben Paley, has proved difficult to wrench from the CD player whenever it's got back there (see review in the NetRhythms archive)!
Duck Baker, Maggie Boyle & Ben Paley - *The Expatriate Game* (Day Job Records)

This under-promoted gem of a CD should need no recommendation if you know any or all of the three artistes involved. Its title is a clever wordplay on the well-known Dominic Behan song *The Patriot Game* suggested principally by the equally well-known tendency of musicians to carry their tunes to foreign shores. Its equally underselling subtitle (*Traditional Irish And American Music*) simultaneously reflects the performers and the repertoire. Should you need a quick pen-picture: American-born, London-based Duck is nothing less than a definitive premier-league fingerstyle guitarist, whereas both Ben and Maggie were born to families who emigrated to England (Ben's father's that celebrated old-timer Tom Paley, and Maggie was reared in the musically vibrant London-Irish community of the 60s and 70s). Ben's a fabulous young fiddle player who readily immerses himself in activities as diverse as Scandinavian music, revivalist oldtime (with his father in the *New Deal String Band*) and the vibrant acoustic thrash of *McDermotts 2 Hours* and the *Levellers*. And last but definitely not least, Maggie's a damnably fine flute player as well as quite simply one of the loveliest singers in the entire world. Further connectivity is assured when you realise that Duck, shortly after moving to London in the late 70s, had been responsible for introducing Maggie to Steve Tilston, sparking off one of the most wonderful collaborative partnerships of the British folk scene from the late 80s through to the mid-90s. So trust me, the aforementioned three musicians working together give us something truly special on this CD. Their empathy is remarkable; rarely do you hear such miraculous attunement between performers of ostensibly disparate musical disciplines or experience (though anyone with a deeper knowledge of the musics concerned would argue that qualification in any case). It's a heavenly partnership, which first trod the boards of a select few local West Yorkshire venues a mere 15 months or so back (if my memory serves me rightly), and just had to spawn a studio recording! They clearly have a real good time making their music too, as you'll see from the joyously nonchalant cover photo, and in their music-making much play is made with the tension between the Irish and American senses of rhythm. A specially noteworthy feature of the performances, though, is the way in which the extraordinary talents of each of the three musicians as individuals, normally utilised in a solo situation, are adapted so very naturally to the group situation. Duck's essentially soloistic approach, his tremendous facility for playing both melody and either countermelody or bass line, is given full rein in this unusual context of his arrangements of the tunes on this CD. And Maggie's use of the Irish flute on indigenous American old-time tunes is somewhat of a 'first' for that repertoire, while Ben's own facility for, and

considerable experience of, different musical traditions informs his approach to playing or accompanying music originating on both sides of the pond. Ben's Swedish-style harmony playing on the well-travelled The Blackbird is an unusual but effective touch, while his intense accompaniment of Maggie's excellent rendition of A Youth Inclined To Ramble is a CD highlight. This is one of just five vocal items on this CD (happily, no fewer than four of these are Maggie's, yet the fifth, Rye Whisky, brings Duck out front on an all-too-rare excursion to the vocal mike). The faster tunes trip by abnormally lightly and fleet-footed - pieces like Poll Ha'penny (which many of us first encountered as the final leg-slapping tune of the original Fairport Dirty Linen set) and the closing banjo tune Robinson County are both vital and sprightly - while on the other hand the slower (well, more measured!) selections still manage to embody a joyful sense of pacing that, though relaxed, never gets the chance to rest long enough to become in the slightest bit ponderous. Finally a word of praise for the booklet, which manages to convey a lot of information on the tunes and songs and the performers' sources in a succinct and readable manner together with supplying the full song texts used. The recording, a homespun production by Mike Hockenhull, faithfully reflects both a deep feel for the music and a deep knowledge of, and trust in, the musicians and their capabilities. An exemplary release this, everywhere exuding a loving attention to detail alongside the equally exemplary musicianship. Do track it down, you'll not regret it.

David Kidman NetRhythms.co.uk