

ALBUM INTERVIEW

Kizzy Crawford and Gwilym Simcock

Birdsong/Cân yr Adar

Basho Records SRCD 54-2 ★★★★ Recommended

Kizzy Crawford (v, g), Gwilym Simcock (p), Simmy Singh, Lucy McKay (vn), Francesca Gilbert (vla), Abel Selaocoe (clo), Sarah Bennett (f) and Carys Evans (frhn). Rec. date not stated

On *Birdsong/Cân yr Adar*, the gorgeous melodies of Kizzy Crawford combine with the exquisite arrangements and production of Gwilym Simcock to produce one of the year's most beautiful, surprising and joyous releases. Setting lyrics in both Welsh and English, *Birdsong* tells a story through music inspired by Carngafallt, part of the Welsh rainforest territory in Powys and home to a complex ecosystem. Also featuring a brilliant sextet (string quartet, flute and horn) drawn from the Welsh chamber orchestra Sinfonia Cymru, from the folk-like, pentatonic soundworld of 'Into The Dark Mystical Beauty' – a mini-suite in its own right which provides the moment of greatest ecstasy – to the sublime, soaring lines of 'Back to the Trees', this is a collection of songs that speak directly to the heart. Seamlessly blending the improvised with the fully notated, with plenty of space for soloing, this utterly singular statement deserves the widest possible audience.

Jazzwise spoke to Kizzy Crawford and Gwilym Simcock about the album

There's a joyous, almost ecstatic quality to the music – is that something you were consciously aiming for?

KC: That's exactly what I wanted to convey. I've been able to connect to and express what I feel is the essence of myself and what I believe is meaningful with *Birdsong*. I learnt Welsh as a small child and had a completely Welsh medium education. As a mixed race girl with ASD, the poetry of the language gave me a voice for thoughts and emotions which I didn't find in English. All this flowed into the writing and composing of *Birdsong*. I'm also expressing, celebrating and exploring my heritage: the migration of birds to and from Africa, for example.

GS: I enjoyed working with Kizzy so much – it was such a joyous process, and I think that came out in the music.

They're anything but typical song structures – what was the compositional process?

KC: I hear a line of melody, or a lyric, and then allow it to flow pretty freeform. Gwilym is so precise and completely knowledgeable about composition from a technical perspective.

GS: We had a budget for six musicians, so I kind of knew in my head what the thing was going to sound like as we were writing it. The great thing about not having bass and drums is that you can express rhythmic intricacy in a more creative way.

Was the bilingual text setting of especial importance to you?

KC: Definitely. I really want an English-speaking audience to enjoy and appreciate the sounds and textures of the Welsh language, and challenge some of the misperceptions about Welsh being archaic and difficult – and impossible to pronounce. It was very important for the piece to be bilingual, given that we're talking about a Welsh rainforest.

How did the song cycle element come about?

GS: We talked about the concept of the seasons, and migration and a yearly cycle ties in quite neatly. Kizzy managed to steer that element of the narrative and it was serendipity how the tunes found a natural order.

KC: The project was a collaboration with RSPB Cymru, to promote and celebrate a unique rainforest in Powys. Using the seasons as our structure enabled us to explore and describe the lives of the birds, trees and flowers through the year.

How would you describe the sound-world of the album?

KC: Though the songs can be played and listened to individually, it was never written to be heard or presented that way. I sing the vocal part of an orchestrated score and it's important I'm not thought of as having greater weight than any other musician. We've set out to create an experience illustrating all the sensory aspects of the rainforest and its inhabitants through a yearly cycle. You have to come to a live performance to fully experience it – or go to Carngafallt! **Peter Quinn**