

LIZ CARROLL ON THE OFFBEAT



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Own Label, LC0001, 12 Tracks, 52 Minutes

www.lizcarroll.com

Liz Carroll's fans will be pleased to know this is another fine example of finesse on the fiddle, from Chicago's first lady of Irish Music. We've come to expect that as the norm, albeit an exceptional norm and she does not disappoint on this her first solo studio album in eleven years.

Liz began recording this album about a year ago, starting in November 2012, in Glasgow. Produced by Seamus Egan, she is joined by Winifred Horan, Seán Óg Graham, Trevor Hutchinson, Keith Murphy, Natalie Haas, Chico Huff and the harpist Catriona McKay with whom she built up a big musical relationship during the album's genesis on Clydeside. They act as perfect foils for Carroll's mastery over the fiddle and her tune writing talents.

Liz has a playful way with titles and as reviewer I had to say something about *Barbra Streisand's Trip to Saginaw*, could it be a more American title? The tune is pure Carroll, inhabiting a land somewhere between Michigan and Miltown Malbay. It begins by setting up a choppy beat from a short drawn bow, plays around with a broken melody, before it runs away with a generous guitar fill from Sean Óg Graham, stopping for a second to pick up the hitch hiking bass of Trevor Hutchinson.

Yes she has collaborators, but *On the Offbeat* is predominantly her album, with Óg Graham and Hutchinson forming the central core, indeed Carroll performed at Celtic Colours this past October with the two boys. On the album the trio are joined by Haas, Horan and McKay in the multifarious *The Fruit and the Snoot* set; a 7/8 layered body of complex strings executed over dramatically sweeping backdrop, which escalates into a powerfully harmonious crescendo. The differentiation of the bow work on *Tinsel* highlights the diversity of Carroll's playing as the tune is sensitively rendered with the tenderest of touches.

Many reviewers conclude that Liz Carroll is an emotional player, and I found this to be especially true on *Liam Childs*, it was a goose bump moment for me as the piece gathered momentum to close on the jocular pairing of *Balkin' Balkan* and *The E-B-E Reel*. Here each musician free-wheels their own interpretive dance around the tunes yet it is seamlessly together.

Nothing has more impact than the tandem of tunes on the duet of Carroll and McKay, where the intricate layer upon

layer of notes in the *W.T's 97th* set both intrigues and beguiles. The detailed web of sound combines clever pauses with off-the-beat syncopation to deliver a mini-master-class. For introspective poignancy look no further than *Never Far Away*, where Carroll again produces a sweeping softness enhanced by a sophisticated, almost symphonic backdrop, then take pleasure in the rich simplicity of Liz and her fiddle connecting with a striking rawness on the traditional favourite *The Yellow Tinker*.

On the Offbeat is a sublime ensemble of players at the height of their powers, but it is Carroll's fiddling that brings the best out in every one of them, and it is certainly one of the best albums of the decade so far.

Eileen McCabe

