

## *Sketch ~ CD Review*

### *Sketch*

Dagama CD123

The term may be a cliché, but this is a supergroup. Here we have the combined talents of Maggie Boyle (yes, that Maggie Boyle!), Gary Boyle (yes, that Gary Boyle!) and Dave Bowie (actually, no, not that David Bowie). In other words, one of Britain's finest traditional singers, one of its most respected jazz guitarists and a bass player of impeccable subtlety.

One is tempted to use that convenient catch-all, 'fusion', but the term does a disservice to what happens on these nine tracks. There is no sense of disparate elements being merged together, but rather one feels that this is a natural confluence. The arrangement of each track is utterly valid, in every case adding new dimensions to the song. Take, for example, the second track, Searching For Lambs: Gary evokes the scene with an understated pastoral guitar, before Maggie joins with a pacey take on the well-known narrative, allowing space for looping inventive solos, while all the while Dave's bass creates highlights like shafts of sunbeams breaking through on the rustic romantic encounter.

The album features five folk songs, including Sketch's arrangement of John Renbourn's version of Death and The Lady, a set of reels that take Gary's playing into very unfamiliar territory, and three non-traditional numbers. Almost inevitably, for any project involving Maggie, one of these is a Steve Tilston song, a very sympathetic reading of Anthony Believes. Like that song, the version of Bert Jansch's Bird Song recalls an earlier musical collaborations. Perhaps most surprisingly, Billie Holiday's God Bless The Child is evidence of the new directions in which working with Gary have taken her.

If the previous paragraph make the album sound like a Maggie Boyle record then it belies the delicately balanced contribution of all three members. Take away any part of that and the whole would diminish; to add more would be redundant.

The whole album is the epitome of good taste. Musically, it is both unexpected and totally right, the epitome of understatement. The recording is produced with economy and crystalline clarity. Even the packaging – beautiful in its simplicity – is delightful. It is, in short, a faultless achievement.

Much more than a sketch, this is a masterpiece in miniature.

**Tykes News ~ Nigel Schofield**

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Maggie Boyle, it has to be said, is a bit of a musical tart. She's made CDs with Duck Baker and Ben Paley as *The Expatriate Game*, with Lynda Hardcastle and Helen Hockenhill as *Grace Notes*, with John Renbourn and others as *Ship of Fools*, as well as all that work with Steve Tilston. Not to mention *Frank Killkelly...* or *The Ballet Rambert*. And now she has two new sidesmen – magical jazz guitarist Gary Boyle and stand-out stand-up bassman Dave Bowie, both of whom, it must be said, are way ahead of Maggie in the Musical Tart stakes – Dave owns up to Snake Davis and Mark Cresswell (and admits to a “whimsical career path”), while Gary's CV makes casual mention of Dusty Springfield!

So not a conventional folk album, then, despite the fact that only one of the 9 tracks, “God Bless The Child”, would fall outside what one would expect of a Maggie Boyle record. There's a traditional tune set, songs from the pens of Tilston, Jansch and Renbourn, and 4 “big” Irish songs (including “A Stor Mo Croi”, which is as big as they come). It will be no surprise to those even slightly familiar with Maggie's work that her singing is as faultless and matchless as ever. What will come as a surprise is the accompaniment from Gary and Dave, who are completely at ease with their virtuosity and treat labels such as “folk” and “jazz” with supreme contempt.

The result is a highly original and extremely pleasurable album, beautifully recorded by Paul “Bruce” Haden, which reveals glory after glory as one listens again and again...

**Alan Rose**

### *SKETCH – Sketch (Dagama CD. 123)*

Masterly. Nigh faultless. Bliss. Thereafter, I am fair lost for words to describe this beautiful CD, without having to resort to critical clichés. So I need to distance myself and give you the straight biog.... Sketch is a trio comprising Maggie Boyle (yes!), Gary Boyle (no relation!) and Dave Bowie (and before you jump, no!), in totally natural musical confluence of one of the folk scene's finest singers, an excellent guitarist and an excellent double bass player, both of the latter having serious cred in jazz and acoustic circles. And yes, the combination does work! And how! So maybe I'll just provide some word-sketches then. The music of Sketch is relaxed, easy and intimate in demeanour, belying the intense artistry and accomplishment within and exuding a consummate classiness. Soothing but stimulating, and gently compelling. Truly cool, yet also red-hot spine-tingling. It's not folk, it's not jazz – well, not really, but it's got the best of both worlds. Should you think *Pentangle*? *Ship Of Fools*? *John Martyn*? OK; all and yet none exactly. Take a look at the source-material Sketch perform: of the album's nine tracks, five are arrangements of traditional songs, one a set of traditional reels. Hearing these song arrangements for the first time, one's struck by the freshness of execution that stands outwith the practical need to provide a conscious

framework – in one respect you know what you're going to get, and yet you're constantly surprised and delighted by Gary and Dave's fluid, supple playing, responding to and answering (and yes, these can mean different things) Maggie's own fluid and supple responses to the texts. Her own exemplary phrasing, her use of restraint in decoration and nuance, her skilful use of dynamic shading, all these elements are mirrored in the brilliant counterpoint of her fellow-musicians (to use the word accompanists is to undervalue their contribution). Moreover, the three players have a miraculously acute sense of internal balance, clearly born of a deep respect for each other's talents, which is conveyed unerringly by the clear-toned, jewel-like recording. It's very much a "less is more" record, a miracle that so ostensibly restricted a palette (which could all too easily be sterile) can conjure such a varied emotional landscape. One packed with enchanting incidental details, yet never feeling cramped or constrained by the need to engage the listener. Gary's inventiveness as a soloist knows no bounds, yet he knows instinctively when to rein in and support or step out into the spotlight; Dave's organic approach to the role of the bassist perfectly complements Gary's playing while both creating and allowing space within the texture supporting Maggie's melodic lines and ornamentations. But if the Sketch renditions of the traditional songs are fabulous, then what they do with the three more recent compositions is nothing short of revelatory, with an extra dimension of contemporary empathy imparted to God Bless The Child in particular, while Maggie turns in an intensely sympathetic version of Steve Tilston's Anthony Believes and Bert Jansch's Bird Song also comes off unexpectedly well. And the cover and booklet design, in its simple pastel minimalism, ideally reflects the deft brushstrokes of the artistic musical gestures within. Perfection. Bliss. Aaah...

**David Kidman - NetRhythms**